

A New Yesterday

by

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Introduction

Most people I know started writing from a very young age. They knew they liked it from when they were in middle school and sometimes even earlier. I always envied those people because up until 11th grade in high school, I hated writing. Of course, I'd never written a short story before, only critical essays for class. But when my 11th grade teacher assigned a short story, I had no choice. I fought it; I didn't want to write it. Why would I? Writing sucked, at least 11th grade me thought that. I had only written essays and I hated them. It wasn't fun, it was a lot of work, and I never enjoyed it. I didn't think writing a short story would be any different. Then I put my annoyance aside and wrote. I loved it. This wasn't like writing an essay at all. I was shocked at how much I enjoyed the freedom to create characters and bend them to my will. I had never done something creative, and actually enjoyed it. I couldn't draw and because I wasn't good, I didn't find it fun. Photography was okay, but I never had any attachment to it. But writing? For some reason it was different. I wasn't very good, but I didn't care that much. It was fun and that's what mattered. I had also enjoyed reading fanfiction in high school, so of course, when I started writing for fun, I wrote fanfiction. And I wrote a lot of fanfiction.

I taught myself to write by posting stories on fanfic.net and archiveofourown.com. I failed, I got bad feedback, but I kept trying. Eventually, the last fanfiction story I wrote followed Bucky Barnes, Tony Stark, and Steve Rogers after *Captain America: Civil War*. I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I liked the idea of Bucky and Tony getting together. In my story they were able to overcome their difference and, well, fall in love. The crazy part was I had over 5,000 followers. I had improved and people actually wanted to read my writing.

They waited for updates because they were invested. I wrote 86,000 words, I was thriving. I thought I knew so much. Then I took a writing class at my first college and my professor said, “no fanfiction.” I knew him for years prior to that class, so I knew the comment was for me. I started struggling again. Creating my own characters? How the hell was I supposed to do that? I tried, just like I tried when I first wrote fanfiction. And I improved. I got into the Creative Writing Program on the first try and I stopped writing fanfiction, though sometimes I’ll go and read someone else’s.

I learned a lot in the Creative Writing Program. I started slowly creating worlds and characters that were mine and solely mine. I wrote a short story in Narrative Techniques, my fifth ever and my first real workshop piece. I learned so much. I learned more about POV and how to decide which is best for your story. I learned how to improve my dialogue; it was all so helpful. Then in Fiction I, I took my biggest leap yet. I started a novel. I can’t remember exactly where my idea came from. At the time, I was very conscious of climate change. I brought my own straw to restaurants. I brought my own reusable bag to the hub. I never bought water bottles when I could fill mine for free and without single use plastic. I wondered what would happen if the world ended because of Global Climate Change? We’re getting to a point that global climate change may become irreversible if we don’t act now. And it’s something I’m very passionate about. So, I created the worst-case scenario.

The end of the world as we know it. Would the earth be survivable and how survivable? Even though it’s in the future, would things revert to how things were back in older times? Would they grow food? How would they travel? These questions lead me to my novel in progress, which explores a world 210 years in the future in the fictional city of

Evdaimon, where a prophecy of a man and woman is what will ultimately save the world. In my world there are two known types of people, The Prosperous and The Payson. The Prosperous are the leaders, and The Payson are the oppressed. Then there is the third group, which to most is no more than a rumor. They are the resistance. The power that The Prosperous have is something I wanted to explore. I think it compares to both white privilege and the privilege rich people have. The Prosperous control so much in this world, just like the 1 percent along with straight white cis males. All of The Prosperous are white, or as I call them Kafka, and many of the people in charge are men, although Prosperous women do have a role.

In my world there is a prophecy about a man and woman travelling a vast distance to save the world. My first protagonist is a woman named Alex, who is the woman in a prophecy. I always wanted to write diverse characters. As someone who is part of the LBGTQIA+ community, I wanted to write from a gay perspective. But I didn't want her sexuality to be the whole story. I was tired of seeing LBGTQIA+ representation as just a love story, where they come out and get a happy ending, or the best friend, is gay for the sake of diversity. Of course, I enjoy those stories and think they're a good start, but I wanted more. I wanted a main character to be gay and I wanted her to have a story line that wasn't just about her sexuality, but it does play a role in the novel. Alex struggle with her sexuality because in this world being gay is a crime. The punishment for being gay, is her worst nightmare. Isolation for the rest of her life until she gets Abolished, or almost ritualistically murdered. This makes Alex hesitant to share with anyone. I wanted to explore this topic in my novel because it is something I'm passionate about, and gender and sexuality is still

such an important topic today. People today think that being gay is a sin, so in my dystopian novel I went a step further and made it a crime, just like in many countries now.

My other main character is named Wyatt. He's the man in the prophecy and also a person of color, which I've called Mavros. Wyatt was fortunate enough to get an education from a friend of his father after he passed. This man, Jones, taught Wyatt everything he knows about engineering. He is the only Mavros who's gotten an education, most Payson don't even know how to read. Like sexuality, I wanted race to play a role in my novel. The Prosperous are all white. And the Payson are of all races. In this world Mavros, the people of color, are oppressed even more because of the color of their skin. There is a whole back story on how the Mavros tried to tell The Prosperous that they shouldn't enslave the people who snuck into the town back when the world ended. They didn't want those people to be like their ancestor's years before. However, there were more Kafka, white people, than Mavros, so the Kafka enslaved them and made all Mavros part of the Payson. This idea is something important to me but something I worried about taking on. I am a white woman. I've read peoples stories but of course, I will never know what it's truly like to be anything but white. However, this topic is important to me. I am doing thorough research to create my characters and will have sensitivity readers to make sure I'm not accidentally being offensive. My second reader is a professor with a doctorate in race in literature. I want to do this, and I want to do it right. It's something I'm worried about, but I have to try.

I've done research on writing characters of color. I'm reading works by people of color where the main character is people of color and I'm taking notes and details on how they describe these characters and how they act. The Black Lives Matter movement that is

going on now is so important. And though this idea started before the major protests from the murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others, it just made my decision to explore this topic more concrete. I knew I had to go through with it.

All of this started in Fiction One, and I wanted to continue working on it in Fiction II but lost some motivation. I was going to work on it over winter break, but I never did. Then Professor Okasi mentioned short stories are better for workshop than novels. And because I had lost some momentum, I did just that. I knew I still needed to work on it. I had this idea, but I just didn't know how to continue. When the end of the semester rolled around, and we started talking about our senior project I got excited. I was going to write my novel. I swore to work on it over the summer. But then I was working full time and taking two summer courses and though I wanted to my motivation fell again.

I felt like a fraud. My love for writing disappeared. I was worried I chose the wrong major. I had changed my major a few times. I wanted to be a businessperson like my dad, or an engineer like my sister. I took classes in geology. I wanted to be a geologist then an astronomer and astrophysicist. But then I took a writing class and realized writing could be a career. And for three years that felt true. I was learning and honing my craft. I was improving from the girl who only wrote fanfiction. But my motivation fell, and I wasn't writing, and I became worried.

I thought I had done it again. Chosen the wrong major, only now I'm too deep in and it's too late to back out. I never told anyone this, but I stopped believing in myself and was too embarrassed to voice the fact that I might have screwed up, I might have done it again when graduation was only a year away. I was still passionate about using reusable items to

help prevent global climate change, and it was still an issue in the world. But yet whenever I thought about writing my novel, I just couldn't get myself to sit down at my computer.

When the fall semester started, I was worried. It had been almost a year since I worked on my novel and it has been months since I had written creatively. Life had just gotten in the way. But between my meetings and my classes my motivation came back to me quickly. Quicker than I thought possible. Last fall I wrote I wrote 18 pages in three days. That was the most I had written all year. I wrote and ended up having 80 pages. But when I was rewriting, I realized that through those 80 pages I discovered where I needed to go, but those pages no longer were what I wanted it to be. In the middle of the semester, I made the decision to completely start over, now knowing where I need to go and how to get there. I wrote 68 pages over the course of 3 weeks. 46 of those pages took me three days.

This past school year my love for writing came back to me. I was that girl again, back in high school and early college writing for fun and writing to learn. I've wrote more pages and explored more ideas than I thought possible when I first started. I have characters with desires. I have a world that I created with an unjust society. My novel won't have a revolution, but time travel. This is what I was hoping for when I started it in Fiction One. But it became more than I hoped for. Back then it was just an idea, one that I was hoping would spark something. And it did. I just finished part one for senior project and I'm excited about where it's going rather than worried about getting motivated.

I'm staring my career in just two weeks as a manager at a small company called Hudson Valley Environmental Solutions. I got a part time job in January at this company, and I got promoted to manager after I graduate. It was just coincidence that it's at an

environmental company, but I couldn't be happier. I know that when I graduate finding time to write might be hard, but I know I'll make sure writing is a part of my life. No matter how hard it is, I'll make myself sit at my desk and write. Because once I get there, the rest falls in place.

PART ONE

Alex

Jane's number was almost up. Alex looks over at her cellmate of nearly two years. Jane is #151, which means that as soon as someone new is brought in, she'd be up for The Abolishing. It's been three weeks since the last one. The time in between varies, and it could have been three days before the next, but three weeks is pushing it. She's worried their luck has run out. Alex is thankful for every day Jane is here but knows each night could be her last. Alex sits up on her cot and looks at Jane who lays watching her.

"Are you scared?" Alex asks, unable to help herself. What a stupid question; of course, she's scared.

"A little," Jane answers honestly. "But I know eventually we'll all be erased, and I'll have a happy life that's not in this Stockade or even in this walled in city of Evdaimon."

Alex sighs. Jane is a firm believer in The Prophecy. As much as Alex wants to be a believer, she finds it particularly hard, especially under the circumstances. The Prophecy states that a man and a woman are going to travel a vast distance and save the world. She knows there are more details to the prophecy lost over time.

"Why do you believe in something that happened over two hundred years ago?" Alex can't help but ask. She knows the answer but wants to hear Jane tell it for maybe the last time.

“The Prophet predicted so many other things, including The Event. Why wouldn’t you believe it?” Jane smiles, and Alex realizes she must know why she asked.

“Because it happened two hundred years ago, if it were going to happen, wouldn’t it have happened already? Maybe the prophet got this one wrong.” Alex wants to believe they didn’t, but two hundred years is a long time to wait. Also, Jane had said they were going to get erased. How would that even happen? Isn’t the Prophecy just fixing today? It’s not like they get a redo.

“Maybe they didn’t,” Jane says.

Alex sighs. “It’s going to be hard without you here.” Impossible, even.

“It’ll be okay. You’ve done this forty-five times before.” Jane gives her a reassuring smile.

This doesn’t make Alex feel any better, she’s never been as close with The Abolished as she has with Jane. Alex never had many friends, even before the Stockade; Jane has been her solace here. She doesn’t know what she’ll do without her. “It’s not that same and you know it.”

“Just remember that I find peace in The Prophecy and maybe it’ll bring peace to you.”

Alex sits in silence for a moment debating telling Jane her darkest secret. The words are at the tip of her tongue, *I’m levia, Jane. I like women.* She’s never trusted anyone enough to tell them. She didn’t even tell her family because she wasn’t certain they wouldn’t have

reported her to the guards in order to double their rations for a period of five years. It's happened to families before and though she trusted her family, double rations for that long were tempting. She didn't want to make her family chose. She wants to tell Jane, but she can't risk it, the guards have ears everywhere and she doesn't want to be taken to the fifth stockade. She would be isolated for the rest of her life going mad until she's Abolished.

Alex is woken by the gate of their cell opening instead of the alarm. Alex looks over to the bed next to her and sees Jane being taken by two Guards, whose white uniforms startle against Jane's grey jumper. She sits up then to stop them, but Jane shakes her head. Alex watches them go as Jane willingly walks from the cell. Tears well up in Alex's eyes and she quickly wipes them away. She doesn't know what time it is, but just wants to lay back down and sleep. She doesn't want to see Jane Abolished and she doesn't want a new roommate. She forces herself to get up. She gets ready for the day early, knowing she needs the preparation. After she's done brushing her teeth, she puts on her uniform. She always feels vulnerable when putting on the stone-grey jumper. She feels too exposed when the simple cloth isn't protecting her. The tiny screen over her left breast now says #046. The reality of Jane's Abolishing hits her again and she takes deep steadying breaths. She sits on her bed and stares at Jane's now empty bed. They're not supposed to get attached, but how can they not when they spend time with the same person for years?

When the morning alarm finally sounds, Alex knew to expect the musical alarm rather than the blaring one, but it still surprises her. Alex takes a deep breath and tries to mentally prepare for the terrible day ahead of her. One by one the Guards open the cell doors and the prisoners form into lines for transport. She follows the pack down the

corridor towards the garage. Alex has been in the garage exactly forty-five times, today makes forty-six. Some prisoners see it more often when they load the trucks with the harvest, but Alex has never been one of the shippers. She has only been to the garage for one reason. And the only time she's ever been driven is for this reason. She looks straight ahead as they march in silence.

They head down the stair, where guards are lined up against the walls. Alex gets in the back of one of three trucks and two guards hop in the back. She sits down on the floor and wedges herself between two other women. The truck has fifty inside. Alex grabs one of the handles on the floor as the truck pulls away. It took less than five minutes for Alex to get from her cell to the truck leaving. The Prosperous and the Guards are nothing if not efficient.

Alex wishes she could see the outside, but the truck is covered completely in some kind of cloth. It feels water resistant, but Alex doesn't know what the material is. She looks at the women around her. Most faces stare blankly into some void. Some are trying to show no emotion. Some just have their eyes closed. And some are struggling to keep their emotions in check. Alex is one of them. She forces on a brave face and tries not to think of what she has to do in just a few moments. There are numbers lower than hers. Alex knows the first few Abolishing's are the hardest. #006 looks like she's hyperventilating, but trying to hide it. Alex wants to help her but knows it will only bring attention to both of them. She needs to think about herself for now.

The truck hits a pothole, and they are jolted. The standing guards stumble but remain upright. When the truck halts, they all stand and are herded out. The sun blinds

Alex and she stumbles getting down. She hasn't seen the sun since the last Abolishing, three weeks ago.

When her eyes adjust to the sunlight, she looks at the dusty ground: only sand here. The wall's built twenty feet high, made from a type of metal that Alex isn't familiar with. It looks like it was once shiny but is now eroded by the dust and the wind. It still stands tall here, and Alex wonders if it's weakened elsewhere. Alex isn't sure if it's meant to keep the Payson in or protect the city from the outside. The Prosperous say it's to protect, but Alex never believes anything they tell her. Her eyes come to the gate; it's not as large as the wall but is still easily ten feet high. Unlike the wall the metal is shiny and clean. Do they clean it for Abolishing's? Or is it a different material that doesn't erode easy? The Guards are around it and on top of the wall holding weapons, ready to fire if needed. Alex then notices Jane standing before the gate with her hands bound behind her. Her breath catches and she wishes she was somewhere else.

A woman she's never seen before stands next to the Warden. The woman's dark skin stands out amongst the light skin all around her; all the Prosperous and all the Guards are Kafka; there are no Mavros among The Prosperous. Her head is held high, like she's not afraid. Alex tries to see the number of her chest but can't make it out. It has to be #001 though. She doesn't know everyone, but she has to be the new woman.

Warden Parker comes forward. Her bright orange clothes pop from the white of the Guards and the grey of the prisoners. Her black hair makes her seem even paler than she is. Her eyes have no sympathy in them, and they never have. She has a sick smile on her face.

“Are you ready girls?”

“Yes, Warden,” they answer.

The Warden faces the prisoner. “We give you life, we allow you to live here in Evdaimon, even though you never belonged. You forced your way into our sanctuary as stowaways, like fleas on a dog. But we allow you to live, and eat, and breath the fresh air that wasn’t mean for you. And you repay us by stealing, taking what wasn’t yours. Even still, we give you time. But we cannot save you forever. Your number is up, Jane. Do you have any final words?”

Jane looks around with no fear in her eyes. “You didn’t save us; you took our life from us. But we will not give up hope on what was foretold. It will come to fruition and we’ll all be saved.” Jane finally catches Alex’s eyes and gives her a small smile. She knows that was for her. Jane smiles back with a small nod. Acceptance with her fate? Alex wonders. It must be. She shifts her focus to The Warden who looks annoyed at her proclamation, but she moves on with the ceremony.

“Girls,” The Warden says.

“Five,” the women start counting. A Guard walks behind Jane. “Four.” Alex glances over at number #001. “Three.” The guard pulls their gun and aims it at Jane’s head. Jane is staring straight ahead with no emotion on her face. “Two.” Alex looks to Jane trying to memorize her, knowing she’ll never see her again. “One.” The bullet makes its way out of the barrel. Jane falls forward lifeless and Alex’s ears ring for a moment. She takes a steadying breath and closes her eyes. After her ears stop ringing, she focuses back up front.

The Guards have opened the gate and tossed her beyond the walls, while her eyes were closed. The body from three weeks ago is no longer there, there must be something out there. Maybe wild animals devour them? The Guards walk back inside and the gate shuts. Alex will never see Jane again. She stares numbly ahead and without a word the women start making their way to the trucks to go back to The Stockade until the next Abolishing.

Wyatt

Wyatt walks into Headquarters looking for Commander Grayson. He's not at the large round table in the center, so he must be in one of the office rooms that are inside the Headquarters room. Three of the doors are closed and he doesn't bother peaking in the open ones. He knows they're empty. Wyatt knows better than to interrupt the Commanders when they're in meetings and he knows better than to snoop in the files on the table. They plan lots of missions. He walks to the map on the wall and stares at its perfectly circular shape. He looks at the right bottom half of the circle, sector three, and finds The Women's Third Stockade. It's a medium size building abutting farmland. Pretty far from The Payson's housing, and even further from The Prosperous. He studies the map that he knows very well already. The other seven stockades are nearby too, but he knows they're pretty far from each other in reality. He thinks back to a map and document he saw when he first joined the Resistance.

A few lucky documents have survived the destruction of The Prosperous, whose been trying to erase any knowledge of the world before the Event. But as long as The Prosperous have existed, so has the Resistance—who've managed to save secret maps and other texts from the before. It's from studying those ancient maps that Wyatt knows that Evdaimon has grown to approximately the size of that long ago destroyed city named Los Angeles. He's only seen the document once, and he knows it's unlikely he'll see it again. They're kept locked up safe, for fear of it getting damaged or stolen. He was fortunate enough to see it, most only hear about it.

The Resistance's base is outside the perfect circle, just out of sight from the vantage of the walls. He gets bored after a moment; he's seen this map a hundred times. He turns around and leans his head against the wall.

When he agreed to join The Resistance, he didn't realize how much waiting he was going to have to do. He gets called to the Commander room only to find they're in the middle of a super-secret meeting. He sighs at the time he's wasting. Finally, one meeting door opens and a man and woman walk out. They're both pale, but her blonde hair makes her stand out against his black.

"Wyatt," Commander Grayson says. "Thank you for coming."

"Of course," Wyatt says, as if he had a choice. He hopes it's not just an update on the time machine. Commanders Grayson and Allura have been pushing him to fulfill his part in the Prophecy and build the machine that travels back to 2030. Supposedly, when he meets the woman foretold of in the prophecy, details would become clear. They wanted him to have a head start since finding the woman wasn't easy and now that they know where she is, getting her out is even harder. He's been stuck for nearly a year now, at a dead end with the machine. He has nothing new to offer them.

"We've identified a potential. That's why we've called you here today. To assist with the planning of the extraction," Grayson says.

"There are many moving parts. It's going to take some time to get it all together," Allura adds. "For instance, there is the issue of getting in and out undetected. There's the weak point, but we can't use it. We need to keep it a secret."

“If they lose our way in and out, The Resistance is pretty much useless. We have to come up with another option to get in and out,” Grayson continues. “Also, The Prosperous obviously know about us but our location and a lot of the details are a mystery. At least from what we’ve gathered. Getting in the secret passage is fine, but when we’re being chased, we can’t risk burning it.”

“There’s a door to the wall. It’s not that far from the stockades, but it’s well guarded. We want you to refocus your efforts on finding a plausible way out. if you need to make a trip to the wall you can borrow a car. We just need you on this now,” Allura finishes.

Wyatt nods at their request. At least now he can do something and complete it. Also, it gets him a step closer to meeting his other half.

“In the meantime,” Allura says, “you can work on your training. I know you’ve technically completed training, but it’s been a while since you practiced. We need you to be able if you want to join us.”

Wyatt nods, holding back a sigh. “Fair enough. I’ll head to the training area, hopefully Charles is already there.”

“He should be,” Allura says.

Wyatt stands up and gives a respectful nod to the Commanders and exits. He walks down the hall past the kitchen and heads into the weapons and training room. He spots Charles immediately. His pale skin signifies he’s part of the large Kafka population. Most of the population is Kafka. Wyatt, on the other hand is Mavros. His life before the resistance

was tough, but not nearly as bad as some Mavros. Mavros are treated terribly from The Prosperous. Even Wyatt isn't sure the full story. He knows it goes way back to the creation of Evdaimon, the Kafka wanted the people who snuck in, now known as The Payson, to basically become slaves. But the Mavros tried to stop them. Something about it happened before, but he doesn't know what they're referring too. So much got lost after The Event. Instead of agreeing the Kafka turned on the Mavros and enslaved them with everyone else. Now, they're worse off than the Kafka Payson. Wyatt, however, is of the lucky ones who received an education or sorts. He's an engineer. And as far as he knows he's the only Mavros that's ever become one.

Charles joined The Resistance before him. He's the best trainer the base has, but he rarely goes on missions anymore. He's a bit older, with greying hair, but he's still strong. Still nearly impossible to beat. Everyone who comes in is trained by Charles. He's the best of the best and crucial to the success of The Resistance.

"I heard you were coming in for a tune up," Charles jokes. Wyatt nods eager to do something useful. "Let's start with a little hand to hand combat and then move to weapons. Let's see how you do, after what four months?"

"Just please go a little easy on me," Wyatt says. Charles always beat him, even when training was finished, he had never won a match.

"You should know me better than that."

"Yeah, that's what I thought," Wyatt laughs. Here we go, Wyatt thinks.

Alex

The morning after *The Abolishing*, Alex is back at the stockade prepping breakfast. It's her first job and she is working on autopilot. She measures the water and doesn't realize that it's come to a boil until the guard shouts at her. She quickly stirs in the oats and turns off the heat and covers them. She needs to hide her emotions better or the guard will get suspicious. She quickly starts counting out one hundred and fifty bowls.

When the prisoners come in, a few that knew she was cellmates with Jane would touch her hand sympathetically when she handed over the tray. She looks away from their sympathetic eyes, worried that she'll start getting emotional. She gives them a small nod, so they know she felt it and appreciated it. A few of the prisoners she's worked with before whisper encouraging words, but they mean nothing. She wills all the prisoners to be served, so she can think about something else.

Then she hands a bowl of food to the new woman. She glances at the number on her chest and sees: #001. She hands the woman the bowl, and Alex catches the woman looking at her wrist. She's never been self-conscious of her birthmark, but she suddenly has the urge to cover it up. She glances up and catches #001's gaze, who gives her a smile before moving on. Alex forces herself to keep working. She knows she'll have to meet her tonight, but it feels like a slap in the face. She takes a few deep breaths and reminds herself it isn't #001's fault. Eventually she gets a bowl and eats without tasting anything. Then she cleans up before being brought to the Laundry room.

She's not alone in the Laundry room and not under such a strict watch from the guard. She's there for several hours before being brought back to the kitchen for dinner. This time though, number #077 is there helping her. She doesn't know her true name. But #077 makes her way over to where she's standing and reaches for an item in a cabinet.

"I'm sorry about #151." Without waiting for a response, she leaves. Alex closes her eyes for a moment trying to calm herself. When she opens them, she looks at #077 and gives her a nod.

They make the vegetable scrap stock and serve it in silence. She doesn't want to go back to her cell, where Jane will be replaced with #001. They finish dinner and after cleaning up she takes her allotted five-minute shower before being brought to her cell.

#001 is already there sitting on her bed. Alex is brought inside, and the cell is shut behind her. She lays on the pillow now getting damp from her wet strawberry blonde hair.

"I'm Imani," #001 whispers from the cot across the small cell. There's about two feet between them. Alex suspected that she'd eventually learn #001's name, but she isn't ready to hear it now. Alex wishes she didn't speak; she's not someone who is good at ignoring people.

"I'm Alex." She turns her back, hoping Imani will get the signal that tonight she wants to be left alone.

"I'm sorry about...it was Jane, right?" Imani asks.

“Yeah, Jane.” Alex responds before she closes her eyes and pretends to sleep. After a moment she hears Imani sigh and lays down. She feels bad about not wanting to talk, but she’ll just get upset if they talk about this. She tries her best to fall asleep. She tosses and turns for a while, before drifting off.

The next day passes slowly. She won’t meet Imani’s eyes when she serves breakfast and dinner. The day feels bleaker than ever now that Jane’s gone. During the day she keeps remembering Jane’s last word and tries to think of The Prophecy for hope. She just doesn’t believe it though. It’s been two hundred years and nothing, so why would anything change now? When she gets to her cell, Imani is already there. Alex knows she’s being rude, and Imani is probably having a hard enough time without Alex ignoring her. Alex puts on a brave face and gives Imani a small smile. Imani brightens immediately.

“How are you holding up?” Alex asks.

“It’s harder than I expected,” Imani answers. “And I was expecting the worst.”

“Yeah, the first few days are already the hardest. Especially with the...” Alex drifts off. She doesn’t want to think about Jane.

“The Abolishing?” Imani finishes.

“Yeah,” Alex replies.

“I’m sorry. I...” Imani looks down, and away from Alex.

“It’s not your fault.” Alex insists, even though it’s hard for her to say. “It’s inevitable. I’m #046 now, but I’ll be #151 eventually.” Which is true, but it’s still hard for Alex to

admit. It could have been anyone and it's not like she knew what was going to happen when she stole. Alex didn't know when she took Lisa's spot all those years ago. Her name is burned into her mind even though she's only heard it that day. The guard only refers to them by number, except at The Abolishing.

"Thank you," Imani replies. "We... we only get to number one hundred and fifty-one?"

"Yeah, they can only house so many of us. I'm not sure why they decided on one hundred and fifty but that's as long as we get." Alex lays down, suddenly very tired.

"I guess that makes sense," Imani replies. There's a brief pause and Alex wonders if they're done talking. "What jobs do you have?" Imani asks. Alex rolls on her side so she can look at Imani.

"I work in the kitchen for breakfast and dinner. In between I do laundry."

"That's not so bad," Imani says.

"No, it's not. Where were you placed?" Alex is pretty sure she was placed in the field. That's where most new people go.

"After breakfast I'm in the field," Imani confirmed. "After lunch I'm in the garage packing up the harvest to be shipped off." Imani sighs.

The fields and the garage are probably the worst places to work. They're the hottest and the most back breaking. Alex spent a good six months in the field. She was moved to

the kitchen when the old person was Abolished. She was thankful but knew what the cost of her change of job was.

“Those are the hardest jobs, they always give them to the lower numbers, unfortunately. Once some new people come in, you’ll be transferred somewhere. It took me six months to get out of the field, but we had a lot of new incoming prisoners those months. Sometimes it’s slower.”

Imani nods in understanding. “It’s okay, it’s not forever. I can handle it.”

Alex is surprised at Imani’s confidence. She definitely wasn’t sure she’d survive after her first two days, let alone the unknown amount of time ahead of her. “You’re already better off than I was. I was a wreck the first three weeks here.” Alex thinks back to her time, she really was a mess. She missed her brother and dad and worry gnawed at her wondering what happened to them. Jane was the one who helped her through it. Alex takes another deep breath and focus back on Imani.

Imani shifts nervously before laying down herself. After a moment Imani responds, “Yeah, I mean I guess I kind of knew what to expect.”

Alex is taken aback. What goes on here, is almost completely unknown because no one is ever returned from a Stockade. They have assumptions but that’s all they are. “How?” Alex asks. Imani doesn’t answer and Alex is going to ask again when a guard walks by. She stays silent.

“What happened your first week?” Imani asks.

Alex doesn't answer for a minute. Alex debates ignoring her like Imani did moments before but decides against it. "After my first Abolishing I was a wreck. Jane really helped me through it."

"I'm sorry," Imani repeats.

"It's not your fault. I did it to someone too. We all have, you didn't know your actions would end up... Abolishing someone." Imani looks away from Alex. Alex feels for Imani, she knows what that was like. But Jane reassured her that it wasn't her fault. Jane must have had a hard time missing her previous roommate, but helped Alex, nonetheless. As hard as it is and will be, Alex swears to do the same for Imani. It would be easy to put Imani at fault for Jane's Abolishing, but it was The Prosperous. Alex just needs to remember that. Alex doesn't know what to say to Imani though. So instead, she offers her some advice. "I know it's hard in the fields, but don't sit. No matter how tempting it is, it's not worth it."

Imani looks up. "That's good to know. Thank you."

"Of course," Alex replies. They lay there in silence for a while and Alex realizes Imani must have fallen asleep. Alex closes her eyes and after a few moments drifts to sleep.

Wyatt

Wyatt trains with Charles for most of the morning, and although it's physically demanding he's enjoying the small break from Engineering. Now, he's on his way to the wall to try and find an exit idea.

He really didn't have a choice when he became an Engineer. His father worked with an engineer at the solar plant. His father did the cleaning, nothing more than that, but the man, Jones, offered to teach Wyatt when his dad passed away. If he was lucky, he could move up in the world, and being a Mavros chances were so small. Jones taught him everything he knew. Wyatt never wanted to be an engineer, but he knew the offer was too good to pass up.

He was seventeen at the time, and that was five years ago, and he hasn't stopped working since. Even when he first joined the resistance, his job was to help repair the cooling system, and rebuild the solar cars. Things of that nature. It wasn't until his second month here that they told him his true purpose, and why they found him. That was a hard pill to swallow, at first. But now he's more than accepted it.

How could he not? He knows about The Prophecy, just like everyone in Evdaimon, but until recently he didn't know the signs for the prophesized. He's always had a weird arrow shape birthmark on his wrist but didn't think anything of it. Commander Grayson, before he was a commander, was on a mission and crossed paths with Wyatt. Grayson must have seen the birthmark which is why he told him about the Resistance and convinced him to leave behind his life. He wasn't leaving behind much; he didn't have a family to miss,

after all. He didn't know his true purpose for being recruited until almost a month later. He was upgrading the cooling system when they pulled him in for a meeting and told him about the truth of why he brought him here. He shakes the memory from his head because he's reached sector three of the wall.

He wasn't going fast to begin with; cars can't go above thirty miles per hour. However, he needs to be careful and watch for the guards. There are watch towers posted on the sides of each of the six sectors. He was told that they've abandoned them because they're low in guards but doesn't want to risk being spotted. The space between sectors is huge, so he has some leeway, but still needs to be on watch. He slowly drives the perimeter of sector three looking for weak points, when he comes across the door to the inside. He stops his car far enough away.

He realizes the door is exactly in the middle of Sector three. He looks to the walls and sees no guards. He wishes he could slip inside and scope it out from the inside. The large metal doors are surprisingly clean compared to most of the wall. He stops dead in his tracks. He didn't see it until now, but there is a lump motionless in front of the door. He tries to make out something and all he can see is grey and some red.

He gets out of the car, knowing this is completely reckless, and makes his way over the lump. As he gets closer, he smells something unpleasant and sees what looks like... hair? With a sudden gasp, Wyatt realizes that it's a body. Of course, he thinks to himself, what else would it be? He continues to make his way to the person, the smell getting stronger. He wonders who it is, and how they got here. He's about five steps away when he sees the blood and brain matter around it. Then he realizes it's a woman. He gets closer and

notices the all grey clothing. Aren't grey clothes for prisoners? He knows red, yellow, and orange are for The Prosperous, blue is for engineers and The Payson wear all black. He isn't sure but why else would someone be executed out here. He wants to take a deep breath but stops himself.

He rolls the body over—a mistake because the woman's eyes are open and clouded over and staring into nothing. The hole in her head goes all the way through and half her forehead is missing. He closes his eyes and centers himself for a moment. He's seen dead bodies before, but not that often. People in the resistance don't often die, but they do sometimes go missing. He's not exactly used to losing people, but he knows now to prepare for the worst. After a moment he opens eyes.

He looks down at her chest and sees a tiny digital screen with three large black X's over her left breast. He wonders what is usually there and why it's now just three X's. He takes a few steps back. He wishes he could take her with him, give her a proper funeral, but he knows he can't. For one, she's been in the heat too long. Two, if The Prosperous come looking for the body could cause them to leave the safety of the wall, and possibly discover The Resistance. He knows he has no choice to but to leave her.

He turns around and examines the wall quickly. He can't stay here too long, but he takes some mental notes before jogging back to his car. He quickly turns the air conditioning up and takes some deep breaths now that he's away from the smell. He writes down his notes on the pad he brought with him. And after a moment he continues going down the wall to see if there's anything else he can use.

Alex

The day drags for Alex. Several times she almost got emotional about Jane, and nearly started crying. She wanted to let it all out, feel her grief to the full extent but knew she couldn't. She knew if the guards saw her cry, she would have consequences. And the consequences are not pretty. After her first week in the stockades, she had shown too much emotion. They considered it an Offending and they held a Reckoning, where she was beaten. They were careful not to punish her so bad that she was unable to work, but she had never been in so much pain. Then worse of all she was in isolation for four days. That's what she heard happens in the Fifth Stockade, the one for Levia and Paya. Those four days in isolation were terrible, she couldn't imagine a lifetime of it. And working after that was terrible. She doesn't want a repeat of that, she's learned her lesson those two years ago.

She allows a few tears to escape in her cold shower, but quickly stops it before the water turns off. When she is brought back to her cell, she wants nothing but to be alone, or with her family. Imani isn't there when she enters. She sits on her bed and takes some deep breaths. That all she feels she can do, to make sure she doesn't fall apart. After a moment she lays down and waits for Imani to come.

Imani comes in a few moments later. The guard locks the door and leaves. Imani sits silently for a moment. Alex braces herself and then sits up.

"How are you holding up?" Alex asks.

"I should be asking you that," Imani responds.

"I'm fine," Alex says shortly. She doesn't want to talk about it.

"I..." Imani trails off. "I'm not going to assume I know your relationship with Jane, but when my mom died..." Imani takes a long breath. Alex watches her carefully, wondering what her next words are going to be. "When she died it was the hardest things I've dealt with. But I at least had a chance to grieve with the rest of my family. If it would help, you can tell me about her. You can grieve with me; I mean if you want."

Alex doesn't respond for a moment. She isn't sure how. She wanted to be the one to help Imani, she never expected Imani would want to help her. "What happened to your mom?" Alex asks after a moment.

"She died during childbirth."

"I'm sorry," Alex whispers. It reminds her about her mother.

"Thank you," Imani replies.

"My mother was taken to the First Stockade," Alex admits.

"What happened?"

"She was pregnant, but the baby was killing her. We scraped enough rations together to pay for a doctor. He told her that she was dying and so would they baby. He said her only hope was an abortion, but we knew if it was found out, she'd be sent away." The Prosperous want as many children as possible. More workers to make them more Prosperous. That to them was worth the extra mouths to feed.

Alex remembers her mother's brave face. She knew the risks for each option and knew neither was good. "He said he wouldn't do it, but he was willing to teach my dad enough of the basics to do it. It felt like our only hope. I couldn't do what my father did, but he did it successfully. She managed to survive, but three days later they came for her and took her to the Frist Stockade. Now, I wonder if she's still alive. That was five years ago."

"I'm sorry. I wish I could give you hope that I could say we'll save her, but I can't."

"There's no hope for any of us," Alex says darkly. "We'll all be destined to the same fate."

"I don't know about that," Imani admits. "Who knows what could happen?"

"I've been here two years, and it's always the same." Alex starts to feel emotional again. "Jane... she believed in The Prophecy." Imani's eyes light up at that. Alex sighs. "Don't tell me you're a believer too."

"You're not?" Imani asks, shocked.

"No," Alex says quickly. "I mean I wish I was, but if it was going to happen wouldn't it have happened already? Like I know they predicted six other things, and they all came true, but it's been two hundred years since the event. At this point what could possibly happen that could save us?"

"Time travel?" Imani suggests with a shrug.

"Time what?" Alex asks.

Imani gives a sly smile. "Like traveling back in time... to prevent The Event from ever happening."

"Do you believe that's possible?" Alex asks in disbelief.

"I think anything is possible when you put the right people together," Imani answers.

Alex thinks about that for a moment. If this, what did she call it, time travel was real then theoretically The Prophecy can be completed whenever. "But why would it be now?"

"The Prophecy did say the fourth great granddaughter of the President would save the world. That's around now."

Alex pauses trying to sort through the new information. "First, what's a President?" Alex asks.

"A person voted to be in charge of a specific area... there was a President of the land we're on now. Actually, there was forty-seven of them, before The Event." Imani answers.

"How do you know this? I thought the histories and The Prophecy was lost?"

Imani bites her lip and Alex wonders what she's thinking. "It wasn't all lost. Some still know."

"Do you know who this great, great whatever granddaughter is?" Alex asks.

"Um, no. I don't. But I'm sure they'll turn up soon," Imani says.

Alex wonders if what Imani is saying is true. If this time travel is real then Jane was right, and they would all be erased. Did Jane know this all along? Alex never asked her what she knew about the Prophecy, just why she believed in it. Maybe, Alex was asking the wrong questions. And if it really is the fourth great granddaughter then maybe they do have a chance in their lifetime. Maybe it won't always be like this. Hope blooms in Alex's chest, but she forces it down. It's not going to change her life here, and now. She has to stay realistic that this is her life. As much as she wants to hope, she doesn't want it to break her when nothing changes.

"It's a nice story, and maybe it'll come true," Alex gives. "But I just can't believe it."

Imani nods. "Well, maybe one day."

"Maybe," Alex replies, but knows unless she's somehow given a new life and freedom, freedom from more than just stockades, she won't believe it. Alex lays down and closes her eyes, knowing tomorrow will be more of the same.

"Goodnight," Imani whispers.

"Goodnight."

Wyatt

The next day Wyatt is running over plan after plan in his head when Commander Grayson comes into his little office, if it could be called that. It's really a glorified maintenance closet with a desk. Wyatt puts down his pen as Grayson walks over.

"Come with me," Grayson says. Wyatt stands up and follows him out of the room. They walk across the hall in the Commanders Headquarters. Commander Allura, and Commander John are both there, clearly waiting for Wyatt.

"What's going on?" Wyatt asks.

"We've received a message from The Stockade," Allura says.

"What does it say?" Wyatt leans forward unconsciously.

"It's short, it says, 'made contact with objective, gaining trust.'" Allura reads from the small note.

"Can I see it?" Wyatt asks. Allura shrugs and hands it over. He examines the paper; it reads exactly as she said.

"How'd we get this? Whose it from?"

"It's from our operative in the stockade," Allura says.

"How'd it get out?" Wyatt asks.

"We have a connection inside the stockade to get them out."

This is news to Wyatt. He knew they had sources, but one in a stockade is almost unbelievable. But he guesses not every member of the resistance came from the Payson. “That’s good. When are we thinking about an extraction?”

“A week to two weeks it depends. We need a solution as soon as possible. How are you doing on figuring out the escape?” Grayson puts the note on the table and waits for a response.

Wyatt has had very little luck coming up with something. The wall is too strong to break through. He didn’t find a single break or weak spot that wasn’t their entrance. And even if they find another weak spot, they’re going to scour the walls looking for how they got in in the first place. He isn’t sure what he can do, but he’s putting all his effort into it.

“I’m having some trouble...” he didn’t mention the body he found yesterday and isn’t sure if he should. “I went to the gate,” Wyatt admits.

Grayson’s eyes widen. “I told you to stay beyond the view of the towers.” Wyatt tries not to flinch at the tone of his voice.

“I know, I know. But there was no one there... except...”

“Except?” Allura asks leaning forward, watching him closely.

“There was a body,” Wyatt says quietly.

The commanders let out a collective breath. Wyatt looks between the three of them confused. “Are you not worried about a body outside the wall?”

“It’s what happens when a new prisoner is brought in,” Allura explains. This is nothing new to them, something that happens regularly.

“Oh...” Wyatt isn’t sure how to respond. He never thought much of it, but in a sick way it makes sense that they kill them. The Prosperous are not forgiving enough to release them back to their families and they can’t house them forever.

“How does it work?” Wyatt asks and wondering if there was more to this that could help with his problem.

“Why does this matter?” Allura asks.

“I’m just wondering if it could be useful to us somehow.” Wyatt shrugs.

The commanders share a look before coming to some nonverbal agreement. Allura explains that they can’t keep everyone there all the time, which Wyatt knew. It isn’t realistic and like he thought earlier, they won’t release them. When Allura tells him about the Abolishing and what happens when someone new comes in, Wyatt has to fight his reaction. At first, he’s horrified that the woman he saw was killed because they sent in an operative. She explains how hard the decisions was, but that ultimately, they had no choice. He thinks about how important this mission is and if all goes to plan than everything will be erased, and she will be alive somewhere happy. He knows the decision must have been hard and it sucks, but this was their only opportunity. After Allura finishes explaining, Wyatt nods.

“Okay, let me think with that, and I’ll get back to you.”

“Okay,” Grayson responds, “The sooner we have a solution the better.”

“I know, I’ll work on it.” Some ideas are already forming in Wyatt’s head more so than he had before this meeting.

“You’re dismissed,” Grayson says.

Wyatt nods in response and heads out to the shower. Normally he minds the cold shower, but maybe today it can help him think. He needs to come up with something and fast.

Alex

The apologetic stares and gestures are no longer happening, but Alex doesn't feel like things were back to normal because Imani is here instead of Jane. She tries not to think about her loss and move forward for her limited future, but she's had some difficulty. Imani has been trying to help her the past few days, but she can only do so much. They're both in their beds and Alex had thought Imani was asleep when she spoke.

"What did you steal to get here?" Her voice was soft, and Alex thought she'd imagined it. "I mean, I can tell you what I did..." Alex isn't sure how to respond. "I'm here because I stole rations." Imani sits up and turns to face Alex. Alex follows Imani's lead and sits up as well. "My family, because we're Mavros, get less rations. My family was starving all because of the color of our skin. I thought, no one will notice one bag go missing from the allotment center. I didn't even make it out the door." Imani sighs. "We just didn't want to be hungry anymore."

Alex wishes the world wasn't like it is. She wishes that The Prosperous weren't as horrible as they are, that life was fair and that people with dark skin weren't treated so poorly. Alex wishes there was something she could do. But she can't and she can't offer any comfort either. "I'm sorry you have to deal with that. It's not fair."

Imani sits up and her eyes harden. "The Prosperous won't prosper forever. Things will change, eventually."

Alex nods slowly but doesn't believe her. They're not going anywhere, and nothing is going to change. They're going to end up dead outside the wall and there's nothing they can

do to stop it or prevent it. But she might as well try and make the most out of her few years here with Imani before she gets to #151. Only 105 to go. she takes a deep breath telling a story she hasn't told since she first met Jane.

“My brother Matt was sick. He missed work one day and we knew that way he was, he wasn't going to make it to work the next day. If he didn't, he be sent off to the Men's Second Stockade, and I wouldn't let that happen.” Alex sighs, remembering that night she lost everything.

“We didn't have enough rations for medicine, and you know it's so overpriced only The Prosperous could afford it. There was a guard base less than a mile from our dwelling. I thought I could be in and out no problem.” Alex remembers the belief she felt that she could pull it off. She was naïve, but not her father. “My dad told me not too. He said there was no way that I could get in and out that I would be caught before I could get my hands on any medicine.”

She was terrified as she approached the base. She thought that she had made a mistake because there were so many Guards. “When I got there, I tried to find an opening. I almost turned around. But then an alarm went off and half the Guards left. I thought I had the best luck. I waited for a moment that I could sneak in and find it. I got inside and got the medicine cabinet, but it had a key lock.” And chuckles darkly. “I should have known. A guard walked in and saw me. I was taken away immediately. I couldn't even put up a fight.”

Alex had begged the Guard to let her go home and see her brother and her father, but he just remained silent. “I never got to see my brother or dad again. I don't know if Matt

made it to work or if my dad is all alone now, his whole family taken.” Alex finally glances at Imani who is giving her a sad smile. They’ve both faced their own struggles. They’re both different and unfair, but they’re not alone in their suffering.

“We’re going to get out of this,” Imani says. “I promise you we won’t die here.”

Alex doesn’t respond because there is no way for Imani to promise that. If she wants to believe there is a way out, that’s on her, but Alex knows better. There’s no escaping.

Wyatt

Wyatt heads to Charles to complete some weapons training. The past few days, he's been focused on hand to hand, but he needs to practice weapons because it will most likely be a firefight. He's always had good aim, but hand to hand is something he's had more trouble with. Charles greets him at the entrance to the weapons.

"Do you need a refresher on how to load a gun?" Charles asks.

Wyatt takes the gun and loads it and cocks it efficiently.

"Easy there, we don't want to accidentally shoot someone." Charles says taking the gun. Wyatt shrugs. Charles uncocks and unloads the weapon. "Let's head to the range."

Wyatt and Charles grab all the gear they need, earmuffs, different weapons, some targets and some ammunition. They load it all into a car and pull out of the fenced in parking lot. The range, as they call it, is over a mile away. They can't risk The Prosperous hearing them shoot weapons. The cars are slow, so it takes them a good half an hour.

"What have you been up to?" Charles asks Wyatt. "How's the machine going?"

"Still a dead end. I'm hoping when I meet her, she knows what she's doing because I'm stuck. Otherwise, we'll need a miracle." Wyatt sighs. He's never failed at something for so long. Sure, things give him trouble, but it's been months, just when he thinks he's getting somewhere, something fails and he ends up right back at the beginning.

"You think she'll know about time machines?" Charles asks.

“Honestly, no idea, but chances are against it. The Prosperous never train women, stupid sexist idiots. But that means it’s less likely she’ll know what to do. But something has to happen, right? I mean what other options are there?” Wyatt looks over at Charles who is focusing on the path ahead. It’s easy to get lost in a world of sand, and the range is not as big as the resistance base.

“I mean you were trained. Maybe she got lucky too. But either way it’s the prophecy, so hopefully you’ll get that miracle.” Charles shrugs not looking over.

“Yeah, I’m just... there’s so much pressure. You know fate of the world and everything. What if we fail? What if we can’t figure out how to go back? The whole world is riding on this, on us. I’m just... at a loss.” Wyatt shrugs now. He’s never really voiced these thoughts, but he knows he can trust Charles.

“I honestly think things will work out. I mean if the two of you getting together is going to save the world, there has to be something more, something...mystical even. I mean we’re working with The Prophecy, so it isn’t all going to be science and explainable.”

“That’s true. I just feel like I’ve wasted time trying and failing,” Wyatt says honestly. It’s one of his biggest insecurities. He’s been given anything he needs and over a year of time, but he hasn’t completed anything. They have a frame and some machine work, but for all he knows he’s lightyears away from what it needs to be.

“I think it’ll all work out. You just have to have faith.” Charles gives him a smile.

“Yeah, yeah,” Wyatt replies. “Now I’m working on getting an escape plan ready. That’s proving to be difficult as well.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, we can’t burn our only way in and out. God forbid the mission doesn’t succeed we still have to try to fix problems, right? We can’t just give up. So how do we get out of a wall that has only one weak point? And how do we evade the guards that will be chasing us?” Wyatt hasn’t had any luck, but he hopes it’s not all riding on him. Hopefully someone else will have some luck, and he’s worrying for nothing.

“Hmm,” Charles replies.

“Yeah, and I found out about The Abolishing and I thought, maybe we could use that... but I’m not sure how.” Wyatt’s been thinking about it the past few hours but hasn’t come up with anything great. “I mean the guards will be watching the prisoners closely, right? Maybe we could show up guns blazing and take the people in there. But then they’ll follow us right back to our base and it’ll all be done for.”

“What if we attack them from the inside?” Charles suggests. “We all come in through the weak point and then we lose the tail before heading back out.”

Wyatt mulls it over. They might be able to do that, then he realizes. “How would we get a car inside? We can’t exactly run away on foot when they have cars galore. And the hole isn’t going to fit a car.”

“Maybe we steal one? The Prosperous have plenty. If we dress appropriately, we can go to their section of the city and well... take one.”

“We’ll need a more concrete plan than that... but it could work,” Wyatt admits.

“The Guards might be more on guard if a car was stolen though... it could be worth the risk.”

“Maybe... maybe not. I know that The Resistance has people on the inside. I mean how else would we have gotten the note from the agent... maybe someone on the inside has a car we can borrow. I mean it would blow their cover, but this is the most important mission. The mission to end all missions.” Wyatt starts getting more excited at the idea. This could work, like actually work.

“You’d have to talk to Grayson about that. Their positions are important we get so much information that way... but it could. It could work.” Charles eases up on the gas as the range comes into view.

The range is no more than a table, which is now covered in dust and sand. There are big wooden crosses with hooks at several different distances away for hanging targets on. It’s easy to miss, Wyatt wouldn’t have been able to get here without Charles. They hop out of the cool car and Wyatt immediately wishes he were back in it. Both Wyatt and Charles put on hats and sunglasses, but it does little to help.

Wyatt takes the rubber targets and goes to hang them on the hooks. Charles heads to the table to clear the sand off of it. After a moment the target is ready, and the guns are unloaded on a clean surface. Wyatt heads behind the table and starts practicing.

Charles gives him some helpful reminders, but he found that his aim hasn't slacked in the few months that it's been since he last shot a gun. When he's out of rubber bullets, they go to the target and collect them for reuse. They pack everything up and head to the car. When they're back inside with the ac blasting, they both let out a breath. After a moment Charles starts driving them back to the base.

"Not bad," Charles says.

"Thanks." Wyatt smiles, but Charles doesn't look over.

"You're ready for the mission, I don't think you need much practice. Your hand to hand is pretty good too. Little rusty, but I think it'll do."

"I don't expect much hand to hand fighting, but I think I might still come by a practice. Gives me something else to do while I try and figure out the plan."

"Yeah, I'll be there. Always am." Charles smiles.

Wyatt looks out the window. Besides the base and the wall in the distance there is nothing around for as far as he can see. And he would never go beyond that because he's sure to get lost. It's almost scary the amount of nothing but sand. Wyatt looks over at Charles. "I'm going to run it by the Commanders tomorrow and see what they say. Thanks for the help, I think it might just work."

“Yeah, any time, Wyatt. I’m not only brawn, I got some brain too.”

Wyatt laughs. “I’ll have to remember that next time!” Charles laughs too and they complete the rest of the drive-in comfortable silence.

Alex

Alex wakes up from her sleep groggily when she hears a tapping noise. She cracks open an eye and sees Imani getting out of bed to talk with a guard. That doesn't make sense. The guard and Imani start whispering and even though she's only two feet away she's only able to catch a couple words. She manages to catch "trust," "unsuspicious," and "truth." She's not really sure what it means, but abruptly the conversation ends. Alex closes her eyes and pretends to be asleep. She hears footstep retreating, the bed creaking, and the blanket rustling. When Alex opens her eyes again Imani is laying down with her eyes closed like it never happened.

Alex ponders what Imani is doing and what it could mean but can't come up with a reasonable explanation for why she would be talking to a guard in the middle of night. Nothing makes sense and Alex worries that she can't trust Imani. Imani seemed so trustable sharing her life with Alex and Alex sharing it back, but this is suspicious, and she can't help but get a nagging feeling that something is wrong. She can't ask Imani about it now, but tomorrow night she's going to find out what the hell is going on. After a while she drifts back to sleep.

The alarm wakes her like usually and it takes a second for her to remember what she saw last night. While getting ready she watches Imani looking for signs of what happened last night, but she just smiles at Alex and gets ready like normal. They sit quietly waiting for the guards and Alex wants answers but knows now is not the time. Alex is watching Imani and notices that Imani eyebrows crinkle in confusion. She raises one questioning. Alex realizes she's been staring at her; Alex shakes her head.

“Nothing, sorry,” Alex says.

Imani nods but looks at her skeptically.

The guard comes and takes Imani to the fields. Alex shakes her head and sighs waiting for the guard to get her. She wants to know what Imani is up to, but she has found some comfort with Imani. It was really hard losing Jane, but Imani has helped fill her void. She needs to know she was doing before she continues to build this relationship. A horrible thought crosses her mind. What if Imani is the Prosperous undercover? And they have a suspicion that she’s Levia. Alex was really close with Jane... what if she was too close that they were suspicious? The thought scares her. Alex shakes her head. No that can’t be it, she’s just paranoid. If Imani were undercover for the Prosperous, they would have official meetings away from Alex. So, what else could it be?

The guard comes and opens the cell, and she walks to the kitchen in silence. She wonders who that guard was. They all look pretty much identical. They all have pale skin, white uniform and helmet. So how could Imani know this one? And how could she know them after only being here a few days? Something doesn’t add up. When she’s at the kitchen her mind is toying with theories and ideas, but none of them make sense. She’s so distracted making breakfast she almost pours the oats into cold water. She shakes her head, to snap out of it. The Guards will notice something is off with her and she’ll get in trouble. She spends the rest of her day focusing on the task at hand, with attention to detail. Sometimes it was hard because who thinks about washing laundry? It isn’t until the end of her dinner shift that the alarm rings three times. Alex sucks in a deep breath, someone’s Offended and they’re having a Reckoning. Without finishing dinner or cleaning they’re all

ushered out of the cafeteria. She's trying to look for a missing face and realize Imani's not there. Half of them are already outside, but who else could it be? It's always the new one. What could Imani have done? She seems so confident of her life and her role in here...

They turn right out of the cafeteria and make the left at the laundry. Alex's heart is pounding in her chest and all she can hear is the rhythmic tapping of shoes on the concrete. She's trying to control her breathing but isn't sure if she can stand there and watch Imani be beaten.

Once they pass the sleek metal door that says WARDEN PARKER, a place she only passes for a Reckoning. When someone does something wrong, they say she Offended, and they hold a Reckoning. Alex had been through one when she first got here. Most new prisoners do. They take another left and walk into the room on the left at the end of the hall. It huge, big enough to fit all the prisoners on one side for the witnessing, and the guards and warden on the other. They all take their place in number order and when everyone filed in the #001 spot is clearly empty. Imani's spot. Alex almost sits in #045, but moves one spot to right, realizing her new number.

Once they're all seated The Warden comes in with the Guards, but they're forgotten when Alex sees Imani. Imani, who is always so confident looks defeated. Her head is bent over and she's in chains. The guards drag her in, and her shoulders look like they're shaking. Is she crying? It breaks Alex's heart to see, but she knew it would come eventually.

The Warden smacks her hands together loudly, and Alex isn't sure why. They were already quiet attention front and center.

“We have an Offender. And what happens to Offenders, girls?” the Warden asks raising an eyebrow.

“The Reckoning,” all but Alex reply. Her voice is stuck in her throat. She’s scared for Imani but she’s mad about the unjust system.

“The Reckoning,” the Warden repeats loudly.

“Number one,” the Warden says sharply. “What was your Offense?”

Imani glares up at her with tight lips. Alex sucks in her breath, willing Imani to comply. It’s worse if you don’t comply. The Warden smiles sickly and holds out her hand. A guard hands her a whip.

“Number one,” The Warden says harshly. “What was your *Offense*?”

Imani looks at the whip and looks to the crowd. Imani catches Alex’s eye and she nods quickly, hoping Imani will get the message. Play along, it’ll be better for you.

“I...” The Wardens head turns sharply and cutting off Imani before she had the chance to speak.

“Your *Offense* was...?” Imani closes her eyes like she wants to fight back but then takes a deep breath. Alex bites on her lip watching this. The only thing harder would have been if it was Jane down there.

“My *Offense* was sitting down in the field,” Imani says slowly. Alex wonders if her pride is going to be the end of her. Alex can tell from the look in her eyes she’s trying to

hide her confidence, that she isn't scared. The Warden notices this too, but since she complied, she moves on.

"Your Offence will be met with your Reckoning. Girls take this as a warning, you do as your told. No shortcuts, no easy way out, no disobeying." The Warden nods her head and a Guard punches Imani hard across the face. Imani's head snaps to the side and blood dribbles out. "You will learn to obey," The Warden continues. "You had your freedom and you lost it." Alex shakes her head. Yes, outside the stockade is freedom compared to this, but not by a lot. Alex closes her eyes as a fist makes contact with Imani again. "We gave you a second chance. To do better." The sound of a fist making contact with Imani's face makes Alex cringe, she can't even watch. She knows if she does, she might do something stupid. "And you will *be* better. Better than before." Alex can hear the Imani's pants, gasps for breath in between hits. "I've never had a Reckoning for the same girl twice, and Number One, it better be the same for you." With one last sickening blow, Alex knows it's over. The speech is always the same. She doubts Imani even heard it, but she will learn her lesson. Alex wishes she would have listened to her warning. She opens her eyes long enough to see Imani's bloody and swollen face before she's taken out of the room.

Alex knows she won't see Imani tonight, but her demand for answers has been silenced by her concern for her wellbeing. The women are taken back to the kitchen to finish dinner in silence. When she and #077 are alone cleaning up, #077 puts a hand of comfort on Alex's. She nods at her and they finish in silence.

She brought back to an empty room and it feels lonely without her here. They've only been together a few days, but she misses her company. She takes a deep breath and

tries to sleep. She has trouble because all she can see is Imani, bloody and swollen. She tried to warn her, not to step out of line, but it usually can't be helped. After a few hours she finally drifts off.

Wyatt

When Wyatt got back from his training with Charles, he took a quick shower before heading to the commanders Headquarters. He has to run this idea by them, maybe it could work. If they have the right circumstances, it could. All three Commanders are around the table in the center when Wyatt walks in.

“Wyatt,” Commander Allura acknowledges.

“Commanders,” Wyatt greets back. “I think I may have figured it out. How to get everyone out without burning our entrance *and* without risking the base.” Wyatt takes a few steadying breaths.

“What’s your plan?” Grayson asks.

Wyatt explains to them his plan to use the next Abolishing as a cover. He tells him about borrowing a car to get away and using the chaos to escape. How maybe someone on the inside can provide a safe house once they lose the tail, until they can get safely out. Once he’s finished the commanders ponder it for a moment. Wyatt can’t tell what they’re feeling, and he tries not to fidget nervously.

“It could work,” Allura says first.

Wyatt lets out a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

“But then we’d have to burn some of our inside men and women...” John says hesitantly.

Wyatt was worried that that would be too risky for them. Before Wyatt can speak up Grayson starts talking.

“This is the endgame, John,” Grayson reminds him. “If the prophecy is correct, we won’t need them anymore. It seems like the best play. Good work, Wyatt, but your job is far from over. We have some details we have to hash out and plans have to be made.” Grayson pauses from a noise behind the door.

The door opens and a man he’s never seen before walks in. He looks out of place wearing all white. He must be a guard. Is it *the* guard though? He seems out of breath like he rushed to get here. If he is the inside guard, what is he doing here? Did something go wrong? Even the commanders straighten up. “Steve,” Grayson says. “What’s going on?”

“Imani Offended,” Steve replies. “They just had a Reckoning for her.” Wyatt has heard of these words, but he isn’t sure what it means together. What is a Reckoning? What happens at one? He’s about to speak up when Steve continues. “She’s in pretty bad shape. Not immobile, but definitely not where we want her to be.” Wyatt connects the dots; they beat her or something similar. What did she do? “I don’t have access to her for another day at least, and now they’re going to be watching her more closely.”

Grayson curses under his breath. John clenches his fist, and Allura remains calm.

“Maybe it’s time to enlighten Alex,” Allura suggests. “If she knows what’s going on, she can help in the escape. She can pick up some of Imani’s slack. She’s capable, she can take the lead.”

“I don’t know...” Grayson says. “We don’t know if she can act under pressure. What if she gives something away? It could ruin everything. We planned to keep her in the dark for a reason.”

Wyatt contemplates that. It is a risk, and Wyatt doesn’t know Alex, but if she’s the woman in the Prophecy she has to be capable. It just makes sense.

“I think she can do it,” Steve says. “I’ve been watching her for a while, and she’s come a long way since her first month in the Stockade. After Jane, she’s been handling it well. Better than I would have expected. She can do it.”

“Who’s Jane?” Wyatt asks. He’s met with silence. He looks between the commanders and Steve, but no one will meet his gaze. “Who’s Jane?”

“Alex’s old cellmate,” Steve replies after a moment.

“What happened to her?” More silence. “Is she the dead body I found?” When no one answers Wyatt realizes it must be. And if she was Abolished then Imani must be her new cellmate. Wyatt wants to be angry that Jane is dead because of them but comes to the realization fairly quickly that she was going to be Abolished either way. This was there one opening, they had to take it. Wyatt turns his attention to Steve.

“You think Alex can handle it?” Wyatt asks. “One hundred percent?”

Steve nods. “I do. I’ve watched her for two years. I think she can.”

“Then I say let’s do it. Steve knows her better than any of us.” Wyatt looks to the commanders to a response. He can’t make decisions, after all its up to them.

“What if we only told her part of the truth?” John suggests. “Nothing huge to make her freak out. But we just say Imani was sent in to break her out. Don’t tell her about the Prophecy. That could be too much pressure. Just says there is an escape plan in place, and that they need Alex’s help to get out.”

“That’s smart. She’s on a need-to-know bases. We can fill her in when she gets here,” Allura says.

With that everyone turns to Grayson. He’s the head of the Commanders so if he says no, it’s over. A long pause happens while Grayson mulls it over. No one speaks.

“Okay,” Grayson concedes. “Need to know only, and the sooner the better. The new plan is to break them out at the next Abolishing. Steve, we’ll fill you in on the plan and your part. Wyatt you’re dismissed. We’ll touch base again soon.”

With that the commanders start filling in Steve in on his idea. Wyatt leaves heading to the common room for some much-needed down time.

Alex

The next day morning, Alex hopes to see Imani at breakfast. If that happens, she knows things will go back to normal. They keep the Offended in isolation for an undetermined amount of time as a form of punishment. Nothing to distract from the pain. Sometimes it's one day, but she's seen it go on for a week. It's all up to the Warden. Alex fears that because Imani is Mavros it will be a longer time than necessary. She really hopes to see Imani but isn't completely surprised when she doesn't show. She tries to hide her disappointment. She keeps her fingers crossed that by the time dinner comes she'll be there, but again she's not.

The next few days pass slowly for Alex. Waiting to see Imani hopeful, only to be disappointed. Alex feels lonely without her, they hadn't known each other long, and of course they weren't as close as she was with Jane, but without Imani she's starting to feel her loss even more. She's going through the motions, just to get through the day, but each day is harder than the last. So, it surprises Alex when Imani is in their cell one night.

Imani catches her eye and offers her a small smile. She still a little swollen and the bruises are still there. She remains quiet until the guards are gone.

"How are you doing?" Alex asks as soon as it's safe.

"I'm good," Imani answers with a confidence.

Alex isn't sure what to make of Imani, she's so strong, her will wasn't even broken by the beating and the isolation. Those are the hardest things in here. The other prisoners,

even though she doesn't know most of their names, are the only things keeping her sane. She knows if she was ever found out to be Levia and she was sent to fifth stockade she would be driven insane. She's rather die than be in isolation for the rest of her life.

"I don't get it, Imani. You're like no prisoner I've ever seen before. Who are you?"

Alex asks.

Imani lets out a pained sigh. "You have to listen to the whole story before you say anything. I just want you to know that everything I ever told you was true. You have to believe that, okay? Just believe me." Imani's voice is desperate, pleading, close to begging.

"Okay, Imani I believe you." Alex has no clue why she's here, why she wouldn't believe what she said is true, but the butterflies in her stomach are making her question it already. Something isn't right.

"Okay..." Imani closes her eyes and takes a deep breath, which turns into a hiss. Alex wishes she could take her pain away but remains silent wanting to know what Imani is going to say.

"I'm part of the Resistance," Imani starts. Alex's eyes widen. She's heard of the resistance before, but only in rumors. They run secret mission against the Prosperous in order to fulfill the Prophecy. She never believed in the Prophecy, so she never had any desire to join this group. There are others that she knows that would join it, but they don't know how. It's a deeply guarded secret, only rumors, nothing concrete.

Imani talking to that guard makes more sense now. The guard must be part of the Resistance too. At least that makes sense.

“You’ve heard of us,” Imani states.

Alex nods. “Just rumors.”

“Well, I can tell you that we’re real. We’re a group based outside the wall.” Alex’s eyes widen. Outside the wall? That’s news to her. the only time she’s ever seen the wall is at the Abolishing and it’s a bunch of nothing.

“How?” Alex asks.

“We’re about five miles or so outside. We have base with everything we need to survive, solar power, gardens, recycled water systems, even air conditioning.”

Alex wonders how they managed to get all that beyond the wall. When did that happen? When did the resistance start? She has so many questions. “What do you do? What are the goals?”

“We go on missions inside the city to gain information about how to save the world.”

“Save, the world... like the Prophecy?” Alex asks.

Imani’s eyes flicker hesitantly. Like she doesn’t want to share the truth. What doesn’t she want to share? What is she keeping from Alex?

After a moment Imani says, “Yes and no. We do try to fulfill the Prophecy, but we are doing things to help now. Things we can do to make life better for the Payson.”

“What things?” She’s heard of the Resistance, but she’s never heard of someone getting help from them.

“We get extra rations and supplies and give them to families in need. We give medicine and medical supplies to doctors for the Payson.”

After Imani says that Alex remembers a boy from down the block. He was Mavros, and he was always so sickly thin. Alex wished she had enough rations to spare but didn’t. Over the course of a few weeks, he looked better, gained weight. She always thought his parents did something to gain more rations, something illegal. But never thought that the Resistance was helping. The thought never crossed her mind. They were a rumor, after all. Imani must have recognized something in her eyes.

“You remembered something? Someone?” Imani asks and Alex tells her about the boy from years ago. “I can’t guarantee that that was us, but it’s likely. We want to help, in any way we can.”

“So, what are you doing here?” Alex asks. That’s the one thing she can’t figure out. “Did you accidentally get captured?” That seems unlikely. If she was captured because she was the |Resistance she wouldn’t be sent here, this is only for thieves. It’s clear that the Resistance doesn’t need to steal, they have everything they need. So that begs the question, why did Imani get taken? And was it a coincidence that she was placed here or is she here for a reason?

“I’m here to break you out,” Imani says bluntly.

Alex stares at her in shock. To break her out? How? Is that even possible? Things are so tightly guarded here; she wouldn't think so. And why her? She's a nobody from district three. She has no skills, no special abilities, no useful information. She's nothing, just a woman trapped in the system. "Why?" Alex asks. "Why me? Why not someone else?"

Again, Imani hesitates. "I can't tell you yet. You just have to trust me."

Alex huffs in frustration. "Trust you? You've been lying to me this whole time! You've just been talking to me for one reason. And all that you said could have been a lie just to get close to me! Is your mom even dead?"

"Yes," Imani answers softly. She's not angry, which surprises Alex. Alex tries to let go of her anger and listen to Imani. "I told you everything I said was real. Those are true stories. I never lied to you. I know it seems impossible, but I need your help. And to do that I need to know if I can trust you, and if you can trust me."

Alex throws her back and closes her eyes. Before this, Alex wouldn't have hesitated to say yes, I trust you. But now she's hesitating. She feels like this whole relationship is a lie, if she's being honest, truly honest, she really liked Imani. In a maybe more than friends' way, not that she'll ever share that. Her confidence and character really drew her in. But that was the point, wasn't it? She calculated everything she said to gain her trust. She seemed so genuine, it's hard to imagine Imani being calculated and doing this only for her personal gain. Alex hesitates, and decides to lie. She isn't sure if she can trust her, but she needs her to get out. And she really does want to get out.

“Okay,” Alex says finally. “I’ll trust you to take care of the escape and get us out. But don’t expect anything else.”

Imani looks disappointed but she nods, seemingly understanding. “I’ll take it. And maybe when we’re out I can earn your trust back.”

Alex gives her a small smile. “You’re welcome to try.” She pauses. “Now, how the hell are we getting out of here?”

“Well, that’s what I’m going to need your help with. I just got the plan from HQ. We’re going to use The Next Abolishing as our escape. The resistance is going to attack, and we’ll use the chaos to get away.”

Alex nods slowly taking it in. She concedes the Abolishing is a good time to make their getaway. One problem is burning at the back of her mind though. “Are we going to leave #151 to die?”

Imani pauses, looking a little taken aback. Like she never considered this. “I mean... that was the plan.” Imani shrugs. “I don’t mean to be harsh, but her number was up.”

“Yeah, and Jane’s number was up so you had her killed so you could get to me.” The harshness is Alex’s voice surprises both of them. Imani looks hurt, for the first time. Even with her bruised and swollen face. Alex shakes head. “Sorry, I know she was going to go either way; I’m just saying I want to save everyone... anyone, someone besides us. Can’t we do that? I know we can’t save them all, but maybe just one person?”

“We will, Alex. Just not now. The plan is risky enough already. Getting you out is enough.”

“Give me the details, how is it going to work. Maybe I can think of something,” Alex says.

Imani nods, and explain to Alex the plan. They barely sleep that night, running through it over and over so when the time comes it all goes to plan. The next morning their both exhausted, but they push through knowing hope is on the horizon.

Wyatt

The past few days passed slowly to Wyatt. He's been figuring out the finer details of their plan and waiting on word from Imani through Steve to figure out if Alex is able to help. In his spare time, he's been reading and training with Charles. His relationship with Charles is easy, and they have a lot of comfortable silences. It's stopped Wyatt from dwelling on the issues at hand. There's a lot of what ifs going around his head. What if they can't execute his plan? What if one of them gets hurt? What if one of them dies? What if someone on the resistance dies? Also, the unknown timetable is getting Wyatt on edge. He's fidgeting at meals, and when he's trying to read. An Abolishing can happen whenever. It all depends on if someone steals, and when.

Wyatt was staring at the clock in the common room, when Allura walks in. He doesn't even notice until he calls her name. He looks up at her and she motions for him to follow her.

He puts the book that he wasn't really reading down and follows Allura out of the room. They walk in silence heading towards the Commanders Headquarters. Wyatt opens the door and walks in and sees more people in this room than he ever has. He knows everyone on base, so he's surprised when he sees unfamiliar faces in the room. And he's even more surprised when he sees orange, red and yellow clothing. He knew they had people part of the Prosperous on the inside, but he is shocked to see the numbers. There is at least twelve people wearing bright clothes, they stick out easily from the black clothing. He also shocked to see them here. As far at Wyatt knows they've never ventured outside

the wall before. There also people in black and blue that he doesn't recognize. They must be the Payson on the inside. They really got everyone here for this mission.

"Let's begin now that everyone is here," Commander Grayson says. "We all know the plan, and we all know why we're here." Everyone nods all around. "Our friends from the Prosperous agreed to let us use their cars, but they are not part of the mission. They know that once their car is compromised in the mission, it's not a far leap to being part of the resistance so for their safety after the mission they'll be here."

That makes sense to Wyatt, with a mission so big, it's clear a lot of people are going to get burned. There's no way to stop it or prevent it. Wyatt's just thankful these fortunate people are willing to give up everything for the greater good. He takes a deep breath, feeling the pressure suddenly. Everything that's going to happen is relying on him, and he's nervous. He hopes Alex will give him whatever insight she can so they can build this machine and save the world. Wyatt shakes his head; he needs to tune back into what Grayson is saying.

"...don't know when the actual Abolishing is going to be, so until then we are going to go inside the city and wait. We will be staying at a few of their places, getting prepared to move at a moment's notice. They will be staying with us until then to keep appearances and answer the door but will safely evacuate the night before the abolishing. We'll only get notice the night before the Abolishing and that isn't enough time to get everyone in and make sure everyone is well rested."

That makes sense to Wyatt, it's a smart play keeping them there. The Prosperous won't suspect a thing. Hopefully, it'll only be a few days, but it could be up to weeks, according to Allura.

"We plan on moving out in sections over the next three days," Grayson continues. "Just in case the Abolishing happens sooner. We'll sneak everyone in in groups. One Prosperous to five soldiers. Well do it in shifts of four groups each day. That's 60 people, and from our intel that's plenty of soldiers to overwhelm the Abolishing. Guard numbers have been dropping recently, and they don't have the usual number for the stockades because of it. They don't worry about a breach our outbreak because they force the prisoners to live in a state of fear and hopelessness."

Fear and hopelessness? That's what Alex has been dealing with for the past two years? That's terrible. Wyatt hopes it hasn't affected her too much, but if it has, he'll make sure he can help her any way he can. They're a team, and they both need to be strong in order to win.

"Your assignments and movements are posted on the wall to the right. If you have any questions, see any one of us after." With that Grayson finishes and people start making their way to the wall to see their assignment. Wyatt waits for the crowd to disperse before heading over. He watches everyone get their number and make their way out. Wyatt wonders if they have enough beds and food for everyone. As far as Wyatt knows they've never had this many people and aren't prepared for it either. Usually, each new member who is brought here is planned out ahead of time. They gather intel, how they can be useful, and if they believe they'll agree to leave everything and join the fight.

After the room has mostly cleared Wyatt heads over the board. He catches the Commanders watching him. He goes to the list and scours each group, when he gets the end, he realizes he must have missed it. When he goes over it again and it's not there, he's confused. He walks over to the Commanders.

"I didn't see my name on the list," Wyatt says waiting for an explanation.

"We thought it over, Wyatt," Grayson says. "And you're too important to the mission to risk."

"I'm *benched*? You can't be serious." Wyatt is shocked. The whole plan was for him to be there.

"What if you get shot? Then it's game over and it's all for nothing. It's too much of a risk," Allura says calmly. Too calmly for Wyatt's mood.

He takes some deep breaths, knowing that he can't fight with them. Yelling will get him nowhere. But he can reason.

"You had me train, I'm ready for this. Ask Charles, he gave me the go ahead."

"You still haven't beaten him hand to hand, once. And yes, we did have you train, but the more we thought about it, the more it made sense for you to stay. We have enough men and women without you, that we don't need to risk it." Wyatt takes a breath to argue, but Allura pushes through. "Think about it Wyatt. Let's say you don't die, what if you even get hurt? That sets us back weeks, weeks that we may not have. We're putting all our eggs in your basket; you can't drop it."

Wyatt sighs again. It does make sense, when she put it like that, but he always assumed he'd be there. Be the one to help her get out, before anything goes wrong. Wyatt takes another deep breath. He knows they're not going to change their mind, and he knows, he isn't either. He'll just have to make it in without them. He puts on a resigned face and nods.

"I understand it's too much of a risk. I'll stay behind."

The Commander seemed relieved, and he knows he'll get in big trouble for sneaking in the mission, but he won't be left out. His fate and the fate of the world is relying on this. There is no way he's going to sit out.

Alex

Imani explained the plan thoroughly several times to make sure Alex knew what to do. The last time Imani explained it, Alex harshly told Imani she knew what to do. She's since apologized; she was on edge about everything. Imani accepted her apology, they were all under a tremendous amount of stress. Alex has been trying to shove down her feeling of hope. She's scared that this is all somehow a mistake or a dream and they're never going to get out. It just seems too unlikely. Imani purposely getting taken so she could save Alex from the stockade, that just seems improbable. But every night Alex watches Imani, waiting for her to say it's a big joke and that it isn't real.

Alex has thought about saving someone, but she knows it's risky. And she doesn't know who to save. #077 has been with her in the kitchen for a while, it would be easy to save her. But there are so many women that she wants to save. And the one she wants to save the most, is already gone. It sucks that Jane had to die for her to escape. She keeps trying to look on the bright side that at least she didn't die for nothing, but it's hard to believe, since her escaping doesn't seem real. She wishes she could talk to Jane about it. She's had a good insight. Alex has been hesitant to share what she's been feeling with Imani.

Alex believes that the stuff she said was true. But how much of it was because she cared not because she needed to gain trust? Imani has sworn that it's more than just to gain trust, but Alex is having a hard time believing it.

Imani is also not helping because she doesn't want her to save anyone. She keeps telling Alex the plan was made for two, but Alex can't believe that. What's one more? According to Imani it's a lot, but she won't explain why, so Alex isn't sure what to believe.

"Come on," Alex says one evening. "One person, we have to power to change someone's life for the better." A look flashes Imani's face but it's gone before Alex can figure out what it means.

"Look, Alex." Imani sighs. "A large amount of work that has gone into this carefully made plan. One more person could screw it up. I want to save someone, hell I want to save everyone. And we *will*, but not like this. We need to follow the plan, so it will work."

"Why has a large amount of work gone into saving me? You still won't tell me why I'm so important to the resistance, going to all this trouble for!" Alex huffs.

Imani looks at her guiltily and sighs. "Look, you weren't even supposed to know about the plan, but we had to tell you in case the next Abolishing happened before I was better. You said you would trust me, so please trust me on this."

"How can I, Imani?" Alex whispers, her voice breaking. "You came here with one purpose. To get close to me and you did, but I don't know if I can trust you again. I feel betrayed, honestly. Like I question every moment we had together, what was real and what was for your mission?"

"It was all real," Imani says.

“But it was all for your mission,” Alex replies. “And I guess I can’t differentiate between the two like you can. I just need some time.”

Imani nods, understanding as usual. But Alex isn’t even sure if time can heal it. Imani made her feel better, after losing Jane, but like she said she can’t differentiate, and she doesn’t know how that’s going to change.

Alex lays down and turns away from Imani. She hears Imani lay down too. A few minutes go by before Imani speaks. “I’m willing to give you time and I get it, I get you can’t trust me, but I guess I need you to believe me and what I’m telling you.”

Alex pretends to be asleep and doesn’t respond. But sleep doesn’t come easy for Alex, it hasn’t for the past few nights. She’s been pondering for a few days why the resistance would need her, and nothings makes sense. She doesn’t even have a general guess or idea. She has no useful skills at all. She’s not that smart, she’s not that strong, she doesn’t have any skills that could be useful to them. Nothing about her is special, and she can’t imagine why the resistance would go through so much trouble to save her. There has to be more important people to save, like Jane, for instance. She was a firm believer in the Prophecy, she would do anything to help fulfill it. Alex doesn’t even believe it’s true.

The unknown amount of time until the next Abolishing was also looming on Alex’s mind. If they’re lucky Imani’s guard will be able to tell them the night before, but there’s a chance that they’ll wake up to that special musical alarm and that’s the whole notice they’ll get. Alex has never had to deal under this much pressure before and she’s hoping she can step up and handle it.

She also has been thinking about her family. She wants to see them, before she leaves the city forever. She wants to know what happened to Matt, and if her father is still okay. Alive, even. Her father was always the strong one. He was there for her and Matt when her mom was taken, but if both of his children are taken, she isn't sure that he's even strong enough for that. She's always wanted to know what happened after she was taken, but over the two years she's made a sort of peace that she'll never know. But now that she's getting out it is possible. They have a safe house they're going to lay low for a couple days before escaping the city to their base. Maybe she can find a way to make it home. No, Alex *will* find a way to make it home. She knows that they put so much time into this, but if she has the chance, she's going to take it. She'll make a plan as soon as she can, she just needs more details first. Imani was keeping it need to know, but maybe Alex can convince her to give more of the plan.

Alex sighs and rolls over. She's not sure how she's ever going to fall asleep tonight.

Wyatt

The first group is moving out tonight, and Wyatt needs to be there. He looked at the list, and the group leader most likely not to send him home is Charles. He's the best fighter and marksman, even though he's older there's no way he's sitting out. Charles is more likely to allow him to stay. Everyone is gearing up, and Wyatt sneaks in keeping his back to the others until he's put on the gear and helmet. There are other Mavros part of the whole, so he doesn't stand out too much.

Everyone grabs a gun and ammo before heading to the jeep. He sneaks on to Charles jeep. It'll be hard to miss an extra body, where they're six instead of five, and his Mavros skin stands out with the all-Kafka group, but maybe they won't notice? Or if they do, maybe they'll pretend they didn't see. He knows they'll both get in trouble for it, but he's willing to face the consequences. After all, what can they do to the man in the prophecy? He gets in the back and doesn't look at anyone. By some miracle they start driving and Wyatt keeps his fingers crossed. The entrance is almost on the other side of the city, so the drive is long. Wyatt tries not to fidget nervously so no one notices him. It feels like an eternity later when they get to their passageway. From a distance it's looks like a complete portion of the wall, but if you get closer, you'll notice the crack throughout. Wyatt stays in the back of the group, and watches as they move the piece out of place.

One by one, they start making their way through. It's a decent size hole easy enough to fit one person, even a large person. Wyatt makes his way through last and looks up in front of him. They're in the Prosperous district and it's been a while since he's been in the city. He can't help but be in awe of the lights. It brightens the whole area, and he can see the

houses as far as his eyes will let him. They're gorgeous and big enough to fit fifteen people, easy. He marvels at the grass. The wants to take his shoes off and walk barefoot. Grass is only found here, because the amount of maintenance it needs to stay alive in the almost wasteland they live in, is insane. He takes a deep breath and can tell somewhere nearby it was freshly cut, he's only smelled freshly cut grass once before and he inhales again, knowing he may never smell it again. He lets out a breath and hears a shift in metal and know the drivers shut the entrance behind them. Wyatt lets out another breath and turns to the group. Only then does he notice his group staring.

"Hi, Wyatt," Charles says with a smile. "Didn't think we'd notice you?"

"Well, I was hoping you wouldn't turn me at the least," Wyatt says sheepishly.

"You know you're going to get in tons of trouble, right?" Charles asks.

"Yup."

"Alright then, Starlette, lead the way," Charles says.

The woman dressed in all red with the palest skin Wyatt's ever seen is staring at him. Did she not hear Charles? Wyatt notices the others are looking back and forth between them. It dawns on Wyatt that he's the only Mavros in the group. Since joining the resistance he's never felt this sort of feeling of being other. It's painfully clear now, as Starlette stares at her in almost disgust. Wyatt straightens up instead of cowering in on himself.

"Starlette?" Charles pushes. She slowly drags her eyes away from Wyatt.

Starlette shakes her head. "Sorry," she says seemingly genuine. She starts walking towards presumably her house. They try and keep to the shadows, but it's hard with the lights being everywhere. Wyatt is on guard, watching every angle as he walks with the group. Starlette is at the front, walking next to Charles. No one makes a sound the entire way, always on the lookout. If a patrol unit comes through, they're done for and the whole plan is over. But Starlette and the other Prosperous have assured them that there hasn't been patrols in months. Probably the lack of guards.

As they walk Wyatt can't help but notice the houses, each one bigger than the last. The outside are bright beautiful colors, more than orange, red, and yellows, but pinks and bright blues too. The prosperous love color so much, they monopolize it. Wyatt as an engineer wears blue, but it's a dark navy blue, nothing like the bright colors he's seeing.

Finally, after a half hour of walking, Starlette turns into a driveway. There is a little fenced in area attached to the house with a car in it. He's amazed that they have so many solar powered cars, enough that a family can have their own. Every house they passed had the same set up. Starlette takes out a key and unlocks the front door. Wyatt walks in last and is met with a nice breath of cool air. He hadn't realized how hot he was, until the air conditioning hit.

The second thing he notices is the room itself. It's sunset orange, a color Wyatt's never seen before. Most oranges, Wyatt finds ugly, but this is strangely calming. There are also several couches in matching colors. They look new, and barely used, unlike the beat-up ones in the base. They also don't look that comfortable, they look stiff and hard. There are framed things on the wall, and Wyatt is pretty sure it's art. He's only heard the term a

couple times, but what else could it be? There are some drawings in color and weird shapes on them. Wyatt thinks they're ugly. The whole house is. He's used to neutral colors and anything else just feels wrong.

"Thanks, Starlette," Charles says. He turns at the sound of the door shutting behind him.

"Make yourselves at home. There's a couple of spare bedrooms. Not enough for everyone..." Starlette drifts off.

"It's more than enough, Starlette, thank you." Charles gives her a smile and then she walks down a hall, retreating for the night. The couches look too nice to sit on and not nearly comfortable enough, so Wyatt and the others take a seat on the floor.

"We all know the plan, now it's a waiting game," Charles says. "I know I don't need to tell you this, but I'm going to anyway. Don't go outside, don't go near the windows, and stay hidden. If the door rings, we all go to the bedrooms. If any of the neighbors see us, it's game over. I think Starlette has some books to read if you get bored. Also, try and keep the place clean, pick up after yourselves, Starlette and the others are giving up a lot so let's try to be good house guests, okay?" Everyone in the group nods in understanding. "Alright, it's late so let's get some sleep."

Wyatt is too keyed up to sleep, he knows the call could be at a moment notice and he's been on edge since he came up with the plan. He also can't help but think of Starlette and her blatant staring. He was used to it before the resistance, he was able to ignore it back then. Now though he can't help but feel upset. He got comfortable at the Resistance.

He was a member of the team, an important one. He never felt like an equal before, even with his education, but after he joined, he realized that people accepted him regardless of his skin tone and he grew comfortable. He didn't forget about the struggles Mavros faced inside the wall, but it wasn't at the forefront of his mind. However, with this painful reminder it's not something he's going to let slide again.