



POLETTES

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Powerless

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The Beginning of the End

September 15, 2017

The president of the United States delivered a controversial speech to the United Nations this morning. In it, he said he would, "Completely and utterly obliterate any violent opposition to the United States." Although not stated outright, the speech was directed towards North Korea, specifically their increasingly provocative statements. Ambassadors of North Korea left abruptly before the speech was finished.

September 17, 2017

The president said on Tweeter today: "Lots of people have asked me about my speech a few days ago. I meant what I said. If North Korea ever tries to threaten the American people, they will pay a big price for it."

September 20, 2017

All communications with North Korea seize. Satellites show no change in North Korea, but they haven't responded to any questions. The nation holds its breath as it waits, but the President assures the people that nothing will happen.

September 22, 2017

At 10 pm Mountain time, the power and electricity went out across North America. Millions are left in the dark, their modern way of life forever gone.

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Unchanging

Joseph Campton was a man of the land, that much could be said about him by anyone with a great deal of certainty. He was reserved and made a special effort to be presentable to all. Many called him “old-fashioned,” which would indeed be true. Joseph fancied the old way of life; he despised revelry and preferred personal, introspective moments by himself or with a few others.

He still held himself duty-bound to serve and work and volunteered at the church. Indeed, the church was Joseph’s main purpose in life. He was too old to do real work anymore, his farm required little tending, and there was not much else around the small town. Whether Joseph was really happy or not was a point of contention even in his own mind, however, he could say that he was content at the moment with what he was doing, and he made no effort to change.

Change was a shapeless, appalling beast that Joseph tried his best to satiate with minor sacrifices. He was scared of what could happen and saw nothing that could benefit himself from change. He was, after all, old-fashioned, and change always brought new systems which he could not hope to understand but which could only exile him farther from society. He was a man stuck in what is and what could be, and he was unable to escape.

The Trivial Life of Adyline Clerchek

It was six in the morning. The morning light shone on the city of Whiteridge, Colorado. Adyline Clerchek groaned as she steadied herself on her bed. She stretched, her legs stiff, and headed to her kitchen, where her cat, Craigory, was bathing in the spots of light on the floor. Adyline rose to fill Craigory's food bowl. The pellets clinked against the ceramic dish.

"Enjoy, baby," she whispered, patting Craigory on the head. Craigory meowed, pleased. She brought a bowl of cold oatmeal from the fridge. Alone at her table, scrolling through her Facebook feed. She put her bowl in the sink. It clicked against the other unwashed bowls in the sink. She strode back to her bedroom. Tall bookcases lined the walls, filled to the brim with lifestyle guides and encyclopedias. Pens lay scattered and papers were strewn about the room. She pulled open her closet door and pulled out one of her signature outfits: a white blouse, a blazer, jeans, and a silk scarf. She made sure she was wearing her bracelet. It was black, grey, white, and purple, and made out of interlocking rubber bands. Her sister made it for her a few years ago, and Adyline has worn it every day since then. Shortly before leaving for work, Adyline's phone rang; her sister was calling.

"Hey Addi? Could you pick me up? There was a spill in the lab," Harper asked.

"Where are you? Are you okay?" Adyline heard distant sounds- people were barking orders.

"I'm fine, but could you hurry please? I'm-" Harper coughed.

“I’m fine. See you soon.”

Adyline hung up and rushed down the stairs. She ran to her car, panting. She slammed her door and sped towards Oakheart University. Adyline knew her sister- she was not okay.

The Way of the Wolf

At Oakheart University, in Colorado, Wolf is sleeping in bed, after staying up late working on homework and playing games. Several people know of his habit, but when they bring up its unhealthiness, he doesn't listen, just like he doesn't listen to almost any small talk. He is known as the mysterious A with a 3.9 GPA, but also is very quiet. He also seems to know what's going on, even if he's not really listening.

Wolf got up out of bed at precisely 6:00am, just like any other day, tired. *Ugh*, Wolf thought as he sighed, *I need to get to bed earlier*. He dragged himself out of bed and into the small kitchen. Grabbing a bowl and seeing the small pile, he knew he had to get dishes running before leaving. Wolf then surfed through the stations, looking for one not playing rap or talking. *Come on, come on, please be a good station*, he thought as he searched. Eventually Wolf settled on 105.5 station. He ended up dropping the milk, but it luckily didn't break the gallon jug, nor was there anyone around, but Wolf looked around anyway. Wolf set the stuff down, and slowly went to grab the cereal. Wolf ate his cereal in peace, reading some comics, not paying attention when the radio stopped playing music and went to talk about the news. After that, at around 6:30, he went to take allergy medicine, brush his teeth, and attempted to tame his wild hair. He stopped when the comb got stuck in his hair for the fifth time, so badly that time that it had ripped out several hairs. He had to cut it out. Then, at 7, he left for his engineering class.

Emily Ennimbelle Knight

Ennimbelle Knight walked into her apartment, arms swinging loosely at her side. Her apartment was medium size, just large enough for her to live comfortably, and every room had a window, many of which encased an entire wall. It was not a cheap apartment, but it was worth it for all the windows. The apartment was sparsely furnished, with only the bare minimum, fit for a working geology student, and nothing was up against the windows. She kept the space as open as she possibly could to minimize her claustrophobia. As she passed through the living room, she paused and brushed her fingers across the picture of a raven-haired girl who was identical to Nim when she was younger. “Emma. I still miss you,” Nim murmured. The picture was a reminder, so Emma was never forgotten, at least not by Nim. With one final glance at the picture, she continued on to her bedroom, which was more populated than the rest of the apartment. One wall was taken up almost entirely by sci-fi models and action figures. They were the only thing she bought that weren’t strictly necessary for life. She was very aware of how much money she had, and was very careful to never let herself fall into debt, a trap that might make her go crawling back to her parents for help. Shaking the unpleasant thought from her mind, she turned her mind to her plans for that day. She was going climbing, and, that was it. Her best friend, Felix, was probably out with his girlfriend, and other than him, she had no friends. *It’s fine*, she thought sadly. *I’ll just be here, all alone, and curl up with a book, or something. I still have some classic sci-fi to read.*

Evan Toler

The Farm

Joseph sat on his wooden rocking chair, gazing at the crimson sun as it sank low in the sky. He was thinking back to when life had become a struggle just to survive, when the apocalypse had first started. It was a month ago, but he could remember it as if it had happened just yesterday.

“Order, order,” one of the elders of the church said, to no avail. The church was a chaotic mass of noise and movement, everybody clamoring to figure out what was happening.

“Please! We need to discuss what to do with everyone,” another of the elders shouted. The crowd fell silent, and Joseph was aware all eyes were upon him and the other elders.

Joseph calmly strode up and faced the crowd. He was one of the most devout and active members of the church and thought it only proper he announce his plan first. He cleared his throat and then began, “As you are all aware, our electronics are gone. We don’t have electricity, and there are fires and chaos. We don’t know what’s happening, but nobody’s come to help us; we must get through this ourselves. I could use some people to help me run my farm, and in return they can stay there. Does anybody else need anything?” Joseph finished and sat back looking for volunteers while the other elders told their plans.

As night began to fall, Joseph had assembled a small group of ten people. He watched as they all quietly got into the bed of his truck. Nobody was talking, and Joseph could tell no one was sure what to think of the situation, or their new associates.

He climbed into the driver's seat and drove to his house while everyone tried to sneak inconspicuous glances at each other. When they got to the farm, Joseph showed them where the bathrooms and their new bedrooms were before retiring to his own bedroom.

He checked the pistol by his bed and listened closely for any sounds throughout the house. He knew what people would do to survive, and he was taking no chances. He peered out into the house and saw no one was up. It appeared this day had exhausted everyone. He closed his door and laid back in his bed. He sat there, wondering whether he could trust the others. He closed his eyes and reminded himself that tomorrow morning he needed to check to make sure no one took anything. Sleep came slowly to him, and it was soft, dreamless sleep.

“Um, excuse me, sir.”

Joseph felt his arm being shaken, and opened his eyes to see a young boy, college aged, whom he recognized as Wolf from last night.

“We have a problem. There's not much food in the pantry, and there's no water,” Wolf explained.

Joseph got up came downstairs to see the others waiting around the table for him.

“What do we have to eat?” A middle-aged woman, Joseph remembered as Adyline, abruptly asked.

“Well, we have corn out in the field that should be almost ripe,” Joseph offered.

“We can't eat just corn. Besides, what will we do when winter comes around?” Nim interjected with a worried look on her face.

They argued about jobs and supplies for a long time, until finally Joseph had had enough and intervened.

“Hold on everyone, let’s think about this,” Joseph said as he stroked the stubble on his chin. “Nim can scavenge for us, and Wolf and I can repair the water pump - or at least try. Someone needs to get us water from the creek, maybe Adyline can, and everyone else can find something to do,” Joseph finished and looked around, aware that everyone was looking at him as if he were the leader. He supposed he was, given that it was his farm and he knew how to run it. He immediately set to work, taking Wolf with him to the pump while the others scattered.

Joseph worked with Wolf all day, amazed at how hard Wolf worked. However, whenever Joseph had to stop to go inside, he always saw the same group of people in there. He had tried to give them jobs to do, but they had just brushed him off and not paid attention. His blood was beginning to boil, and when he and Wolf were finished for the day, Joseph went into his house and stormed up to the group.

“I noticed you all weren’t working. Need I remind you this is a life or death situation?” Joseph exclaimed harshly, pointing a dirty finger at the group.

“Relax, we’ve been thinking up a plan. We want to go and travel down to Mexico; we can scavenge for supplies along the way until we’ve made it,” one of them, said.

“Yeah, dude, no offense, but this farm is too much work. Though we could take the supplies from it for our trip,” another one of them, a tall man with long hair, said.

Joseph was shocked. “You can’t just take our supplies, we need it too!”

“Oh yeah? And who’s going to stop us?” the tall boy laughed and pushed Joseph aside with a hard shove as he began walking towards the kitchen.

The others of his group followed, and when Joseph tried to stop them from taking what little food they had, they slammed his head into the wall. He laid on the ground, his vision dark, and heard others had run into the kitchen.

“What are you doing? Why is Joseph on the floor?” Wolf asked.

“Stop taking our food! I heard you guys arguing and you can’t just take our supplies and leave us with nothing. Joseph took us in; we’ll help him, too, if he needs it,” Nim said. She suddenly shoved them out of the kitchen while Joseph slowly stood up and made his way to the living room where everyone was.

Joseph looked around the room. Those that wanted to leave and those that wanted to stay had separated themselves onto opposite sides of the room. The two groups stared at each other intensely, and Joseph feared a fight was going to break out, until finally the tall boy in the other group spat on the floor and stormed away outside. The other members of his group slowly shuffled away to join him, and Joseph and the others watched until they were out of sight.

When they left Joseph collapsed on the couch. He didn’t think he would’ve been able to get rid of the other group by himself, and he was thankful that he had help. They could have left him too, but they had been ready to fight for him. Joseph was grateful towards them, and made a vow to help the others survive, no matter what.

Joseph heard an owl hoot and jumped. He looked around and noticed it was dark. He had been lost in thought, and night had fallen. He snuck upstairs to bed, careful not to wake the others. They needed the rest; the work had been hard and plentiful. He wasn’t worried though, he knew together they could survive.

Ava Richards

Punished by Pestilence

Adyline Clerchek pressed her ear to the door. From the other room, Adyline heard muffled talk of abandoning her and Felix, due to the potential strain on supplies. It was hard to bear; for the past week, Adyline and Felix were victim to severe illness. The six of them feared what might have happened, and the worst came true; it was contagious. They had been staying in Joseph's farmhouse for the past five weeks. If people were sick, there was no guarantee it would be contained within the house's thin walls.

"Why should we let them stay and fester? D'you want to die because of this?" Joseph snapped.

"Do you want to leave a quarter of our group to die? What if they get better? We can't afford to lose them," Nim replied.

Joseph scoffed. "It's an apocalypse, Nim. You reckon we'll find a pharmacy?"

Nim sighed. "No, Joseph. I don't. All we can do is hope they will get better. Can we keep them for another week?"

"Fine. Let's go downstairs and fix ourselves dinner."

Shortly after, Adyline lay on her bed, staring at the ceiling. She faced her cat and stroked his face. *How did my life come to this?* she pondered. A mere five months ago, she was scheduling tours and getting her next book published. Five weeks ago, her apartment building was burning down; the world was ending. Though she and the others did not know, an EMP strike

hit the United States, causing nationwide electrical failure. Five days ago, Adyline was knitting a scarf in quarantine. What happened? Her life had changed so quickly, she could not believe it.

Adyline heard a knock at the door. "Come in."

Harper, her sister, stood at the doorway. "Hey, Addi? Just out of curiosity, how would one theoretically cook a meal?"

Adyline raised an eyebrow. "What do you want to make? We have just enough ingredients for more stew." She knew her sister did not have a penchant for cooking.

"Yeah, something like that. Your choice." Harper shifted.

As Adyline explained her process, Harper took notes on a scrap sheet of paper, presumably ripped from her textbooks, before she mumbled a "thank you" and hurried downstairs. Craigory, Adyline's cat, sprawled out on Adyline's quilt. She waited for her sister's return.

Harper eventually returned with a small bowl of murky broth. Adyline looked displeased. It smelled lightly of rot.

"Isn't this from the other day?" She pulled the spoon through the stringy meat chunks. The clovers and corn danced in the ochre liquid.

"I think so. Why?" Harper asked.

"Then this isn't safe to eat. Meat can't be reheated like this. It's disgusting." Adyline handed the bowl back to her sister.

"Gross. Is there anything else I can get you, then?"

"I'm good for now, just let me sleep. Thanks, though," Adyline drew the covers around her. After waving goodbye, Harper brought the bowls downstairs with her.

As the days passed, Adyline learned of the group's newest problem- that they had little food. Everyone was too busy working to cook. Meanwhile, meals dwindled down to a late dinner. As Adyline and Harper talked about the latest happenings,

they heard a yelp from the living room. Adyline huffed as she and Harper ran downstairs. Though her fever broke, she still had not fully recovered. Both Adyline and Harper ran to the living room to see Wolf on the floor. His eyes were glassy. His view remained fixed in front of him as the others surveyed his body.

“What happened?” Harper looked at Wolf.

“He just stumbled in the living room and fell. I don’t know why,” Nim replied. She checked Wolf for a pulse.

“Is he good?” Adyline asked.

“Probably,” Nim looked up. “I think he’s unconscious.”

Sure enough, after a few minutes, Wolf awoke. Though he did not have a fever, it was clear that something was awry. Out of everyone in the group, Wolf did the most physical labor. According to Harper, it was likely he collapsed from exhaustion. Food was hard to come by. If something did not change immediately, Adyline feared the group would crumble. She summoned Joseph and the others to the living room.

“Normally, I’m not one to take charge, but we need to fix our food problem, and we have to do it now. We cannot risk more of our group falling ill from malnourishment.” Adyline glanced at the rest of the group. “We need to manage our food better. Our meals are spoiling, and we can’t rely on fresh produce year round.”

“How do you propose we fix it?” Joseph asked.

“We need to better secure our food; we can’t leave out stuff like broth for long before it spoils. I do not have the resources to cook three dishes per day anymore. We can’t afford to waste anything.” Adyline replied. She kept fair distance from the rest of the group, for fear of infection. “When you bring in game, bring in everything. We need the skins for warmth, the bones for broth, and as much meat as possible. This isn’t the time to throw stuff away. Whatever we don’t use immediately, salt it, so we can use it next month.”

“What will we do if something like this happens again?” Wolf asked. “Even when there were two people out of commission, I was working so hard, I could have died. I mean, I’m fine now, but-”

“I hate to say this, but I think the only way we can do that is to loosen schedules. Apart from Adyline, no one has the time to cook. If someone else is compromised, we need to be able to pick up the slack.” Harper fiddled with her bracelets as she spoke.

“You’re right,” Joseph looked disappointed. “I am sorry I have been forcing y’all to work so hard. Clearly, it isn’t working.”

During their discussion, they also discussed their plans for the future. The group decided that from then on, they needed to prioritize their own wellbeing. No more long hours, and no more strict schedules. After a few more days, Adyline was well enough to cook again. For dinner that night, she had the others pitch in. Nim and Joseph hunted game, while the others gathered wild crops. Adyline made cornbread and stew. Everyone contributed their own dishes. Such an event never afflicted them again, and the group would make sure of it.

Evan Moening

Penicillin Conundrum

Wolf was working on the pump when one of the gears slipped and cut his leg. Although the group cleaned out the cut, it still got infected a couple days later. This caused several issues in his ability to work on the leader of the group's farm, Joseph, with his jobs in the mechanical stuff and various farm jobs. And even though people told him to stop, he continued. He had stuff to do and didn't want to let them down. They would not think this though.

While working on a cool November day, about 8 weeks since the power went out, he noticed Nim sprinting back from the woods in her tattered clothes, seeming to be very excited. *She's home early, she better have something important.* Nim was the scavenger for the group, for she could climb, thus reaching more places. They had to scavenge because all the stores were gone, or at least, useless without power. Nim went inside Joseph's old, two story house, before quickly running back out, calling for Wolf, Felix, and Joseph to come inside. They came, a bit reluctantly, and went to the meeting room.

Nim explained why she had called them all, "I found half a bottle of antibiotics, penicillin or something. The labels a bit destroyed," she said excitedly. "We can get rid of that nasty infection on Wolf's leg!"

“What!” Adyline said, “What about Harper? She’s still sick, she needs it!” Adyline was the cook for the group. Also doing random household jobs, all very important in this post-power time. Harper was her sister, who was the doctor for the group, and did other miscellaneous jobs in the house too.

“No she doesn’t,” Nim said, “She’s got the same thing you had, probably caught it *from you*, and she’s had it for less time than you, with less severe conditions! It’s nothing to worry about. But Wolf’s infection, that’s been getting real nasty. I’m surprised you’re still even working, that cut has got to hurt!”

“It’s nothing much; I can handle it, okay? I don’t need the antibiotics, I’m doing just fine,” Wolf lied quickly, “perhaps we save it for a later use, as Harper doesn’t need it either. Now if you excuse me, I need to get back to work.”

“No Wolf, you need it,” Joseph said, blocking the doorway, “I’ve seen you working; you are working much slower, and I see you grimace when running or carrying anything. You need the medicine.”

Wolf started, “No, I’m doing just fine, I-”

“See! Wolf doesn’t need it, so Harper should have it, she is sick and needs help!” Adyline interrupted.

“No, she doesn’t, Adyline!” Nim shouted, “She is doing just fine, in fact, she is doing better than you did when you had it! So stop trying to give it to Harper, she is *fine*!”

“And Wolf definitely needs that medicine-“

“Antibiotics,” Wolf said quietly.

“Medicine,” Joseph stared at Wolf, “You need this, ok? That cut is really reducing what all you can do, to the point where I’m not working as hard so I can watch you! You can’t be working in this state, you need the medicine.”

“No! I’m working just fine, and you have no reason to be watching me. I don’t need the medicine!” Wolf stated stubbornly, “Just save it for later or something, and let’s stop this bickering!” Wolf stamped his foot down, instantly regretting it as pain flooded his leg.

“Yes, as that clearly shows,” Nim said sarcastically, “Now Wolf, you need to take the medicine, for your own good!”

“Yeah, just take the medicine Wolf!” Joseph yelled, “We are trying to help!”

“I don’t need it!” Wolf yelled back.

“So give it to Harper!” Adyline screamed, “She needs it!”

Adyline then ran at Nim and tried to grab the antibiotics out of her hands.

“Hey!” Nim shouted, moving the antibiotics away from Adyline, “Everyone calm down! We need to discuss this! Okay? Okay.” Everyone stopped and looked at Nim.

“Harper has improved in her condition, Adyline,” Nim said, “And it was never as bad as what you had. She is handling the sickness very well and doesn’t need any additional help.”

“Okay...” Adyline said reluctantly.

“This doesn’t mean I get it,” Wolf said with a slight grimace, as his leg still hurt from when he stomped it down.

“Clearly you do. Just stomping your foot caused you pain. That’s not normal for a cut,” Joseph stated.

“It’s fine, nothing I can’t handle,” Wolf refuted.

“Wolf, just take it. That infection has not improved at all, and it’s clearly causing you pain. If it progresses much more, I don’t think you’ll be able to do anything at all,” Nim explained, “You can’t do much when you’re dead.”

“Fine, I’ll take it,” Wolf said reluctantly.

“Okay, Good! Now all we have to do is find a teaspoon!” Nim said.

Nim and Wolf went into the kitchen to find a teaspoon, and Nim handed it to him,

“Wolf, you need to stop being so stubborn. First you pass out because you overworked yourself during the food crisis, and now this,” Nim sighed, “At some point, this stubbornness will get you killed.”

Wolf just sat there, pretending like he didn’t hear her, fiddling with his hands, “I can’t just stop working. This farm has so much that needs done, I can’t just stop, or stuff won’t get done.”

“Look Wolf, no one will think any less of you if you take a break when needed. You are one of the hardest working people here, but you never take time for yourself. You need you time, you can’t devote all your energy to the farm. Otherwise, at some point, you won’t be able to do anything,” Nim said solemnly.

Wolf stared of into space, and muttered a brief, “Okay.”

“Okay. Wolf, why don’t you rest for an hour or so, and then you can get back to work. That cut won’t improve with you constantly irritating it,” Nim said.

“Okay, I guess,” Wolf said, moving slowly to his room to rest. *I’m tired anyway.* After this, he returned to work. He repeated this for the next couple days. Not only did the cut improved, but the break became part of his routine. He accepted that, and he wouldn’t overwork himself again.

Rebekkah Mobley

The Marauder Situation

Nim winced as Harper unwrapped her throbbing arm. Her arm felt like it had a bunch of needles stuck in it, so Harper had insisted that she take a look. Last night, the marauders had attacked the farm. Nim was the only one with an open wound, but Joseph sported a concussion, Harper's sister Adyline was badly bruised, and Felix was bed-ridden with a fractured leg. Harper had patched them up the best she could, but their supplies were inadequate, especially for the extent of their wounds. Using a scrap from one of Joseph's old shirts, Harper re-wrapped Nim's injury and stood.

"I can't do anything about the pain. Sorry," Harper said.

"It's alright, you did what you could," Nim said, standing as well.

"You're lucky the bullet only grazed you," Harper said. "Keep it clean, and please, just stay on the farm. We can't risk an infection."

"So, I can't scavenge?" Nim asked, grimacing when Harper shook her head. Joseph decided early on that Nim would scavenge for resources and hunt for the group. She was a climber; she could get to hard-to-reach places, as long as they weren't completely enclosed, and was calm under pressure. Actually, she was always calm. Joseph and Adyline entered the small living room,

their unofficial official meeting place since they had first arrived at Joseph's farm, less than a week after the EMP strike. Wolf was not with them, and Felix was sleeping in the other room, with strict instructions from Harper not to disturb him.

"We need to decide what to do about the marauder," Joseph began, but Harper interrupted.

"Where's Wolf?" she asked.

"He's still working. Stubborn boy insists on keeping up the workload of three people all by himself. Plus, he's keeping an eye on the marauder, and has already made his opinion abundantly clear: don't kill the marauder," Adyline explained. Wolf was squeamish about harming people, even in self-defense, and Nim was still frustrated with him for not helping them during the attack. In fact, he'd made it worse. He'd tried to use an old, rusted paintball gun, for goodness sake! And when one of the marauders had been hit, they'd thought that the pistol Nim was using was also a paintball gun.

"We cannot keep the marauder here as a prisoner," Joseph said in his flowery speech. "Since he's not doing anything, we can't support him. With four of us injured, two badly enough that they can't work—"

"I can work!" Nim protested, but Harper narrowed her eyes at Nim, and shook her head.

"—and winter coming, we will be hard-pressed to find enough resources as it is. The cold will drive the animals into hiding, and the fields and garden will no longer produce food. Even without the cold, neither Harper nor Wolf, nor Adyline can use any of my guns well enough to hunt, and with my concussion, I can't. The marauder will only put more strain on our

already low resources. And, of course, there is the situation of heat, as the only room with a fireplace is this one, so he would have to stay in here. Being cooped up with the man who shot at us is *not* a good idea,” Joseph continued.

“So what can we do?” Adyline asked, looking around the room for suggestions.

“We could make him work, but I really don’t want to go scavenging with him watching my back. But like Joseph said, with winter coming there’s no other work outside, and we can’t keep him inside the entire winter.” Nim shook her head.

“Well, we can’t just kill him!” Harper exclaimed. “We haven’t lost our humanity yet!”

“It would almost be an act of mercy, though. There’s no way to keep him prisoner without harming our own chances, but if we release him into the forest, the likelihood of his survival is little to none,” Adyline said.

“Death in the wilderness during winter is slow and agonizing,” Joseph added. He had been a medic in the war, and had seen people die from exposure.

“But if we kill him, we’re no better than they are,” Harper whispered. Nim was torn. She didn’t want the poor soul to die, but he had attacked them. Besides, Joseph and Adyline were right. Exposure was a terrible way to die, but they couldn’t keep him jailed with the resources they had available.

“There has to be another way,” Harper said.

What other way was there? They couldn’t release him. If he

managed to survive, he might come back, and if he didn't, well, it would be a cruel way to die. Nim wouldn't wish that death on her parents, and she hated them. Making him work was out of the question, and holding him prisoner? That would be even worse. And who would stop him from leaving? No one who could watch him would do what was necessary. That left one option.

"You're forgetting," Nim finally spoke up, looking at Harper, "that even if we did decide to keep him here, the only ones who could watch the marauder are you, Wolf, and maybe Adyline. And, you aren't really comfortable shooting the marauder if he tries to run." She turned toward Joseph. "If we can't make him work, and we don't want to just kick him out, then we have to kill him. We can't risk it."

"I'm sorry, Harper, but I agree. He tried to *kill* us, and if we kick him out into the forest, he'll die anyway," Adyline said regretfully. Harper closed her eyes and nodded after a moment.

"I guess," she said reluctantly. "If there's really no other way." She shook her head sadly, and walked out of the room.

"I'll do it," Joseph said, a troubled but determined look in his eyes.

Nim raised her eyebrows. She had honestly not expected either of them to offer to do it. Joseph was haunted by his time in the army, something that he hid as well as Nim hid her claustrophobia. She only noticed because she could see it in the way that he held himself. Adyline, well, she had said before that she was not very brave. Since Adyline and Nim didn't object,

Joseph opened the front door and marched out. A few minutes later, a gunshot echoed through the air. When Joseph walked back in the house, Nim's knuckles were white, and Adyline had retreated into the kitchen.

"Do you think we did the right thing?" Nim asked softly.

"Sure. It solved the problem, didn't it?"

"I guess," she replied, even as the gunshot rang through her head. She was the cause of that man's death. It would stay with her for the rest of her life.

Contributors

Rebekkah Mobley-15

When Rebekkah began creating Nim, she had a character that she was already working with, and she wanted to make Nim have similar characteristics, but an overall different character. For her name, Rebekkah wanted her to have a regular first name, an unusual middle name, and a last name that was a chess piece. After she figured out the base of her character, she built everything around that.

Evan Moening-15

Evan created Wolf by first starting with a name. He used a random name generator and Wolf came up, and it sparked interest in Evan. He then created a character around his perspective of wolves, mysterious and smart, and with some actual features wolves have. Brown eyes, grey, messy hair, and a similar height (technically length), along with a likeness of the forest and cold.

Ava Richards-14

Ava created Adyline with the intention of going outside of their comfort zone. Ava tried their best to make her relatable and well-rounded. They wrote in her sister (and though it was not in the story, their shared history) to give her a motive in the story.

Evan Toler-15

Evan wanted to create character that he could understand but was unlike himself in most aspects. He started with what he wanted the character to be, and where his character would be before he wrote the story to make the story as realistic as possible.

End