

~Flashback~

The faint sound of music can be heard. Riley tilts his head to the side.

“Do you hear that?” He asks getting ready to turn and look for where the sound is coming from.

“Riley wait, I think we should end it here, I really need to head back now. We can come back tomorrow.” I say taking a step forward. He turns to me and frowns.

“I can’t”

“Well then another day?” I ask with an upward inflection. Riley shakes his head. “Alright, then when?” I ask chuckling without humor. He sighs and looks down, grabbing the firefly dogtag around his neck.

“I don’t know. They’re making me go work with more of the group in a different city, a different state. I’m leaving tonight.” He informs me, looking at me as if he was expecting something. I look down taking it all in.

“Okay.”

“Okay? That’s all you have to say?” He asks in an Unbelieving tone. My head snaps up to look at him.

“What else am I supposed to say?” I ask getting a little angry. He huffs and looks at me like I’m stupid.

“I was expecting some friendly advice.”

“Since when did you start to care about what I think! Last time I ever gave you advice, you told me to screw off, then just upped and vanished,” I bark at him, trying not to get loud, “if you’re looking for a way to leave again, I’m giving you one. Go” I back into the arcade machine behind me. He looks at me with the saddest eyes and starts to turn.

“I’m going to go find the music.” He mutters over his shoulder, walking through the push doors.

“Riley,” I call after him, getting no answer, “Riley!” I call a little louder, still getting no reply. I sigh, leaning forward on a busted game machine, looking ahead of me. I think about heading back to camp, until the music gets quieter. I stand and walk through the push doors, going through the slightly opened ones. Walking through the last one, I see Riley standing near a New York sign. I walk up behind him as he stares at it. “Seen anything like this before?” I genuinely wonder, looking at him. He sighs and keeps staring at it. “Okay,

now you're just not going to talk to me?" I ask as if it's the most stupid reason to be mad, but it really is. He turns around and looks at me, his eyes still looking sad.

"You said I didn't think of you when I left, I'm sorry, it was a messed up thing to do, but it was the easiest way to leave," He tells me, sliding his backpack to his chest. "And if I wasn't thinking of you, why would I have come all the way through this soldier infected town, risking my life, just to see you?" He unzips his backpack, revealing two super soakers. "These water guns you dreamed about? I almost got shot for these, Eli. Surprise." He throws his backpack to my feet. With a small smile, I lean down and pull the toys out.

"How about I destroy you, then, we can finish talking." I ask, playfully smirking at him, earning a chuckle.

"Alright, but you're gonna get drenched." He laughed as we both pumped up our guns. The water fight felt like it went on for hours, and by the end of it, we were both completely soaked.

"Okay, one more round and this time, I will win." He chuckles while hopping around.

"Riley, I would love to keep doing this all day but—"

"But you have to head back." He finishes my sentence quietly. I nod looking down and sighing, this might be the last time that I'll ever see him. "Well, can I at least walk you home?" he asks me with a ridiculous face, making me laugh. I nod once I calm down. "Alright, lets go get our backpacks." As he lightly jogs to our stuff, I walk up behind him.

"Listen," I let out a breath I've been holding, gaining his attention. "I know I said it like a total jerk," he chuckles, "But I mean what I said, you should go." He watches my face intently. "I mean you've wanted this for like... your whole life" He looks down with a small frown. "And who would I be to tell you not too?" Riley laughs dryly.

"The only person who can."

I smile lightly.

"Oh no, please, don't go! I'll be miserable without you!" I plea jokingly, getting a smack to the arm. "I'll be fine, and you'll be fine... so that's all that matters." He smiles, handing me his water gun, the starting to look around.

"Hey Eli? Do you still carry around that old Walkman?" I nod, putting the guns in my bag and handing him the object in question. "What's in it?"

"The tape you made me." I say looking up to see him walking past me.

“You will be miserable without me. Come on, leave your stuff.” He taps my back. We walk to the music section, where he plugs in the speakers to the Walkman, playing the music. He jumps up onto the glass display case and starts to dance.

“What are you-“

“Just shush and dance with me!” He laughed as he pulled me up and made me dance. We have been dancing for around six minutes, when I slowly came to a stop. Riley noticed and walked up to me.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” He asked, his face full of concern. I couldn’t hide the fear and pain from showing on my face.

“Don’t go.” I plead in a shaky tone, barely above a whisper. I was expecting him to snap at me for being selfish, for taking back what I said not even ten minutes ago. What I saw almost made me cry. He stood thinking for a second, before ripping his dog tags off and throwing them away. My feelings are all over the place and I couldn’t stop myself for kissing him, even if it was for a second. I pulled away and looked down. “Sorry.”

“For what?” he wondered with a smile. I kept my head down and shook all the thoughts out of it. I looked and see him looking around.

“What do we do now?” I ask, making him look at me. I hear something fall making me look out of the store. What’s out there?

“We’ll figure it out, one things for su-“ I cut him off when I hear a yell.

“Wait!” I yelled as the shouts and yells got louder. He spun around, hearing it too. Infected, and a lot of them. “Riley!” I yell getting him out of his panic stage. He pulls out his pistol, and starts firing at the group of Infected. There has to be more than twenty of them.

“Eli, go! Run!” he commands, pushing me away from the horde. I hesitate before dashing to the exit. The amount of Infected is startling me. I can’t just leave him here. I quickly spin around, losing my balance and smacking my head on a shelf before blacking out.

When I come to, I hear gunshots drain out, and heavy panting. My wrist has a slight burn and an unbearable itch, causing me to look down. Tears form in my eyes as I see a large bite.

“Oh no...” I whisper, hot tears run down my face. Riley slumps to the floor next to me, tears of his own stream down his face.

“This really sucks.” He muttered, wincing when he moved the wrong way. I looked over to see his shirt torn by his side, covered in blood. “At least yours is in a less painful spot.” He points to my wrist. He sighs and looks down. “Marlene told me there are two

options if someone ever gets bitten." I watch as he talks calmly, "The first is an automatic no so... option two, we fight. Y'know... we could be all poetic, and lose our minds together." He spoke with a small smile.

As I wiped away me tears, he stoop up.

"C'mon... let's go..." I sat for a little longer, then stood and followed him. We walked for a while in silence. I looked down at the bite on my wrist, the bleeding has stopped, but it still itched. I groaned and scratched at it furiously, Riley watched.

"Don't do that, you'll make it worse." He said quietly, I looked at him.

"I don't think it can get any worse..." I muttered.

"Hey..." He grabs my hand. "Remember what I said? We fight. Please, please, don't give up. For me?" I can easily see the forced positivity in his eyes.

"Even you're kidding yourself." I let go of his hand. Can I still call him a friend? I forgave him for leaving, but the whole thing with the kiss made me over think things. Now I'm very sure my feelings for him go past friendship. I'm sure I love him, and I hate it. I hat this feeling, this feeling of affection, it made me want, no, need to protect him from all the big and small things that can hurt him, and- and I failed. I failed and now he has to suffer through the worst thing I can possibly think of.

"Riley... I'm so sorry..." I grabbed him and hugged him tightly.

"Eli, if this is anyone's fault, it's mine. I dragged you out here. It's not your fault. Besides, look on the Brightside." We sat down, me still hugging him.

"There's a Brightside?" I asked looking at his face. He smiled.

"Yeah. I got to see you again." He said quietly. I smiled and blushed lightly.

"Do you think I could ... Y'know... again...?" I asked sounding all super awkward.

Riley placed his hand on mine and slowly leaned in. Our lips met, and somehow, despite all the hardship we had endured, it was soft. We held it for a few seconds, than pulled away.

"Thanks..." my face warm with a blush.

"Anytime," He said, putting his hand on my shoulder. "I think this would be a good time for some jokes, yeah?" I nodded then smacked my forehead.

"The book is in my backpack... and we dropped those..." I sigh

“Well, Let’s just go back and get them. The Infected have probably cleared out by now” Riley scratches the back of his head as he talks.

We stand up and head back for our bags. I feel better about our impossible situation after Riley’s encouraging words. We held hands as we walked, drawing strength and courage from each other. We let go of each other as we got closer to our stuff, and hid behind a desk. I press my finger to my lips, signaling for him to be quiet. I closed my eyes and listened for the screeching, shouting and yelling. There was no sound. I opened my eyes.

“It’s clear... I don’t hear anything... they’re all gone.” I muttered. Riley walked up beside me and grabbed both of our bags. We quickly left, just in case, going back the carousel, and sat on the horses. I pulled out my pun book.

“A hard boiled egg is hard to beat.” We both laughed.

After I exhausted the pun book, both of our sides hurting from laughing so much, Riley yawned.

“Man, I’m tired...” He said while pretty much falling off the horse. I jumped down and felt his forehead with the back of my head.

“Jeez, Riley you’re burning up.” I mutter, helping him walk over to a bench. “I’ll go look for some fever pills.” He grabs the back of my shirt as I start to walk away.

“No... stay here... please.” He begged weakly. I lied down next to him on the bench, resting my head on his chest. His steady heart beat slowly lulling me to sleep.

“I’ll be right here.” I whisper, smiling weakly.

“We... might not... wake up... b-but... you need to k-know that... I-I love you.” Riley stutters, his breath, shaky and weak. I close my eyes for a few seconds.

“I love you too.” I whispered into his shirt. I tried to stay awake, but his heart beat was like a lullaby, soothing me into a forgetful sleep, making me forget about this dangerous world for a while.

Waking up a few hours later me and Riley were more tangled up than before. Sitting up I look around and then at his face. He’s not awake yet... something’s not right here.

“Riley, get up.” I shake him slightly, not getting a response. I look at his chest, its not moving, he’s not breathing... “Riley, stop messing with me, wake up!” I shake him harder, tears forming in my eyes.

He growls...

My eyes open with shock as I start to tremble with fear.

“Riley...?” I slowly got off the bench, backing away. Riley starts to screech and yell as he tackles me. I struggle to get free, kicking him off of me and pushing a shelf onto him. I look down at what was left of Riley, tears rushing down my face... This is my fault.

“I’m s-so sorry Ri-Riley.” I whisper, falling to my knees, crying, wondering why I hadn’t turned yet. It takes eight hours to turn, and it’s been at least ten... Why am I still perfectly fine? Why don’t I feel sick? What’s happening to me? Riley’s shouting brought me out of my thoughts. I turn to see him slowly wriggling out from under the shelf. I stood on wobbly legs, and walked over to him. Kneeling down in front of him, I pulled out my switchblade.

“I’m s-sorry.” I push on his shoulder, holding him still. The tears I was holding in were starting to blind me. “I’m sorry” I whisper, closing my eyes after lining the blade up with his head.

Shulck.

Riley’s screeching and yelling came to a harsh stop. My breath was short and frantic. I stood once again, grabbing both of our backpacks and headed back to the shop where the water fight took place. I knelt down and grabbed his dogtags, wrapping them around my wrist, then threw a jacket on. I sigh as I head for the exit.

“We fight.” I whisper, leaving the store.

~End Of Flashback~

Opening my eyes, feeling the burn I come to know so well, I look over at Joel, who is still asleep. I sit up and lean against the window sill, staring at the world outside, covered in rain, then glance down at my wrist, seeing the dogtags.

“I’ll see you soon Riley, I promise.” I mutter, looking back outside, seeing the mall where it all took place.