

The Bunker

Chapter 1

The car came to a slow stop.

I sucked in a breath, let out a soft sigh of relief. The car engine shut off and, grunting, Dad turned around in his seat – looked back at me and Daisy.

“We’re here,” he told us, voice a deep rumble. “Stretch your legs for a few minutes, then we’ll unload the trailer.”

Daisy nodded her head quickly.

As my family - Dad and Daisy and Mom – climbed out of the car, stood on wobbly legs and began shaking off the long drive, I looked out the car’s windows. My eyes scanned the dry, cracked landscape around me; the total lack of vegetation and life.

Save for a few random solar panels dotted around, and a small satellite dish pointed skyward, there was nothing.

I shook my head, opened my seat door and stepped out into the hot, dry air beyond. Resigned to my fate.

“Five minutes,” Dad’s booming voice called over our small group. “Then we unload and unpack.”

“Where even is it?” I found myself asking. My eyes searched over the flat, empty land once again – found no hints of Dad’s special ‘project’. “I don’t see any-”

“Hidden,” Dad answered before I could finish. “Wouldn’t do for a bunker to be out in the open. The hatch is over there, far enough away from the solar panels that it won’t be easy to find. Not unless you know where to look.”

I looked in the direction Dad was pointing, saw nothing but dry earth and dust.

“Come on,” Dad grinned. “I’ll show you.”

I followed him. What other choice did I have?

Sure enough, once we were a decent distance away from the solar panels and the satellite dish, Dad crouched on a patch of indistinct, dead-looking ground. He reached down, grabbed a rock, strained as he lifted it. And up came the metal hatch.

A square hole in the ground with metal ladder rungs that descended into total darkness.

I shuddered at the sight, eyes flicking to Dad.

He was grinning.

Of course he was grinning. This was his dream come true. His weird fantasy fulfilled. He had every reason to smile. Still, that grin did nothing to calm my anxiety. If anything, it only made it worse.

When we returned to Mom and Daisy, the four of us began unpacking the trailer.

Dad had given each of us a suitcase to pack ‘personal items’ in. But, after my and Mom’s complaints, our arguments for reason and sanity, he’d relented – hitched up the trailer and allowed us to load everything we could possibly fit in it.

Clothes, mostly. Books and magazines and board games. Mom had even gone out and bought a video game console on the way here. We had plenty of candy and enough movies and games to occupy us for however long Dad kept us here. And, of course, those original suitcases we’d been rushed to pack.

Fingers crossed, Dad got bored of this nonsense quickly.

None of us – with the sole exception of him – wanted to be here. And we certainly didn’t *need* to be here either. But, unfortunately, here we were.

As me and Mom and Daisy ferried the bags to the hatch, Dad climbed down it and began turning lights on and what-not – preparing his ‘bunker’ for actual habitation. His head popped out of the hatch just as we were placing the last of the boxes next to it. A sweaty brow and an eager smile.

“Come on down,” he told us. “One at a time. I’ll show you around and then we can

bring everything in and lock up. Come on!"

And, just like that, his balding head disappeared down the hole once again. Leaving me and Mom and my sister exchanging nervous glances. After a moment, I stepped forward and crouched down at the edge of the hatch. Slowly, carefully, I began descending the ladder.

The bunker was made out of buried shipping containers. Specifically, twelve twenty-foot long, steel containers. They were arranged in a large 'X' shape, three containers making up each 'wing'.

The first wing was food storage. Three shipping containers filled to the brim with tins and cans and glass jars of pickled fruits and vegetables. There were sacks of dried rice and beans and noodles. A whole row of shelves dedicated to plastic, air-sealed packs of dried and salted meat. Enough food to last us... I honestly had no idea. But a long time. A very long time.

The second wing was, as Dad put it, the 'water wing'. The first container was a dining room with even more stored food filling half the space. The next shipping container served as the kitchen, with working faucets that got their water from an underground river. And the third was the bathroom and 'disposal' room. Toilet, bath 'n' shower, waste-disposal chute – all connected to the same underground river.

Wing number three was all about 'energy'. At the far back were batteries and back-up generators for if the solar panels failed. Then the entertainment containers – television hooked up to the satellite dish, computer with working internet, second 'spare' television, stereo and speakers, and plenty of space to spare.

And the final wing of our new 'home'. The sleeping wing. The furthest back container belonging to Mom and Dad, an empty spare container in between, and the nearest container - which would be mine and Daisy's room.

Every shipping container was separated not by a door, but by a curtain. Barely any privacy to be had anywhere.

Getting all the boxes and bags and suitcases down into the place was a pain and, when the last of our supplies were in, Dad climbed up the ladder, closed the hatch, and locked it shut. Only one way in or out – and only Dad knew the code to open the digital lock.

"Go unpack, girls," Dad grinned at us after descending the ladder one last time. "Mom will get started on dinner and I'll make sure everything is in working order. Chins up! Thanks to my foresight, everything is going to be okay!"

I was only too happy to get away from the idiot.

Me and Daisy slipped through the curtain into what would, for the next few weeks at least, be our bedroom.

Cold, undecorated steel walls. A bed on either side, with metal lockers next to them. On the ceiling above, florescent white lights glowed dimly. The room had about as much personality as you'd expect from dull metal; no charm or sense of comfort or homeliness at all. Plain white sheets. No-doubt uncomfortably hard mattresses. Great. Just *perfect*.

"Which one do you want?" I asked, turning to Daisy.

My younger sister shrugged, eyes wide.

A pretty girl, Daisy. Far prettier than me, for sure.

I was tall and slim, plain-looking with small, unremarkable breasts and no butt to speak of. The kind of girl guys didn't notice or care about. Hell, I'd been mistaken *for* a guy more than a few times. Which, to be fair, was probably my own fault. No make-up, baggy and formless clothes, a laid-back approach to life, short black hair. Nothing like Daisy.

She was about as much of a girly-girl as you could get. Bright blonde hair and shining green eyes, shorter than me and a whole lot bustier. Like, *seriously*. How in the hell were her boobs so big? Daisy had won the genetic lottery for sure. Beautiful, with the kind

of body guys drooled over. A master with make-up. The type of girl who always wore dresses and skirts and smiles.

We were like night and day in so many ways.

And yet, here we were. Having to share a 'room' together for who knew how long.

"I'll have this side," I told her, walking over to one of the beds and dumping my suitcase on it. "That side's yours."

"I'm telling you," Dad grunted. "Shit's gonna hit the fan soon and none of 'em are gonna be prepared for it. Those numbers? They're wrong. The media is under-reporting fatalities. Mark my words."

"Yeah Dad," I said, using every ounce of willpower I had to not roll my eyes at him. "We know. You've told us."

"Global pandemic," he huffed, eyes on the television screen. "Of course they're hiding the real numbers. The media is corrupt, the government doesn't want people to panic. If they had their way, they'd keep us living in the dark, spending money, making 'em richer right up 'til the end. How can people not see it?!"

I glanced at Daisy, saw her wide green eyes. A terrified expression on her pretty face. The poor girl had actually bought into Dad's paranoid bullshit.

"I don't know, Dad," I said, hoping to calm some of Daisy's anxiety. "Maybe the pandemic isn't as big a deal as you think it is. It sucks, sure, but—"

"If it wasn't bad - *really* bad - why would the government start a lock-down? They know something we don't! Mark my words, a few weeks from now, there'll be nobody left. It's the end of the world, and everyone's too blind to see it."

"A few weeks, huh?" I said as I stood up. "So, if the world doesn't come to an end in a few weeks' time, we can go home?"

Dad grunted, didn't reply. His eyes were glued to the television screen, narrowed at the news broadcast announcing new pandemic restrictions.

I shook my head, walked back to me and my sister's shared bedroom.

It was, as best I could tell, night time.

The bunker, it turned out, had a massive design flaw. Not surprising given Dad had been the one who built it. But that 'flaw' was one colossal pain in the ass. Simply put, the lights never went out. They remained on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. They *had* to, apparently. The only way to turn them off would involve risking permanent damage the wiring that connected them with the bunker's batteries.

Genius. That's what Dad called himself. 'Moron' was more like it.

I was in bed, eyes shut against the light. But sleep, as always, was difficult down here. In the end, I gave up trying, sat up in bed and glared at the florescent white light.

A voice in the back of my head told me to smash it. That'd be one way to turn the light off.

But, as I contemplated the idea, something caught my eye.

A twitch. Movement in the corner of my vision.

My eyes turned to my sister's bed, the bulge of her body hidden fully under her fluffy pink blanket.

She was shaking.

Slowly, I climbed out of bed, crept over to her. And, the closer I got, the more I heard it. Her gentle, muffled sobs.

I opened my mouth to speak, hesitated for a moment.

"Daisy?" I whispered. "Are you okay?"

The blanket bulge flinched, froze.

Slowly, the blanket came down to reveal my sister's face. Eyes bloodshot and puffy, cheeks stained with tears.

"Alexis?" Daisy spoke so softly, I could barely hear her despite being right in front of her. "I thought you were..."

"Nah," I smiled. "Couldn't sleep. Dumb fucking lights."

"I..." Her face shifted, eyes shutting tight. "I wanna go home."

The sobs that followed her words were louder this time. Less restrained. And, despite my best efforts, I couldn't think of anything to say. Not a fucking thing. I just crouched there next to her bed as my sister cried her eyes out. Speechless. Useless.

"It'll be alright," I managed to say eventually. "We won't be here much longer."

"We," Daisy choked out, "won't?"

"Nope," I told her, tried to sound more confident than I felt. "How long have we been here already? Weeks, at least. Two months? More? And nothing has changed out there. There haven't been any mass graves or riots or anything. No martial law and no genocides. Nothing like that. Everyone's just going on like always. The news even said that some lock-down restrictions are being lifted. Dad's wrong about it. He's wrong about *everything*. And soon, he'll have no choice but to admit it."

I reached over, brushed some hair out of my sister's pretty face.

"And, when he does, we'll all get to go home. His fetish for being a 'survivalist' can only go so far. He can't keep us here when it's *obvious* there's no reason to."

"Really?" Daisy asked, rubbing the tears from her eyes. She sat up in bed, pink creeping into her cheeks.

"Yes," I grinned. "Really. We'll just have to nag him and remind him how stupid all this is. He'll cave. He might act tough and strong, but deep down he's just a big, fat scaredy-cat. He's bound to give up if we hound him enough!"

"It's really cold down here," my adorable sister said. And, sure enough, under the blanket she was wearing a pink hoodie. One guess as to what her favourite colour was. "If... If you want, we could maybe move our beds next to each other and-"

"No need for that," I told her. "Scoot over. Bet we could both fit on your bed no problem."

I glanced from Dad to Daisy, a cold feeling of uncertainty tickling my belly.

"Where's Mom?" I asked, eyes focussing on Dad.

He stood in front of us, hands behind his back – a thing he always did when he thought he was 'in charge' or 'taking control' of a situation. He probably thought he looked imposing, but the only thing that stance really did was make his gut protrude all the more.

"Resting," Dad answered. "I've already told her everything I'm about to tell you girls."

This was unusual. Weeks and weeks spent in this shitty bunker and Dad hadn't once sat us down for a 'serious' conversation. His hair was swept back over his balding head, eyes narrowed at me.

"There's been a development. A problem that I am unable to fix. I'm afraid that, for the remainder of our time here, we will no longer have access to television stations or the internet."

"What?!" I shot to my feet, my eyes wide. "You can't be serious! How-"

"Calm down," Dad snarled. "And sit down."

I flinched. Slowly, moved to obey. Best not to piss Dad off. He seemed more on edge than usual. More annoyed.

"While we still had internet, I made sure to download as much music and as many movies and television shows onto the computer as I could. There should be more than enough there to keep you occupied. The radio is also out of commission. The satellite, our only connection with the outside world, has malfunctioned. There's nothing that can be done to repair it, I'm afraid."

"Can't you just go out and get a new one?" I muttered, drawing Dad's glare. "Or, better yet, end this bullshit 'survival' crap and drive us all home so we can get on with our

lives.”

“No-one,” Dad said, voice deep and firm, “is leaving this bunker until the pandemic situation is over. No-one.”

I opened my mouth to point out that we now had no way of *knowing* when the pandemic and the lock-down came to an end – not without news channels or the internet to tell us. But, as soon as my lips parted, Dad cut me off.

“Not another word, young lady!” He practically shouted at me. “I won’t have you poisoning your sister’s mind. No-one is leaving this bunker and that’s *final*! Do you understand?”

“I-”

“Do,” Dad growled, “you *understand*?!”

“Yes, Dad.” I answered, glaring at him.

“Good.”

I wanted to speak up, to shout at him. This whole situation was crazy! Dad was acting like a lunatic. And what was that about me ‘poisoning’ Daisy’s mind? Where in the fuck had he gotten *that* idea from?

Even as I thought it, I knew the answer.

He’d been listening in on our conversation last night.

Asshole.

“On to the second matter at hand,” Dad said, eyes moving from me to Daisy. “Stress, and how to properly manage it.”

Daisy blushed, looked down at the floor.

“It’s an issue that’s been growing in the background for some time now, and recent developments will only serve to make it worse. We’re all feeling the stress of bunker living. And the anxiety of impending apocalyptical events. Until now, I’ve been hesitant to put my vast knowledge of surviving adversity into action. But it’s been made clear to me that I must act. And so, in order to help you all cope with the stress and anxiety of living in these conditions long-term, I have decided on a well-tested, appropriate method to keep everyone mentally healthy and stable.”

I had a bad feeling. I couldn’t quite place it, couldn’t describe it. But I felt it all the same; panic and dread.

“Starting today,” Dad said, eyes on Daisy, “I will begin hypnotising the three of you daily. Helping you manage your stress, making sure you’re all doing well mentally and emotionally. I’ve already given Mom her first hypnosis session. Next up is you, Daisy. Then, last but not least, Alexis. Now, if you’ll come with me honey...”

As Dad took Daisy by the hand, led her out of the room and into another segment of the bunker, all I could do was watch with my mouth hanging open.

Hypnosis? What lunacy was *this*?

And the satellite mysteriously ‘malfunctioning’ the exact morning after I’d told my sister that everything would be going back to normal soon? That *couldn’t* be a coincidence.

What the *fuck*, Dad?