“I’m going out for food,” I told John, my companion and only person I had left, as I gathered my pack and grabbed my hunting knives. One step and I was out the door.

“Canned,” John replied, not looking up from the gun that sat before him. He had just found it a few days earlier, and had grown mindlessly attached to it.

“You think I don’t know that?” I said harshly, and slammed the door shut behind me before he could mutter some snappy answer.

The scenery that sat before me wasn’t anything new. Trees. Overgrown grass. Weeds. Abandoned cars. Destroyed and ransacked buildings. Useless items that enveloped the compact ground. Anything that you would expect in a ruined and insufficient society.

It was twenty years before when the rebellions occurred. I wasn’t even alive, but John was, and he foretold every detail, every observation, and every rumor that ever mattered. He had experienced everything firsthand.

It was the typical way any abusive and sadistic government would deal with citizens that wanted to overthrow them. Warnings. Then chemical weaponry and brute force. And then finally, despite the fact that it’s not sending out a decent message to outlying nations, bombs. Plain, old-fashioned war weapons. Ones that only had the power to wipe out a few villages at a time. But they were enough. Enough to send a powerful and bloodcurdling message to the rest of the country that rebellions were not tolerated in a “divine and celestial” society.

One area impacted by the bombs was once known as Quinn. It soon became John and I’s home “town” after we were forced to leave our previous home due to reasons that cannot be stated.

Nothing much happened after the bombings. The nation went on with itself, most of it (excluding the government’s safety, crime prevention, and crime investigation programs) ignoring and avoiding the impacted areas. Soon, the government actually became respected by its remaining people. But these people didn’t know about the abominable stunts the regime began pulling. Holding “hostile and dangerous” citizens hostage, torturing these captured citizens by invading their minds with gruesome and petrifying images, and committing despicable and loathsome deeds that resulted in the creation of a malicious and vindictive place known as Second Hell, where the rebels were sent to.

However, there were small groups of people that knew about the government’s defamatory deeds. They, obviously, wanted integrity and the fall of a malevolent empire that unfortunately controlled them. John and I never had anything to do with them. Their ideas of a lucrative overthrow of the government were and always had been outrageous and downright frivolous.

I hoisted my pack higher on to my shoulders and trudged into the woods, where I always first searched for something edible before scanning local (and of course, abandoned) grocery stores (I could only visit them when I had the time). It also gave me time to “search myself”, per say, and think about what’s to come.

Almost five minutes had passed, and I was already sweating due to the exorbitant and extreme temperatures. Humidity was high, and carrying a large and hefty pack on my back wasn’t helping the situation.

After continuing to walk through the treacherous heat for a mere half hour, I began to notice the regular changes you would see in a forest as you continue to hike through it. Animal tracks could be spotted everywhere, all kinds of bird chirps could be heard, and many insects continued to crawl upon my legs. I knew that when this occurred, I wouldn’t be able to walk much longer, or otherwise I would lose track of where I was and have to endure the wilderness. Without John. A terrifying thought.

Seven minutes passed (according to my brain) before I came across a small can. The label had been ripped off. It was also red, had many insignificant nutritional facts on it, and the lid appeared to have been tampered with. I picked it up and began to examine it more closely, wanting to check for normal things such as the expiration date and the ingredients. The date read the fourth of February of 2067. I tossed it aside. The contents inside the can would be completely inedible, it getting over a decade of a full-fledged process of wear-and-tear. Definitely not compatible with a human body, so no wonder whoever came across this tossed it back aside.

Before I knew it, orange streaks of sunlight rays were casting out along the beautiful atmosphere. Even with the tree branches and overgrown bushes invading my vision, it was a spectacular view. I could have stared at it in awe and amazement for hours on end, not giving a single second to even breathe. Remarkable how a world destroyed by spiteful governments and the contemptible mediocrity of the human race can still shine at astounding levels.

I hastily began to head back to John and I’s temporary domicile, no longer caring for the extravagant sky. The government’s helicopters would soon be flying over our region, checking for any signs of humans.

Most likely, if the government were to find us, they would capture us and take us in for interrogation. Because we were living in a pillaged and neglected area, they would assume that we were rebels and question us about our lifestyles, histories, and such before holding us prisoner in Second Hell for the rest of our lives.

The government thought that we knew absolutely nothing about Second Hell, but we knew close to everything about it. We even knew each cell’s volume. Information could spread in inconceivable ways.

* - -

As soon as I swung the door open, John asked, “So what’d ya find?”

“Nothing significant,” I replied as I slammed the door shut behind me. “All I found was a ten-year-old can of something that’d probably kill us if we ate anything that came from it.” John sighed in response. He was still fiddling with the gun he had found a few days before, only this time it had appeared he had made some sort of progress on getting it into a functioning state.

“I see you’ve made some progress,” I articulated. John nodded, obviously too focused on his gun to delve into a conversation. I quietly sighed and walked into what was left of the kitchen, setting my pack on a countertop. I then began unloading the contents of it, carefully making sure that everything I brought with me was still in there. Magnifying glass, flashlight, batteries, cloths, bottles of water, granola bars, weighty rope (probably the reason why the pack seemed so heavy), and the hunting knives, which were in another compartment.

* - -

Another hour passed before it was completely obscure outside and the moon was in full force. John lit candles (which we had a large amount of) and set them all throughout our shabby home. The copters wouldn’t be able to see the lit candles from their altitude thanks to John’s ability to hide anything and everything with much thought and consideration.

The home we found years before was in shambles after the bombings. The roof had caved in, the beams that held the floors up had rotted and collapsed, and the overall house structure had just been obliterated.

John and I had managed to construct a new but rundown roof and a few walls, but they were only enough to shelter us from weather and animals. We also managed to remove all the shattered glass and shards of wood from what was left of the home, even though John and I always had our shoes on. We didn’t want to take any chances.

Why we chose that particular home is a question with a simple, unpretentious answer; it felt abnormally safe. When John and I first walked through what was left of the home, it felt like we could live in there for years with no conflict of any kind. We immediately got to work on fixing up the place and making it suitable for our temporary and provisional lifestyles.

* - -

It wasn’t long before I heard the helicopters coasting above our heads. John and I both remained completely silent and motionless in the kitchen, not wanting to attract the attention of anyone inside the choppers. John and I usually had to remain completely still for about ten minutes before all of the choppers passed our area.

The helicopters flew over the wreckage of every annihilated town and area every night, searching for rebels or anything that might be of any particular value. It was their way of ensuring that their power would not be in jeopardy.

The ten minutes passed soon enough, and we no longer heard the choppers flying above. John brought the candles back out from their hiding places and placed them where they originally were.

“I’m gettin’ pretty tired of having to hide the candles every night,” John said, placing the last candle in its correct place.

“I’m gettin’ pretty tired of having to live like this,” I responded, giving him a cold stare.

“Well that’s not in our control,” he said, turning his attention to his gun yet again.

“Not in our control?” I stated loudly, getting infuriated. “What do you mean? We *chose* to live here, out of all places.”

Before I could say anything more, John glared at me and nearly shouted, “Well I’m sorry that I couldn’t find you some five-star hotel with amenities and some fuckin’ pizza.” John looked back to his gun and began playing around with it, attempting to better it. “We live in a cruel world. Life is no longer a basket case full of satisfaction and want. We have to scrape by in order to get what we need, and we have the government on our asses all the time.”

I took in John’s words like I always did, even though he had said them so many times before. *No longer a basket case full of satisfaction and want?* I asked myself. *When was it ever?* The question drifted around my head for the rest of the night, invading my thoughts.

I made my way over to my bed (if you could even call it as such) and lied down, John’s words still causing confusion and excessive thinking. John exited the room (I slept in the kitchen) and went to his own separate place of privacy, not even muttering a simple “good night”. I could always take his compassion into question.

It wasn’t long before I could feel the effects of a long day on my eyes. I attempted to stay awake, but I soon succumbed to sleep and let myself drift off.

Unaware of the hell I was about to experience.