

Chapter 1: Sanctuary

Sanctuary. Vaelyn grumbled as she walked past the sign to the crumbling bridge. At one time, this neighborhood had been her family's sanctuary in the world. She looked back to her rusting house on the hill and sighed, once but that was long ago. Waking from the cryo-pod had thrown her into a nightmare, one she couldn't wake up from. The settlers that had taken residence in her old neighbors' homes sat around a flickering fire, the topic seemed to be about what was to be done with the current living situation.

Her heart raced as she stepped lightly on the rotting wood, one misplaced step and she'd likely go crashing into the irradiated waters below. She had heard from a passing settler that she could find someone who could help her in the place called Diamond city. The "Green Jewel of the Commonwealth" is what they had called it. It was hard to believe anything could be considered a jewel in this hell of a world. She breathed a sigh of relief when she made it to the other side. She could make out a Red Rocket in the distance, there would most likely be supplies she could make use of there. If anything else, she could barricade herself in for the night on the way back.

She eyed the ruins of the old station when she reached the top of the hill, rusted cars littered the road around its premises. A power-suit station caught her eye and brought back memories of a time long before the war. Nate would always comment on how impressive the suits were during his time in the army. She choked back a sob, he would be raising hell if he saw his wife now. She was always too delicate in his eyes to handle the life of war and he had made it perfectly clear that their son should be her highest priority. Vaelyn looked over at the open road and bit her lip. She was honoring Nate's wishes. Her main priority was getting Shaun back and she would stop at nothing till she had what was left of her family back.

The sun was rising higher in the sky with each sector of ground covered. She clutched the 10 mm close to her chest as she peered around the cars for enemies. She was paranoid of what she would encounter on the mission of meeting the detective. Several mongrel dogs scavenged the decaying remains of what she assumed were more people like herself, unlucky in the wasteland she had found herself in. Her hands trembled as she watched them rip flesh from bone, the sickening sight of what could be her next turned her stomach. She hurled into the bushes along the roadside, wiping her mouth against the sleeve of her blue vault-suit. The dogs hadn't paid her any mind, their delicacy before them was more than enough to keep them occupied.

She bolted behind the next car and kept the pattern of sneaking through the ruins till she could see the skyline in the distance. "You'll see the tall towers, that's where you want to go dear." She recalled the sweet elderly settler known as Mama Murphy that had given her advice. She was rather pleasant even though she was high off chems most days. Vaelyn lost herself in thought as she covered more ground and before she knew it, she was standing in front of the ruined bridge that lead to Diamond City. The sun had started setting in the distance and she could smell the winds bringing in a radiation storm. She would have to move quickly to make it to the safety of the city's walls if she wanted to avoid radiation sickness.

Navigating the Fens was the worst experience, Vaelyn shuddered as she watched raiders descend upon terrified travelers. Their screams resonated in her ears long after their dying breath. The Diamond City security were clearly not interested in keeping the area around the entrance to their city safe. They were only concerned with what came to them, not those who needed their aid.

“Ma’am?” A voice said from the shadows of the old ticket booths.

Vaelyn turned abruptly and pointed the shaking pistol at the darkness. She wasn’t going to go down so close to her goal. She had just made it to the city for Pete’s sake. She was shocked when a figure in a long trench coat came into the light.

“Vaelyn? Miss Vaelyn?” The figure said, he lifted his face revealing the gears and circuitry under his gray ‘skin’.

“It’s Mrs. Vaelyn. And how do you know me?” She snapped towards the man, never lowering her trembling weapon.

“Ah, I thought since your husband had passed that you may be going by Miss. My apologies ma’am. I am Nick Valentine. I was notified by a Mr. Garvey to meet you here? He seemed pretty worried that you wouldn’t make it this far.” He said as he shuffled through his coat for a jar of water for her.

“How did you...”

“A detective never gives away his secrets. Let’s just say, I have to have ways to communicate with the citizens of the Commonwealth who need my services. So, you’re looking for your boy?”

Vaelyn nodded as tears swelled in her eyes. She started from the beginning, before the bombs fell. She spoke with a heavy heart and used her hands to emphasize her tale as she spilled everything. The detectives face fell when she described the man who murdered Nate.

“Wait, can you say that again.”

Vaelyn looked surprised but obliged his request. “He had a gruff voice, and scars covering the left side of his face. They were jagged and rough.”

“It can’t be. He did have a child with him, but it wasn’t an infant. Though, Conrad fits the description perfectly. Conrad Kellogg left town pretty recently and in a hurry too.”

Vaelyn fell to her knees and cried. No matter where she turned it seemed that Shaun was always one more step away. Valentine coughed awkwardly and handed her a handkerchief. She took it gingerly and dabbed the tears from her cheeks. It didn’t seem like she would ever find her son.

“Now Mrs. Vaelyn, you must keep it together for your child. We will find him. I promise.” Valentine muttered assuredly as he ushered the young woman to the doorway leading to the town. “I just need you to see if you can get into Kellogg’s old home. If we can find where he is, that will be a good start.”

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Vaelyn ventured into the mayor's office cautiously. A young blonde secretary sat behind the desk scratching away at a piece of paper.

"Hello, uhm...I am looking to get the key to Kellogg's house." She stammered at the secretary, her anxiety an obvious hindrance.

"If you believe any of your property may be in the seized property of Mr. Conrad, you may take it up with the Mayor. I must warn you though, he is a very busy man and may not be able to hear your request for a while as he is dealing with political matters."

Vaelyn slid a small sack of caps across to the woman. "I think you could help me out and help me avoid talking to the Mayor."

The young woman's eyes widened. "Oh, darling. I didn't realize it was you. You should have warned ol' Geneva that you'd be coming today for our visit. I must sadly inform you that I can't get away from work right now but if you'd like..." She slid a key across the table. "...You can always go back to my house and sit tight till I get off this evening." She winked as she finished her statement and turned back to the filing cabinets.

"Oh, yes. Thanks Geneva. Can't wait to see you later this evening." Vaelyn responded as she walked back to the elevator.

"Oh yes dear. Till next time."

She rushed around the small city towards Kellogg's house as she thought about how lucky she had gotten. Bribery wasn't something she wanted to resort to but no one in this town knew her. She was sure that she wouldn't get much help if she'd asked. Valentine was leaning against the railing outside Conrad's front door. He watched the birds descend onto the power lines leading to Power Noodle and sighed.

"Look at them. Oblivious to our perils."

Vaelyn looked at the creatures and shrugged. "I wouldn't say they are oblivious. We can't communicate with them and they seem fully aware of the plight that plagues the people of this city."

"You're probably right. Just get to thinking sometimes about how easy it would be to just be able to escape the hell of the Commonwealth's humanity or lack thereof."

Vaelyn handed him the key and smiled. He looked at her with squinted eyes. "I don't want to know how you managed to get this, but let's get this show on the road." He opened the door and held it wide for the lady to pass through ahead of him. Vaelyn's heart jumped as she entered the darkness. She was one step closer to finding Shaun. One step closer to avenging Nate. One step closer to having her life back.