

Werewolf 221

Chapter 221: A red place

Just like when he had selected Claw Drain and Controlled Transformation, he felt a flood of information enter his head, and his body's muscles twitched a few times. It was as if his body was learning how to activate the skill for him. After that, a strange energy entered his body, and it was gone a second later.

Gary had done his utmost to pay attention to every little detail this time, since he was still trying to figure out what exactly this system was, and how it worked. Unfortunately, it didn't really amount to much. It was similar to seeing a bullet train pass by for a moment. Just because he had seen it, didn't give him any expertise on how it worked...

'Let's see what this skill can do.' Gary happily smiled to himself, opening up the system and checking his skill list. Though he instinctively knew how it would work, he wasn't yet too familiar with all the intricacies.

[Last Stand]

[When activated, the user's Health cannot fall below 1 HP.]

The skill will take 0 points of Energy to use.

Warning; While Last Stand is active, you'll still continue to take damage as normal!]

[Skill duration: 60 secs.]

[Skill reset time: This skill can only be used once a day.]

After reading the skill, Gary immediately gulped. This wasn't what he had imagined. Sure, it might be useful in a game, allowing him to charge in without worrying while blazely attacking and allowing his teammates to help out. Unfortunately, this was real life, and there was no respawn mechanic.

If all the Werewolf Warriors skills worked like this, he wasn't too surprised that the description of the Warrior Class had claimed that they boasted the highest fatality rate. If the high schooler was to use this type of skill while fighting, it would have to be in a situation in which he was able to defeat whoever was around him within that minute. If he failed to do so, well 1 HP meant he would be as good as dead.

The thought itself was scary, if it ever needed to come to that.

'Come on, Gary, let's try to find the silver lining. For one, the skill doesn't consume any Energy. It can also be used as a sort of lifeline in a situation that would have killed me, like a second chance ... Yeah, in a way, this skill gives me a lease on life. If I can't beat someone, I can at least try to run away in that minute.'

'Sigh, this skill would have been so cool if it could have made me invulnerable for that one minute... but if I still take damage it's pretty much just an increased Health pool, isn't it? I guess I really should have figured out what type of skill it would have been with such a name.'

'Why didn't I ask Tom before making a choice? I could have just told him that it was part of that game... although if I do that too often, he'll probably get suspicious... if he hasn't already... Should I just tell him about the whole Werewolf System thing?'

Gary ran his fingers through his hair, as he was stressed out. The teenager felt like he had made the wrong decision. He had been hoping for a power up to bridge the gap between him and Jayden, but the skill just made him aware that some situations that he might have to face could end up very deadly...

At the same time, touching his hair, was reminding him of the other stupid things the system had done.

Wasting no more time on the system, Gary sent a message in the Howlers group chat, informing his friends that he was on his way. However, he naturally didn't take the bus, and just as planned, he jogged there.

He ran through the streets, although those who saw him, would describe him as sprinting. If only they knew how long the boy had been running for. Eventually, Gary came across the street that the others had told him to meet them at.

Looking up, he couldn't believe his eyes. It was dark out, nearly 8 PM. When the sun went down, this place looked completely different. Neon glowing signs were turned on and flashing, and the single street was filled with people who were walking up and down exploring the place.

Even the people who could see walking on the very street seemed different to those that Gary would normally see in slough. They carried confidence in their steps.

It looked so pretty, Gary had never seen so many neon light signs in his life, but when looking at the street itself and those on it, he realized the reality of what this place was. The streets were filled with pretty girls standing outside the restaurants. They were wearing skimpy dresses such as air hostess outfits, red little devils, and all of them had extra short skirts.

The girls would frequently whistle at those who passed them, holding up signs stating what their rates were. Of course, there were a few restaurants that were still operating as restaurants between these establishments, but the street had undeniably turned into a red-light district.

Gary was at the entrance of the street, where up above he could see a large sign that showed the entrance called Burnham street.

"Hey, you made it!" Marie shouted, with a big wave and a smile on her face. The rest of the group were soon behind her as well.

"Yeah." Gary said, still taking in what he was seeing. As a sixteen-year-old teenager, he had never quite visited a place quite like this one.

"So did everything go okay?" Kai asked casually, but Gary wasn't in the mood to answer because seeing the whole place, he had a question of his own to ask.

"Are you... planning for us to take over this place, Kai?" The Howlers gang leader wanted to know. "I mean, if we take out the gang here, it means that we would then run this place, right? Do you intend for people to still do... all of this?"

The others looked at Kai nervously because based on what they knew about Gary, they had already assumed this to be his reaction. Kai was the Brain, whereas Gary was the Muscle. Without one, the other couldn't work. For the Howlers to work, they needed both.

Unfortunately, Kai had already told him his own stance about what he intended to do...

Chapter 222 - Take Over! (Part 1)

The blonde haired teenager didn't outright reply, instead he sighed. Not too long ago, the others had asked him the exact same question.

"Tell me, Gary, do you see yourself as a saviour?" Kai asked back, yet his underclassman just raised his eyebrows as if he didn't understand the question. "I selected this place for several reasons. First, it's far away from the other gangs. Second, it's ideal to serve as our link to outside of Slough.

"Third, a good chunk of the clientele that comes here are from big companies, which could be the true kickstart that the Howlers need. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it's making serious cash. Think about how much we grabbed from the grey colour gang. That on a daily basis... for each of us."

For Gary... although all the things he said were true, it still annoyed him somewhat.

"I... I need the cash... you know that. Still... to go this far."

Once again, Kai let out a sigh, this time bigger.

"I get why you would want to put an end to this. Sure, morally speaking, this place is a travesty. However... have you taken a moment to consider the consequences of such an action? Let's say we take over, and you close down this place... What do you think will happen then?"

"Do you really believe that those guys who have come here for their entertainment will stop? Best case scenario, they migrate to another town, more likely, though, the Grey Elephants or Underdogs will just offer these services in their own areas.

“Not all the girls have been forced into this. Sure, some were, and if you wish to let them go, I wouldn’t mind agreeing with you there. However, for a lot of these girls, it’s a way for them to earn money to live in a city like this. We might not like it, but to them, it’s just like a real job.

“You close down this place, it might make you feel better, but you’ll rob them off their means to make money to support their family. Need me to tell you what happens then? No job means no way to pay their bills. They will be forced down to a Tier-4 town... or worse.

“Do you think, living like this, is really worse than living like that? As gang members, we will always cross a line with the law, but we can still be a gang with our own ethics. Look, at the end of the day, you’re our gang leader, so I will go with your decision no matter what.

“However, as a good leader you need to be aware of the consequences. For that, you should also listen to the voices of the people that it will affect before making such a decision.”

The world wasn’t as black and white as police officers, TV and such liked to make it out to be. Gary, having been in a position that had made him join a gang, understood. Who knows, maybe if his family’s situation had gotten worse, he might have ended up becoming a boy toy for some of those older women.

Thinking about such a thing, Gary’s body shivered, imagining something resembling Jabba the Hutt asking him to do strange deeds.

“You’re right. ... Let’s talk about it more once we’ve actually taken over.” Gary said, with a change in attitude. Meanwhile, Innu was looking around, wondering if that cute waitress was also out on the streets.

The group was walking down the street, turning their head constantly left and right. For the ones that had been here earlier in the day, it was just as much of a shock to them as it was to Gary. It seemed as if they had stepped through a portal, transporting them to an alternate reality.

There were a few other things that they were noticing more that hadn’t been there during the day as well. Nearly every establishment had a set of male guards that were standing outside with their arms crossed. They all gave off an intimidating look. A place like this, serving particular clientele and doing what they were doing, would need the help.

In fact, walking down this street alone, they had seen the need for them to get involved a few times. However, those 'fights' stopped as soon as one of these men stepped forward. Still, two times they had watched them use stun guns on some drunken men, who didn't understand that 'no' actually meant 'no'.

It was quick at shocking the persons unexpectedly, while the others gathered around them and brought them inside. For what, the others could only imagine.

While they were walking through, Kai thought he would explain to the rest a few details about what they were trying to do.

"As I've already told the others, the gang in charge of this area is called the Pincers. They're one of the five small-time gangs we'll have to take care of, before the Underdogs and the Grey Elephants fall out." The blonde teenager explained.

"Every one of those men in suits that you have seen is a part of their gang, and as you can tell, controlling a busy street like this, there are a lot of them. Shouldn't be too surprising, though, given the type of their business, yet it also means that their gang is heavily concentrated in one place and reliant on that one place.

"There are some unwritten rules for this place. We've already seen the 'No pestering the women' in action. Aside from that, you should keep your phones to yourself. While they won't stop you from making a call, if they suspect you're trying to take a picture, or worse, film anything... things will turn out bad.

"This is a rule that is set up to keep their clientele out of trouble, and most people will follow that rule. Sure, some try to test it, but they'll all pay the price. Those guys work under the assumption that it's better to grab one too many than to let one slip."

There certainly were a lot of people, and even Innu, who was a good fighter, was starting to worry that the Howlers were outmatched by this large force. If this could be called small-time, then what were they, mini-time?

“So, what's the plan? Surely, you don't expect us to just raid this place like with the grey colour gang?” Innu asked.

Chapter 223 - Take Over! (Part 2)

The others were waiting to hear Kai's plan, hoping he wouldn't send them into the lion's den.

“Of course not. Did you already forget that we're just here to scout out the area today?” Kai looked at Innu, who sheepishly rubbed the back of his head. “The quickest way to take down a gang or to make it collapse is to take out the head. Still, that will leave us with the problem I mentioned earlier about running the place, but we can worry about that later.

“The issue is... finding the location of the Pincers' base. The information I received only helped me narrow it down. It should be located on this street. As to where exactly... well, that's why we're here.”

Looking around, the others attempted to look for some clues. Perhaps it was the place that was busiest, the one with the most workers, or maybe even the one that had the most guards outside. Alas, it wasn't like after entering, they would instantly recognise the leader.

“I can't sniff him out.” Gary eventually mumbled, thinking that Kai was expecting him to do something. The others had heard what their leader said, and were confused, but the comment made the upperclassman smirk.

“I never expected you to. Remember what I said about willing workers? It will be impossible to get any information out of anyone who has been working for a while for them. However, there will also be those that have been forced to work here. We'll focus on those workers that aren't afraid of the Pincers just yet. Our goal is to try to find one of these workers to... help us out.”

Strange, wild thoughts started to run through everyone's head as soon as Kai mentioned this. If they needed to talk to the workers, and they were here, did that mean they needed to partake in... that?!

The blonde teenager walked up to Austin and Gary, handing them both a large pile of cash each.

“You two look the oldest out of all of us. I'm afraid it's too risky for the rest of us to try our luck. They'll probably won't even let us past the door if we requested a worker. You know what to do, try to get the

girls to confess something. Oh, and if you want to have some fun... at least give us a heads-up." Kai smirked.

"Hey, Gary!" Marie immediately went up to him. "You're not actually going to listen to that idiot, right? Just go into the room with them, ask some questions, and head out." Her face was red, aware that she had no right to tell the green haired teenager what to do.

"Since they think you will be doing-doing...doing that. They most likely won't have cameras or that in the rooms, in order to protect their important clientele."

Gary just nodded, not saying much, as he was left a bit speechless. Out of everything he had done, maybe this would be the hardest thing after all.

[Your BPM is rising]

[BPM 95]

'Shut up!'

There was one person that seemed a bit bummed out about the whole thing, though, and that was Innu. He was cursing his somewhat small frame that did make him appear young to others. He could understand Austin, but seeing Gary, who had only recently enjoyed his growth spurt, pass him on their way to adulthood was a nasty pill to swallow.

After making it clear what they needed to do, the real question was where would they start.

"I have a suggestion." Innu said. "Why don't we head to where we had the meal today? It's as good a starting point as any other, right?"

Still curious about the girl that had acted strangely. Innu wanted to know whether that girl was a willing or a forced worker... he felt a little bad for her. For once, the boy was talking a surprising amount of sense.

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Once Gary and Austin entered through the door, they were being led by a businesswoman who had a walkie-talkie attached to her hip.

She was wearing a business shirt and a tight skirt, and she herself didn't look bad as she led the two of them to the reception room. The restaurant wasn't even open for business. The tables had all been cleared, and now they were sitting on one sofa out of several.

There were other clients in here being led by a server worker as well.

"Please, what service would you like to select from our menu?" The woman asked as she handed them a leaflet.

Reading the 'items' on the list was just making Gary's heart beat even faster. Imagining the scene in his head, for a young teenager who had done nothing like this before, he was worried that any second now he might stain the inside of his trousers.

'What the hell is wrong with me...think Jabba the Hutt...Jabba the Hutt...'

"Austin, handle this one, please." Gary whispered.

Since the large teenager seemed less affected, the gang leader left the talking to him.

"It's hard to order from the menu's description alone. Would it be possible to see all the girls here?" Austin asked. Gary was quite impressed that he had said those words so calmly, without stuttering. It all felt so... natural. 'Could it be this isn't his first time in such a place?'

The businesswoman got on her walkie-talkie, and a few moments later. A number of girls walked out in a row with numbers on a large badge that was placed on the top right of their shirts. They were wearing quite the flashy red Chinese style dresses that the others had seen today, only the slit seemed to go up the thigh, revealing more.

"Please, tell me which number you like the best, and what service you would like to get." The woman told them.

Fourteen beautiful girls came to stand before the two teenage boys. Having somewhat calmed himself down, Gary lifted his head to take a look at the girls. That's when his eyes locked onto a certain individual.

'Stacy! What is she doing here?!'

Chapter 224 - A Happy Ending

Inside the dark venue, some of the girls were doing their best to be chosen by the customers. They were throwing kisses towards the men in the room, lifting their dresses to show off more than just their legs.

"Sirs, while we do abide by the principal of 'the customer is king', I'll have to ask you to hurry up your decision. We can't keep the girls out here forever, especially not when we have other customers they could attend to." The businesswoman had her arms crossed in front of her, her right foot impatiently stepping up and down.

On another sofa, some older men were already mumbling, and Gary could hear a few of them mentioning numbers here and there. Everyone had a menu, but not everyone had asked to see all the girls as Austin had done.

Looking at the girls, Gary immediately noticed a few things. While many of them tried to present themselves to the two teenagers, some of them were standing in a defensive position, rubbing their arms and covering themselves from the gazes of others. It was clear that they didn't want to be there.

'I was right, sure there are some who are willing, but not all of them want to be here.' Gary thought. With this thought in mind, it allowed Gary to calm himself down from the situation a bit. He looked over all the girls before he announced. "Number 13."

Her head held low, Stacy stepped forward. The businesswoman cleared her throat, making her flinch up, before she looked up, and put on a nervous smile at her suitor. Gary still had his hood up, even in the establishment. The workers didn't seem to mind, indicating that he wasn't the only one who had come without wanting anyone to recognise him.

'That was the girl that Innu kept trying to talk to as well.' Austin noticed. 'Man, those two are into the same girl. That's going to cause a problem, that's for sure. Should I stir the pot with Innu for a bit?' Austin smirked as he was finally able to make a decision.

"Are there any of you with a kid?" Austin loudly questioned with his arms crossed. The atmosphere immediately changed, and Gary almost fell out of his chair. Even the girls who had been vying for attention stopped and looked at each other strangely. It wasn't a request they often got, that was for sure.

'A kid?! Why is he asking if any of the girls have a kid...unless he is just here for fun. Does that mean he has a thing for older women? Man, I'm learning too many things about those close to me today, which I don't want to know. I'm afraid if Innu was here, he would be asking for the girls to show off their feet or something.'

The truth was that Austin had asked this question not because of some personal preference, but because he believed that those with children might be more willing to talk. Since they had more on the line, they might be more frightened of the Pincers. Potentially, they might agree to share some information in exchange for money...

"Apologies, sir, but that is private information our workers don't feel comfortable revealing. Please just select the one you like. If she feels comfortable, perhaps she will answer your question then." The business was clearly frustrated by now, since the teenage boys had already wasted so much time. She was even second guessing whether she shouldn't have just thrown them out immediately.

"Okay, number 8." Austin declared, and a small, young-looking girl stepped forward. If Gary were a betting man, that one would have been the last person he had picked, especially after his question. Honestly, he couldn't comprehend his fellow gang member's way of thinking.

The rest of the girls walked away, and the workers led them where to go next. The two pairs entered an elevator together, arriving at the second floor. They could see a long hallway with several rooms on either side.

Each room had a corresponding number above. Following the girls, it was finally time.

'I can't believe I'm in a place like this... what the hell happened to my life?' Gary asked himself, when Stacy opened the door with the number '13' on it. Meanwhile, on the opposite side, Austin casually entered the door with the number '8' on it.

"Thank you." Gary said, heading inside. His legs felt like they were going to buckle at any second, and he was wondering just how Austin was dealing so nonchalantly with all of it.

Entering the room, the high schooler didn't know what he had imagined, but it wasn't... this. There was a large bed with all kinds of fancy pillows on them. Looking at them alone, he could just imagine how soft they were.

Then there was a closed-off bath and a separate shower with marble flooring on the toilet. Quickly running into the bathroom, the worker felt like her customer was acting rather strange.

"Hey, this is like a hotel, right? Meaning all these small Shampoo bottles and stuff are free?" Gary asked.

"Y-yeah, I guess." Stacy answered in a stutter.

Shoving them into his pocket, Gary felt elated, believing he had just obtained the perfect gift for Amy's upcoming birthday. Hotel shampoo was a luxury... at least from where they were from. The high schooler would just have to keep quiet as to where exactly he had procured it from.

'This... is like a dream place. I've never even been in a hotel before.' He couldn't stop smiling.

Running out of the toilet, Gary ran into the main room with the same enthusiasm as a little boy in a candy shop. The first thing the teenager did was jump on the bed and lie on his back. It bounced him a little, yet soon enough his body started to sink in. It was, as expected, the softest sensation he had ever experienced.

He could only imagine how nice it would be to fall asleep in such a place. Not just that, but on his own. Without having to share a room. After a few seconds of bliss, he remembered that he was actually here to do a job.

He wasn't alone, but he soon got distracted again, seeing something else. A particular set of items on the table were laid out. The toys stood up hard and long and there were all sorts of different colours. Some had unusual designs, rigid, big and small, all shapes and sizes. He had seen these items on specific videos he would watch. It made him gulp.

Heading to the table, Gary picked up one of the strange objects. He had chosen the one that was pink in colour. He started to shake it about left and right with his hand, and surprisingly it had some give as it flopped about. His thumb rubbed against the bottom and noticed there was a button. Curious, he pressed it, and the object started to shake violently.

'Whoa, I nearly dropped the thing!' Gary thought. 'That's really violent. Do they really like these things?'

As he was about to put the pink object down on the table, he heard the sound of sobbing and realised it was coming from the girl.

"I can't do it... please, I don't want to do it..." A cry came from behind, and he could see Stacy was in tears, hardly able to stand up.

"I'm sorry, sir, but please... it's my first day, and... I haven't had time to adjust myself... I-if you could ... just pick someone else." Stacy continued to plead amid her sobs.

Gary walked over, not realising he still had the object in his hand, which was only frightening Stacy more, wondering what this person planned to do to her until she heard him say. "It's okay. I'm not going to do anything like that. I'm just here to ask you a few questions."

Taking down his hood, it was the last person Stacy had ever expected to see in a place like this. Recognising the green hair, the girl loudly exclaimed: "Gary!"

Chapter 225 - The Truth

If Stacy hadn't been so worried about her own situation, then she might have recognised Gary by his facial details. However, the truth was Gary had changed quite some bit since the last time she had seen him.

Now, seeing his green hair, and his face, Stacy instantly recognised him. After yelling out his name, it seemed like she was about to say something else as well, but the words seemed stuck in her throat. The high schooler quickly placed his finger on his lips, silencing her.

He also looked behind her, making sure the door was still shut.

“Look, I’m not here to do... ‘that’ with you, I promise. So you will be okay, alright.” Gary tried to calm her down by using a gentle voice. However, he soon noticed that her eyes were looking in a particular direction — the object in his hand.

‘Of course, if I’m holding this thing, she would be scared.’ Gary nervously smiled and put the pink long hard object back down on the table. Showing his open palms, he called Stacy over. His sister’s former best friend still seemed a bit shocked by the whole thing.

“Gary... why are you in a place like this? And why did you pick me... Since you knew it was me, you could have picked someone else. I... I... You haven’t always had a thing for me, have you?” Stacy asked, as she either hadn’t hurt or didn’t believe the boy’s claims.

“Please.” Gary scoffed. “Don’t flatter yourself. Let me make something crystal clear. I’m not here as your friend. Amy told me everything that happened that day. I understand your situation at the time, it must have been scary, especially as a girl, but that doesn’t change that you left Amy behind!

“I don’t even care that you told them about me... but I’ll never forgive you for what you did to her!”

Looking into Gary’s eyes caused Stacy to gulp down her spit. His tone of voice was severe, and the teenage girl was beginning to believe that if he was in a place like this, he wasn’t the ordinary boy his sister thought him to be.

“Now that we have cleared that up, can you tell me how you ended up in a place like this? I might have understood it if it had been the Grey Elephants, but this area is controlled by the Pincers.” Gary commented.

After hearing the two gang names, Stacy’s eyes widened, and it looked like her suspicions were correct.

'I guess he isn't here just to see some girls...'

She hesitated, wondering if she should tell Gary or not. Even if he might have some knowledge in that area, what could he even do if she did tell him? Nevertheless, the whole situation was too much for a young girl like her, and it had been eating her up inside. Nearly breaking down again, she sat up straight to stop herself.

"My situation... has nothing to do with Amy or the Grey Elephants, if that's what you were worried about. I've done enough to Amy, but she's safe from this life. All of this was because of my parents." Stacy revealed.

"I bet Amy thinks that I moved school because of what happened, but that's not true at all. My parents have been having money troubles for a while now. If you didn't know, they own their own mechanic business. We weren't wealthy by any means but better off than many people in Slough. Many workers relied on our shop for their income.

"However, apparently, one day, my parents had a client who refused to pay up. To make matters worse, it was a big job as well. Usually, they keep the car as compensation, until those people pay up. They did the same in that case, even though the guy claimed he was a gang member.

"Eventually, he came back with others. They beat my parents and all their workers as well. It might have been fine, it had just stopped there, but they kept coming back and disrupting the business. From what they told me, some time later they got approached by someone who had heard about their trouble.

"My parents took out a loan with them, even though they knew the loan shark belonged to a gang, but with so many people relying on them, what choice did they have? The situation at home was stressful. So... I spent my time on some dubious sites, pretending to be someone I wasn't..."

"Coincidentally, I eventually ended up chatting with Hawk. Maybe I just wanted some escape. Whatever... I'm sorry I got dragged you and Amy mixed up in all of it..."

Stacy stopped her story there, but Gary had already gotten the gist of it. The loan must have come from the Pincers. They must have charged her parents criminally high-interest rates, the type that would be impossible to pay off.

Then, in the end, they forced Stacy to do this, move her and her family to this area and the school. The loan was illegal in the first place, so the police wouldn't do anything about it, and it's not like they would act even if her parents would explain the situation.

He wasn't sure if Stacy knew already or not... but the reality of the situation was that her family had most likely been targeted from the beginning. Even if the ones harassing them had not been from the Pincers, it wouldn't surprise Gary to learn that the small-time gang might have paid off another gang to create the ruckus.

"Wasn't your dad's business under the Grey Elephants area? Why didn't they do anything to protect you?" Gary asked.

She shook her head.

"I have no idea, Gary. I don't understand most of this stuff, in the first place. Everything is so scary to me. They told my parents I would just be working off their debt as a waitress for a restaurant. As soon as they had me here, though, they told me that if I don't do as they tell me, my parents would have their organs sold... these guys are scary... they're terrifying people, Gary. What do I do?!"

It was clear that Stacy was beginning to panic again. He was wondering if he should help her or not. Hearing her story, as much as he didn't like her, it wasn't her fault she had gotten into this situation, and he imagined there were others that were the same.

"Stacy, I need you to help me. We might be able to get you out of this situation, but to do that, I require some information. Have you met the boss of the Pincers by any chance? If not, do you at least know what he or she looks like and where they are located?"

According to Kai, Stacy was the perfect target to get information from. She didn't want to be here, and hadn't been here long enough to know just how scary the Pincers were.

Wiping her tears from her face, she looked at Gary once more. Her thick, heavy makeup was halfway down her cheeks.

"I can't... there's a rule. When we first came here, they said we'd be done for if anyone speaks about the Pincers. If anyone even tries to talk to us, then we need to get out of there and inform the other immediately.

"I've put you and Amy through too much already, so I won't do that. Honestly, Gary, I'm just happy to see someone from my normal life. I couldn't tell anyone about any of this, not even Amy! Thank you... for listening to me."

Ironically, Gary had drowned out what Stacy was telling after a certain put. As such, he was completely surprised to feel her hand pressed up against his thigh.

"Say... if it's you, Gary... I think, it would be ok... you could be my... first."

"Austin!" Gary shot up like a bamboo shoot. The reason he hadn't heard the last few words was because he was thinking about what he had just been told, how it could mean trouble for their group.

"AAHHHHH!" A scream was heard coming from outside.

"Someone asked about the Pincers! Help, help!" A female voice cried out.

Chapter 226 - How Strong Are You?

Austin was quite large for his age, a little over six feet tall, and he had quite a wide body as well. It was a solid natural body that he did little work to maintain. On top of this, his outdated pompadour hairstyle made him seem like he was really older than he was.

The girl he had selected came just below his chest. She sat down on the bed, swinging her feet, smiling away. Austin walked over, casting a shadow over her face.

"You seem awfully calm," Austin mentioned.

"Is there a reason for me to be scared? You know, just because you are big doesn't exactly mean that 'all' of you is big. You might be surprised how often the package doesn't match the cover." The girl started to chuckle.

Austin walked over to sit on the single sofa that was placed next to a table. Kneeling over with his elbows on his knees, he gave her a serious look.

“What's your name?” Austin asked.

“Nini!” The girl answered, still smiling away, as she played with her hair.

“Alright, ‘Nini’, tell me... what school do you go to?” For a second, after he had asked this question, her legs stopped swinging. Before she could say anything else, Austin continued.

“I know you're not old enough to work in this place, and you're not the only one. So, how did they get to you?” Austin doubled down.

For a second, it looked like Nini was worried, but she soon lifted her head.

“I promise I'm over eighteen, so you have nothing to worry about, old man.”

“Old man?” Austin chuckled. “Well, if I'm really an old man, it will be quite the surprise when this old man pays a visit to the school in this area. While I might not find a ‘Nini’, I bet I'll be able to find you. Look, if it makes you feel better, I'm underage myself, so if you really are as old as you say you are, we can see who would get in trouble for all this mess.”

Austin thought he had her where he wanted, but she soon started to laugh.

“You really think you have everything figured out?”

It was at that moment, Austin pulled out his phone and started to play a recording.

Shortly after they had gotten off the bus, Austin had messaged the guys from his school to gather some information about the school in the area. It turned out that Kai had indeed just scratched the surface.

While it didn't have a big problem with delinquents like Eton High, there was still a small delinquent circle. Sure, they weren't part of any gangs themselves, but according to what Austin's guys found out, they seemed to be working with the Pincers. They apparently targeted some of the pretty high school girls, trying to get them to walk down the wrong path.

After harassing them for a while, these girls would undergo a drastic change. It wasn't hard to connect the dots. Many of those 'shy' girls would suddenly appear in school with heavy makeup.

From what Austin gathered, every girl those delinquents introduced to the Pincers, would earn them a commission.

Playing the recording of one of her schoolmates admitting to the delinquent circle's doing, Nini finally realised that Austin actually wasn't just making wild guesses.

"I may be unfamiliar with this gang business, but I happen to run the delinquent circle in my area. Anything that happens at the schools, I will know about it." Austin proudly admitted.

Since Nini now knew this wasn't a real customer, she stood up and got off from the bed, heading towards the door.

"Okay, you're right, I lied. However, despite how I look, I'm actually seventeen. Now, unless you want me and you to still have a bit of fun, assuming you have the cash for that, I'm afraid I have to try and earn my keep with someone else."

Austin stood up from his seat and walked over towards her but stopped, not wanting to get too close and scare her. She was already practically out the door, and he didn't want that.

"I'm here to find out information about the Pincers. You guys don't have to lead this life, just tell us where their base is and what their boss looks like." Austin requested.

Nini let out a big sigh as she pulled down the door handle.

"It's cute that you want to be some vigilante when you're just the head of a group of delinquents, but let me tell you, the Pincers don't play around. They're actual gangsters and are in a completely different ballpark from what you're used to.

"Unfortunately, I don't think telling you will change anything." She replied, pulling out her tongue. "I'll probably be in some deep trouble if I told you. ...well, let's see how strong you really are." Nini opened the door and quickly rushed out.

"Someone asked about the Pincers! Help, help!" A female voice cried out.

Immediately, Austin chased after her, but the high school girl was already down the hallway. Unfortunately, some of those countless guards they had seen in the area and around the place came flooding in. Five of them blocked the hallway at the front, and another five did the same from behind.

A second later, Gary opened the door to see nearly a dozen guards, ready to take out Austin.

"I guess... you didn't have any luck then?" Gary asked.

"Nope, but it seems you've made a new friend." Austin replied, seeing that Stacy had left the room with him, and was holding onto his arm tightly.

"Stand down!" One of the guards shouted. "This area is under control of the Pincers. Come with us peacefully and there won't have to be any trouble."

Despite the man's proclamation, the ones behind him had pulled out a few stun guns and knives, it was the same for the ones opposite them.

"Well, boss, your call?" Austin looked at Gary.

"You see them. Peace was never an option. We need to get out of here ASAP. The others must have already left the area, so it's just me and you." Gary replied.

Looking past the guards, Austin could see that Nini was peaking at them, seeing what they could do.

“Perfect!” Austin grinned as he charged in the direction of the girl who had sold him out. Gary was quick to follow his lead, hoping they could take them out quickly and leave this place, when he felt Stacy grab onto his arm, refusing to let go.

“Gary, don’t! They’ll kill you” Stacy called out.

Seeing Austin charge forward, the guards trapped them from either side. With his strong fists, Austin had whacked the first one in the face, causing him to fall into the others, but another got through and tased him.

“Stacy, get off, I have to help him!” Gary shouted.

Trying to pull her off him, he managed to push her away, but he had done so with a little too much strength, causing her to fall the other direction. She soon felt a sharp pain in her stomach. As she moved out, she could see one of the Pincer's guards with blood all over his arms and a knife in his hands.

Chapter 227 - 20 Minutes

Stacy’s body was slowly staggering back towards Gary. She herself didn't know what was going on, but seeing the blood and looking down at her stomach, she started to get wobbly on her feet.

Because her back was turned, Gary couldn't see anything, but he didn’t need to see because he could already smell the blood that was entering his nose.

Eventually, she stumbled, falling into Gary’s arms. Looking down, he could see the wound in her stomach, and, though he wasn’t a professional, it looked quite bad.

‘Sh*t... she was stabbed! ... and the knife is in that guy's hand. You’re not supposed to take it out, right?’ Gary thought as he tried to think back to any form of training or movies he had watched for some knowledge.

“Stacy!” Gary shouted at her. “You need to put pressure on the wound! Hang on, I’ll take you to a hospital. It will all be okay!”

The man, who was responsible for the high school girl’s injury, showed no signs of remorse, instead he charged in again. Quickly, pulling her so she was behind him, Gary kicked the man before he could even reach them. The teenager had aimed at his stomach and he wasn’t holding back, causing the gangster to fly into his colleagues tumbling down.

Turning around, he placed Stacy over his shoulder and was planning to head out of the place, but there was a problem. Austin still hadn’t managed to take on his five guys. With the stun guns being used, they were disrupting his flow, and he needed to be careful of the knives, so he didn’t get a serious wound like Stacy’s.

"Haha even delinquents at school these days use knives, do you think I don't have experience fighting against you lot!" Austin taunted.

There were cuts across his chest and forearms, he was bleeding as well, but there were no serious wounds. Thankfully, he had taken out two people already, but a *ding* was soon heard, and from the front door, reinforcement appeared storming out of one of two of the elevators.

“Gary... it... really... I don’t even know if it hurts.” Stacy whispered, her face being ghostly white.

[New Quest received]

[Who wants to live forever?]

[Should have let her pop your cherry, boy.]

[A girl is dying in your arms, yet you wish to save her life.]

While the wound isn’t too deep, you lack the expertise to treat her.

If you don't do something, she'll die from blood loss (~20 mins)

Warning; External circumstances can worsen her condition!]

[Quest reward: ???]

[Time limit: 20 minutes]

[Failure: Death of Stacy Turnhell]

[Optional complete condition: Bite her]

When reading the last line, a wave of thoughts came into his head. Mainly when Mr Root had been in his critical condition, he had contemplated this way of saving him, and now it looked like his system was subtly pushing him towards it. Turning her would also mean saving her life.

When Gary read the consequences for failing the Quest, he understood that things were very serious. Personally, the teenager had been stabbed multiple times, but unlike him, Stacy was just a normal high school girl. She didn't have the same vitality he had.

'Can I do it, can I get out of this place in time...No... I still have time! I can still consider this possibility if we can't get out.' Gary decided as he turned around.

Multiple people were coming out of there rooms trying to see the commotion, but the guards were soon telling them to stay inside.

"Austin, get back here, I need you to carry her!" Gary yelled down the hallway. After delivering a punch and knocking a guy's shades off, the large teenager went back to where his friend was. Without asking him any questions, he placed Stacy on his back.

Despite having taken out a few of the gangsters, more had come down. There were more than a dozen in front of them, with around half that number behind them. The men were being a bit cautious after

seeing the strength these intruders had displayed. Fortunately, the hallway was narrow, limiting the adults' movement.

"I'll open a path, just stay behind me!" Gary ordered, and looked to his left, where the door to the room he had been in was.

Austin was wondering what Gary's plan was. Honestly, even he couldn't see a way to get out of this one with how many people there were, it was just endless, but their leader was someone who could save them from those two monsters, so he could do the same again.

[Skill activated Controlled Transformation]

[Transformation has begun]

Gary chose to just transform his nails lightly, which he then used to rip into the side of the wall. Once they were in, he transformed his biceps, granting him not just regular super strength, but Werewolf super strength. He could feel the clothes tightening around his bicep.

Quickly pulling the door, he had managed to pull it off its hinges.

"Now!" Gary shouted, as he charged forward while holding the door as an impromptu shield. Austin immediately followed right behind him, but he quickly noticed something.

Gary was too fast.

The teenager had used his skill on his legs to give him an edge as he pushed forward. The gangsters had already seen him do something inhuman, yet he didn't want to give any other clear indication that he was an Altered. He had transformed just enough to give him the extra strength in stats and speed that he needed without any change in his outward appearance.

The men tried to move out of the way of what was coming towards them, but their large number proved to be a detriment in that regard. The next second, Gary slammed the door into the first man, knocking him back. He continued to run forward, not slowing down, and pushed through like a bulldozer.

Eventually, they had gotten out of the hallway, and were now in the open area where the two elevators were.

“Go!” Gary shouted.

Austin went and pushed the elevator button, waiting for it to arrive. The large teenager suddenly felt something warm around his shoulder and as he touched it, he saw that it was a red liquid. Stacy’s blood was dripping down.

The men that Gary had knocked down were getting back up, and now that they were out of the hallway, the door was pretty useless. Since it was already falling apart, the high schooler threw it towards those still on the floor, and stood there in the centre while waiting for the *ding* sound.

That's when Austin noticed that there was a small girl in the corner, it was Nini. She wasn't shaking but was clearly trying to avoid trouble by hiding behind a large plant.

“You see this?” Austin questioned her as he pointed at Stacy. “This is how ‘valuable’ you are to them. Today, it’s the girl on my shoulder, but tomorrow it could easily be you... I’ll be paying you a visit at school soon. You’re scared of the Pincers... but trust me, you should be more scared of us!”

A large yell and cry of pain was heard. It was then that the two of them turned to Gary, who was in the middle of taking care of all the gangsters. He dodged a punch and threw out an overhand right hand into the face of another. He had been hit with a stun gun just before, but the teenager powered through it.

Still, after kicking another gangster, he lifted one above his head, and another came and stabbed him right in the stomach, not just once but a few times. Seeing this, Austin was ready to put Stacy down to protect his leader.

“Arghh!” Gary screamed, hurling the man towards the others, he then grabbed the one attacking him with the knife with his bare hand, and punched him in the face three times quickly, while kicking him on the ground.

“You tried to kill me!” Gary screamed, as he continued to punch in the unconscious man’s face, until he was eventually rugby tackled to the ground, but seconds later the green haired teenager had flung another gangster off. He threw his assailant across the room, before getting back up again.

It was the first time for Austin to witness Gary fight so wildly. The large teenager understood that it was both of their lives on the line, and he genuinely wanted to help... only, how was he even supposed to get in there, in the middle of all that mess?

Finally, a *ding* was soon heard, yet there were even more men inside.

Chapter 228 - 16 Minutes

Austin, with one hand, grabbed onto the closest adult’s head and quickly slammed it into the side of the wall before throwing him behind him. Then, he kicked another one right in the balls, no hesitation whatsoever. Now wasn’t the time to fight like gentlemen, not when the gangsters were using weapons.

A third man was about to hit Austin, but soon a hand had grabbed onto his arm, and pulled him out of the elevator, and the large teenager could see Gary by his side. The group got in and were quickly pressing the button, waiting to go down to the first floor.

There were no words spoken, and only the green haired high schooler’s frantic breath could be heard. Naturally, Austin couldn't help but look at his friend’s stomach, where he had received multiple stab wounds. Blood covered his shirt and was dripping onto the elevator floor.

“Are you-”

“I'm fine.” Gary interrupted in a pained voice. “We need to get her to a hospital!”

The elevator opened once again. Unsurprisingly, there were people waiting for the trio.

[16 minutes remaining]

[Energy points will be used to perform emergency healing]

[-30 Energy]

[173/300 Energy]

[64/100 HP]

[Passive healing will not take effect until you are no longer in combat]

While the elevator was still on its way down, Gary was checking out his stats. Once he no longer fought for a certain amount of time, his body would consume Energy and naturally start to heal himself.

Despite its name, Emergency healing was only useful to seal his wounds and mend his bones, yet it didn't actually bring his Health back up. As such, the green haired teenager was currently in a rough shape, and had used up a lot of Energy healing the cuts on his body.

'Since becoming a Warrior Class Werewolf other than the fight with Billy, it's the first time that I've had to worry about my Energy a bit. I haven't been using Controlled Transformation a lot but still if it comes to it might even have to use the new skill. Yet for some reason... I'm not scared.' Gary noticed.

When obtaining Last Stand, the high schooler had imagined that if he would ever have to use it, it would be in a situation where he would be frightened out of his mind, but instead he was filled with anger. He was angry about the way they treated people, angry that they had hurt Stacy, who was just an innocent school girl, and angry at the gang that was doing all of this.

The elevator door opened, and the area looked to have been cleared, but there were a lot of gang members on the ground floor now, around twenty in total. After the earlier scuffles, Gary was aware that these adults were hard to deal with, and it was quite possible that there were of them as well.

Gary quickly took Stacy off from Austin's shoulder.

"Run!" Gary shouted, and took off towards the exit.

The guards here seemed to be relaxed, most likely assuming that those who had been sent down would have dealt with Gary and Austin by now. They were only two people, after all, and they couldn't imagine how they would beat ten times their number.

Using the surprise factor to their advantage, the trio was able to make a break for the door. Now that Austin no longer had someone on his shoulder, it was easy for him to catch up with Gary whose legs were still strengthened.

A single person soon stood in their way, but at the same time, Austin and Gary threw their fists right in his face knocking him out cold, and bursting through the doors they were finally out of the establishment.

The two high school boys, could see Kai and the others, who had come back to wait for them. They made eye contact for a second. They didn't have to say anything, Kai understood that something must have gone horribly. Then again, the blood on Austin's shirt and the girl over Gary's shoulder would have been a natural giveaway in the first place.

"Hey!!! Who are you filming?!!!" Kai shouted. "Careful, these guys have been filming you!!!"

Keeping it vague on purpose, the blonde haired teenager had assured that everyone who had something to hide, assumed that the gang members had filmed them. It was perfect to cause a commotion in the area, making people disregard Gary and Austin. Thankfully, with the busy street, many people got in the adults' way and demanded for them to delete their footage.

[14 minutes]

'Damn it, I have to get there faster, an ambulance isn't going to be quick enough.'

"Look at them, is that blood?" A bypasser commented, as they had entered another area.

"Maybe something happened, getting a little too frisky."

“Just leave it, the Pincers will probably deal with it.”

Hearing the comments of the others as Gary went by them, he could tell that to the public who went here, this was quite a normal scene. Nobody was panicking, nor did anyone show signs of wanting to call the police. There were a few frightened voices here and there, but they would quickly be calmed down by others. It was just making Gary think there was something deeply wrong with this place.

“Austin.” Gary shouted back at his friend, who was struggling to keep up with him. “I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to leave you. Tell the others I'm going to the hospital I saw nearby when I was running here.”

By now the large teenager was so out of breath that he could only give his friend a thumbs up. The next second, and Gary had picked up the pace, almost doubling his speed as he continued running.

‘How can he run that fast while carrying somebody? He even fought more than me... how is that possible?’ Austin wondered, but more than anything he was worried about the wounds on Gary.

Gary was running as fast as he could, yet the timer was brutally ticking down. The high schooler needed Stacy to a hospital. He had just gotten rid of a huge problem, and he had no desire to trade one Werewolf for another. Sure, she might not be as bad as Billy, but... what if she would be worse?

“Stacy, you can hear me, right? Answer me!” Gary shouted as he rushed along.

“Amy I mi...ss y...ou. So...rry...” Stacy mumbled.

Chapter 229 - 0 Minutes

Austin had managed to get away. He was out of breath and badly gasping for air. He couldn't even remember the last time he had to run that much, his legs were in pain, and his calf muscles were cramping up.

'I much prefer using my fists than my legs.' He thought taking in a big gasp of air and putting himself upright.

Not long after he had left Burnham street, it looked like the Pincer members had given up their chase.

'It seems they can't really afford to leave the area unattended since they need to look after it in case anything else comes up. Smart move, since it would be a good way to distract them and get their leader in the meantime. These guys are definitely not as simple as delinquents, and they don't even care to use weapons, I think Kai might have chosen the wrong gang.'

The fact was the gang wasn't afraid of doing these things so openly, and it made Austin wonder. The police had to be aware of this place, same with the mayor yet no one was doing anything about it. They were either on a high payroll, or had chosen to look the other way because there was nothing they could do about it.

At the moment, Austin was waiting at the bus stop they had arrived at, which was a ten-minute walk from the street. Eventually, the rest of the Howlers showed up, just in time for a bus to appear.

"I know you must have like a million questions you want to ask, but I'll explain on the way, alright? Right now, we have to get to the hospital and check if Gary is okay." Austin stated.

With that the group was off, and just as promised the large teenager explained the details of what had occurred while the two of them had been inside. Of course, he had no clue what Gary had or hadn't done with the girl while inside, he just knew that she had gotten seriously hurt afterward.

After learning all of this, the group had eventually reached a small local hospital nearby. They didn't usually deal with big emergencies, but given that it was the closest nearby, they were sure Gary had taken Stacy here.

As they went inside they looked around the small reception that had around ten people in at most and there was one person with green hair who was sticking out like a saw thumb. Austin was the first to spot Gary. He ran over, and could see him staring off into space, blood on his shoulder.

"Gary, what are you doing here? They couldn't have seen to you so fast!" Austin said, as he went to take a look, but no blood was falling from him. The holes were still in his shirt, and lifting his shirt up out of shock. Austin could see that there was nothing there.

"I told you I'm fine." Gary insisted as pushed Austin's hand away.

Yet, Austin stared at him in pure disbelief. He had seen Gary bleed, he had seen his friend get stabbed multiple times, over and over. How could someone not only survive all those wounds, but heal this fast?

In his head, there was only one explanation, putting this and the other event with the twins, he could only think one thing... their leader had to be an Altered.

'Is that why Kai didn't want to say anything? Did he not want us to snoop around as to how a kid like Gary could have chosen to become an Altered?'

"Hey, why don't we just sit down and relax for a bit? When you're ready, Gary, you can explain what's happened on your side. Meanwhile, let's just pray that the girl will be in good health." Kai suggested in an attempt to calm everyone down.

Innu, after hearing what girl that Gary had selected, was a little worried as well.

Meanwhile, Gary was in the middle of his own thoughts.

'What... have I done?'

[Congratulations! You have endured a lot and have successfully brought the girl to the hospital within 20 minutes.]

[Endurance +1]

[Your base Endurance is now at 16]

[Quest reward: Instant Level Up]

[Congratulations, you have now reached: Level 15]

[A stat point has been granted]

'Is it my fault Stacy got hurt like that? If we never went there, would she have been fine?'

As if reading his mind, Kai went to sit next to him in his seat. The situation felt familiar, which wasn't something Gary really appreciated. If possible, he would like to avoid ever having to be in a hospital again. It was horrible, having to wait for the result of a person's life.

"I'm sure you saw it, when you were running through those crowds of people. Their reaction wasn't what you were expecting because that type of thing happens there frequently." Kai explained. "Like you said, when people are doing things against their will, these types of things are bound to occur. It was unfortunate, but you have done your best by bringing her here."

"I...I know her." Gary finally revealed, which made all the Howlers react. "She's a friend of my sister's... well, former friend... not that it matters anyway. You know, for a long time I thought this underworld stuff was only surrounding me, because I was the one who decided to get involved in it.

"But when I see a regular person that hardly knows me, get involved like that. I realise the truth is quite different. Someone who just goes to school every day, could suddenly get wrapped up in all of this crap.

"Guys, I want to tell you all something." Gary said, looking at them all. He waited, and the others soon gathered around him. Some were nervous, Marie and Austin, for one, believed that he was going to come clean about his secret.

"I think if we are going to be serious about this gang stuff, then you guys should know the truth about me. If you don't want to get involved further, I guess this is your chance to leave." The others said nothing, waiting for Gary to explain.

"I used to be a Transporter for the Underdogs, but I'm no longer part of them. Because I failed to deliver a very important package, they're still looking for me. Since I'm the leader of this gang it will get you guys involved, but I promise I don't plan to just sit back and let things happen. I'll fight them back."

Before the others could give Gary an answer they were interrupted.

“Excuse me!” A woman in a white lab coat said as she came over.

“You are the boy that came in, correct? Do you know her, or do you have her emergency contact information?”

“How is she?” Gary replied, ignoring the doctor's question. There was a strange look on her face, when he asked her that.

“How is she?” The high schooler asked again, and since there was no answer, he decided to push past the doctor. They tried to stop him, but Gary was already running ahead and following the scent of blood that was on his clothes.

Eventually he was led to an emergency room, pushing the door open...he could see Stacy. The heartbeat monitoring equipment was flat, and Gary himself could hear no heartbeat.

Chapter 230 - System Error

Looking at the flat line on the monitor, Stacy unmoving in the bed like so, and the fact that Gary couldn't hear a heartbeat at all confirmed everything. Gritting his teeth, the high schooler couldn't believe it, and with the hospital workers rushing to get him out of the room, they started to pull him back.

Gary didn't resist though, he lacked the energy to do so. Despite the system telling him he had energy, he certainly didn't feel like it. The incoming security guards were able to easily pull him away, but since he didn't make a scene, they just returned the teenager back to the reception room.

It was something that they had experienced with others before and at times, Gary wasn't an exception.

There, a nurse came to ask Gary questions about the now deceased girl. Since the high schooler had brought her earlier, the hospital didn't know her name yet. There seemed to be no form of ID on her either, perhaps a condition from the Pincer gang when working in a place like that. However, seeing the state the green haired teenager was in, Kai voluntarily took over.

He subtly motioned for the rest of the group to get Gary out of the place and let him handle things. With Stacy having died due to blood loss from knife injuries, police were bound to get on this case. Whether someone from the Pincers would cover it up or not was another thing.

Marie and the others were extremely worried about Gary. He had yet to say a single word, simply following behind his friends as if he was on autopilot. All three teenagers tried to reach out to him a couple of times, but there was no response at all.

In the end, the Howlers ended up returning to the Wolf's Pool Club to discuss what to do next. However, they agreed to wait for Gary to be back to his usual self.

Sitting down in one of the sofa seats that the pool club had, his head was coming back a bit.

'When did we get back to the pool club?' He wondered as he touched his head. The high schooler was so out of it he hadn't even registered what his body had been doing. His mind wasn't even thinking straight, but now that he had some time he could think clearly.

'How could it have happened? I don't understand... the system gave me a Quest to get her to the hospital within 20 minutes. Why didn't it work?! I even made it with a few minutes to spare!!!

'Did the timer include operation time? No, that makes no sense! I brought her back and even got a reward, so then why did Stacy still die?'

In his head, Gary was angrily waiting for an answer, yet there was nothing. The system kept as eerily silent as always. Looking over the system's log, he still saw the notification congratulating him, which made him think back to the other option the Quest had given him at the time.

'I guess in the end... the system can't change what actually happens in real life... this is entirely my fault. I SHOULDN'T HAVE PUT MY TRUST INTO A DAMN GAME SCREEN!!!' Gary got up from his seat and angrily swiped the screen interface he had opened, yet to the others he seemed like a madman throwing a fit.

"Gary, are you with us?" Kai asked, since he had finally moved and there looked to be life in his eyes for the first time.

“Huh? Oh, yeah.” Gary replied, noticing the strange gazes the others gave him.

“Good, I was just explaining to everyone that for now, if anyone comes to you and asks we didn’t have anything to do with that girl at the hospital. We can’t afford to get in trouble with the police, not at this stage. Not that I think it will go that far.

“Unless you’ve had better luck, we don’t have any information on the Pincers’ base or their boss’s whereabouts. So we will have to try to do some more digging.”

In the middle of Kai summing things up to Gary, the teenager got up and headed to the door.

“Sorry, Kai. I won’t tell anyone, but I don’t think I’m in the right mindset to talk about taking over their gang right now. Also... she’s not ‘that girl’. Her name is... was Stacy.” Gary said as he closed the door behind him.

The others looked at each other.

“Let’s give him some time.” Austin finally said. “He said he knew the gi- ... Stacy. I saw how he acted in that place... he really gave it his all to save her. ”

Although Austin was somewhat right, it was troubling Gary even more because for one, he had trusted the system, and for two if he had chosen differently, he might have saved her. Eventually, Gary ended up coming home.

—

His sister rushed to the door, seeing him, but she could immediately tell something was up. For one, his footsteps had been quite heavy.

“Gary?” Amy called out.

He continued to walk forward, dragging his feet, until eventually his head was being held up by Amy's body. The teenage boy felt like he needed to cry, yet for some reason no tears were coming out. Seeing her brother in such a state, Amy placed her hands around him and gave him a big hug.

"You have a lot on your plate, huh?" Amy spoke softly. "Whatever's troubling you, I know you won't just let it build up. You'll deal with it. And if you want to talk about it or need me, I'm also here for you."

Amy patted her brother's head, leading him to hug her a bit tighter.

"Remember what Mum used to say. 'We can't keep thinking about the past, it's already happened. If you think too much about the future, you'll miss what's happening now. We need to treasure the present, treasure the now, and that's why it's a gift.'"

"That wasn't Mum, I'm pretty sure that was that old turtle from that panda movie? Master Genbu or something?" Gary chuckled as he lifted his head.

He didn't expect it, but his sister had managed to cheer him up and bring him back down to his senses.

"I wanted to ask you something...do you hate Stacy for what she did that day to you?" Gary asked.

It took a while for Amy to answer, as it seemed like she was really considering the question, and Gary was a little afraid of the answer. He didn't want his sister to speak ill of the dead.

"You know, if you had asked me that question the day when she left me on my own in that cafe, I wouldn't have hesitated to answer that with a yes." Amy replied. "But now... after not saying her for a bit... I actually realised how good of a friend she was, not counting that day... or with Hawk..."

"As far as I can remember, Stacy was always a bit of a scaredy-cat and a pushover. Even though she began playing tough after we came to Bayles, her facade would always break at the smallest sign of trouble."

“Honestly, it’s impressive that she managed to keep everything about you for so long. I didn’t even have to ask her to. She knew I didn’t want her to tell that psycho a word about you and decided to keep it a secret. It wasn’t until the situation had gotten desperate, until she confessed to everything.

“I often think if the roles were reversed if I would have done the same thing... what if I had a family... or what if you were sick. I dunno... maybe I’m just being stupid and looking for reasons to forgive her. I tried staying mad at her, but after the first day at school without her, I realised that I missed her.

“It’s lonely not having her greet me in the morning, having her there to talk to during our breaks. I feel like an outcast now, being the only girl to eat my homemade packed lunch. As stupid as she was in recent times, she always did her best to cheer me up, especially after what happened to Mum...

“I even tried to reach out to her, but she never replied. The most frustrating thing is that I never got the chance to tell her off for what she had done back then. Maybe then I could have forgiven her... but now she’s gone.”

Those words at the end pained Gary more than his sister could have realised. Lifting his hand up, he placed it softly on her shoulder.

“Stacy really was a good friend to you...right?”

Amy didn’t know why, but hearing her brother say that made her start to cry. She rubbed her eyes, not quite understanding where these emotions were coming from. Now, it was Gary’s turn to hold her for a bit, before she excused herself and went into their room.

Still, talking to his sister had allowed him to make up his mind. He took out his phone and entered the Howlers’ group chat, typing away. The others, who were still at the Wolf’s Pool Club, received the message, and shared a smile as they read it.

[I’ve decided, I’m going to take out the whole of that damned Pincers gang tomorrow!

Let me know if you are in or out.]

In less than half a minute, he got replies from the other four.

[In!] x4