

It didn't take us long to get everything together and head out of the bastion. Jessica and Barry were already set from their previous trip back to the high school, wearing their bulletproof vests and decked out with a full utility belt. While we didn't have pistols for them yet, they each had tasers on their hips, as well as multitools, pocket knives, and even handcuffs. Once I was similarly prepared, we left the bastion behind, leaving Roger, Alissa, and Molly to deal with the bags of stuff Jessica and Barry had hauled back from the school. We each had an empty backpack but decided to leave the duffle bags at home since riding a bike with a filled duffle bag would be risky.

We made quick time through the town, silently crossing through streets, cutting through a small wooded path, and even crossing through a soccer field before finally making it to the bike shop. The building, a wooden structure painted red and built vaguely like a classic barn, was almost completely intact. The only damage we could see from the outside was a single broken display window. There wasn't even anything missing from the display, at least as far as I could tell.

"Well... I guess I don't feel so bad for not thinking of it," I commented quietly. "If no one else in the entire town thought of it either."

After using a crowbar to break into the back door of the building, all three of us slowly made our way inside, keeping our eyes peeled and ears open. Just like I had when I raided the tailors, the first thing we did was clear the entire building step by step, room by room. I refused to get ambushed by something just because we were too lazy to check every corner of the building, especially when the building wasn't even that big.

When we had finally checked every room, we made our way back to the actual shop portion of the building. Together, all three of us started looking through what was on display.

"Pretty good selection," I commented, Barry nodding from beside me. "Should probably pick a mountain bike since we will be cutting through yards and wooded areas around town. I-

A short laugh from Jessica cut my sentence off, prompting Barry and I to look at each other before walking around the section we had been looking at to find her. When we did, she was standing in front of another display section.

"Holy hell... We really need to find a way to reward Molly for such a good idea," I commented, stepping past Jessica. "This is going to make things so much easier."

On display were two different bike attachments: one was a little cart designed to hook up to someone's bike, and the other was a small child or toddler carrier. Both of them seemed perfectly capable of holding a good amount of gear, though anything too heavy would most definitely slow down the biker. We spent a few minutes examining them both, and while they both seemed sturdy, it was clear the cart was definitely more stable and tougher. The kid carrier was mostly cloth on a simple aluminum frame, while the cart had a much more robust frame

with wooden panels on the bottom. Both of them were just over two feet wide and three feet long.

"Okay, so we are definitely bringing these with us," I said, both my compatriots nodding in agreement. "Jessica, go back to the storage rooms and check to see if there are any more of these things still boxed up. Barry, let's drag these up closer to the front and start filling them with bike maintenance stuff and anything else useful."

We quickly set to work, gathering anything useful while Jessica searched for more carts in the back. After about twenty minutes, we had everything we needed, from fix-a-flat sealant spray to spare inner tubes, chains, and everything in between. Most of this went into the kid carrier, which Barry had already connected to a bike. The cart, which was also already attached, was mostly filled with a still-boxed second cart. Barry suggested that we put it together, but I shot him down.

"There's no point. We have everything we need from here for now," I pointed out. "We can bring it back home, unload all this, and head back out. I want to do another run of the high school for everything worth bringing over, as well as another sweep through the police station."

"I thought you said there wasn't much left there?" Barry pointed out, looking confused. "That was before we could get both done easily in less than three hours," I explained. "We left behind some stab vests, and there were half a dozen lockers I never cracked open. Chances are there's nothing major there, but now we can double-check pretty easily."

After looking through the store a bit longer, we were finally ready. We pulled our bikes out of the store, using the back entrance to stay hidden as long as possible. Luckily, the wagons fit through the doors. While Jessica and Barry moved the bikes, I grabbed three helmets and followed behind, holding them out to the younger adults as I joined them outside.

"Seriously?" Barry asked, rolling his eyes. "No one is going to care if we don't wear helmets, Aiden. The world ended, remember?"

"What? Are you kidding me?" I asked, pushing the helmet into his hands and passing the other to Jessica before starting to put on my own. "We are riding bikes through a monster-infested town with all sorts of hazards on the streets. I'm pretty sure I'm gonna start wearing it whenever I leave the bastion, on a bike or not! You don't think the helmets soldiers wear are dumb, do you?"

Barry looked surprised, looking down at the helmet. He turned to Jessica, who was already pulling hers on. He let out a defeated sigh before putting his on as well, fastening and pulling the straps tight. With everyone's brains protected, I hopped onto the bike that was connected to the kid carrier, as it was the heaviest at the moment. After a look at both of my compatriots, I pushed off and started to bike away.

Biking with the cart was a bit of a learning experience, especially since I hadn't been on a bike in many years. Still, the learning curve wasn't steep to the point that we failed, and soon we were on our way back to the bastion. Since we were no longer on foot, we could not take the same route we had to get to the bike shop since hopping backyard fences would be a pain. Still, despite that, and despite the fact that the new route was substantially longer, we still arrived back at the bastion in nearly half the time.

We quickly offloaded everything, using the kid carrier and carrier to drag everything up the bastion stairs. However, rather than climb the second set of stairs to the bottom floor of the living area, we walked around the parapette to the large storage space at the same level as the ramparts. We piled all of the bike stuff into the corner, and I made a mental note that we needed some containers and shelves in the storage space in order for it to be viable.

When everything was offloaded, Jessica and Barry brought the carts back down to the bikes while I carried the still-boxed, unassembled cart upstairs. Roger and Molly agreed to put the cart together, and I had a quick conversation with Alissa to explain what was going on. Five minutes later, Jessica, Barry, and I were on our way to the police station.

With our new transportation, the trip took a fraction of the time walking would have taken. Once again, that was despite the fact we had to go a different, less direct route than I had taken before. The bikes were already proving their worth as silent and straightforward transportation.

Before turning the final corner, I stopped my bike, motioning the other two to stop as well, our bike brakes letting out soft squeaks as we slowed. I pushed down my kickstand before tugging my spear off of my back.

"Last time I was here, the front entrance was a bloodbath," I explained in a whisper. It's been a few days, but all that meat probably attracted something."

"We are going to have to clear the entire station before we start going through things, aren't we?" Jessica said, shaking her head.

"No, as much as I wish we could, the place is too big. Three floors and a basement, m offices and the rest," I explained, shaking my head. "We are going to keep this quick and stay alert the entire time. Our targets are the locker rooms and one of the conference rooms. There's a stack of stab vests, as well as two more bulletproof vests in the conference room that I left behind last time, and about a half dozen lockers I want to pop. Just keep your eyes open for anything. Just because the place looks cleaned out doesn't mean it's safe."

They both nodded seriously, and together, we slowly made our way around the last street corner into a more open area where the station was. The building and the hastily assembled defenses built into it looked exactly the same as they had a few days ago. The only difference was the corpses.

What had once been an already gruesome battlefield, with both human and monster corpses, was now an even more gruesome feeding ground. Barry looked more than a little green around the gills, as did Jessica. Having just recently witnessed an entire party of people's heads exploding nearly simultaneously, I was dealing with the gore a bit better.

Slowly but surely, we made our way through the scattered, torn bodies, walking into the police station through the front entrance. All three of us walked through on high alert, peaking around each corner, our weapons at the ready. Jessica, whose shotgun was now slung along her back with a makeshift strap, had my machete at the ready while Barry and I led the way with our spears.

First, we cleared the conference room, moving the vests to the front hall, just by the entrance, before making our way into the locker room. We made quick work of the lockers, finding more police supplies, including some more 9mm ammo, vests, belt holsters, and more of the expected stuff. We even found a box of .38 caliber bullets.

"I *think* this is what Alissa's gun takes," I commented, handing the mostly full box to Jessica. "No reason not to take it either way."

Once we were done with the lockers, we spent a minute debating if we should sweep through the entire building again. I managed to convince Jessica and Barry that I had done a good enough job the first time.

"I spent a good hour going room by room," I explained. "Unless you're looking to loot the offices for supplies, there's nothing big enough to be worth our time. Don't forget, people were holed up here for around a week before they even got here, and they went over the place with a fine tooth comb. It is a miracle we found anything."

"Why were the lockers untouched?"

"Respect, maybe?" I guessed with a shrug. "If there were cops here, they might not have wanted to loot a fellow cop's stuff."

The debate settled, we began making our way out of the station, our arms and backpacks full of our loot. When we arrived back at the bikes, we quickly put everything inside the kid carrier attachment. Once everything was secure, we finally started moving again, now heading back to the high school.

After guiding the bikes into the front entrance of the school, we headed straight for the makeshift living space. At this point, this would be the third trip to transfer supplies, and judging by how we barely managed to fill up the bike cart, which we had disconnected and brought in with us, it was also our last.

"Okay... no more food, no more clothes," Jessica said, scanning the room one last time while Barry and I waited. "No more tools, or toiletries.... Alright, I think that's everything useful."

"Hold on, how did you guys make our spears?" I asked, gesturing to Barry's. "You cut the metal, welded it, and drilled holes."

"Mr. Elroy made them before he died, and before the generator went out," Barry said with a frown. "Using stuff from the shop room."

"I want to see that room," I said eagerly. "The big stuff is useless, but anything that the bastion can run, we can use to fix or make new weapons."

Barry nodded and gestured for me to follow after him as he turned down the hall, walking in the opposite direction we had come from. I grabbed the just over half-filled wagon and followed after the young adult, Jessica letting out a sigh and following as well.

It didn't take long for us to get to the rather large shop room. One half of the large room was filled with woodworking tools, while the other seemed to me more for metalworking, particularly automotive work. The room was mostly clean, save for the largest workstation, which looked recently used. Several tools were laid out on the workstation, and a small but seemingly well-made welder was sitting on the floor. Unfortunately, while it was small for a stick welder, small enough to be powered by the bastion, it was still too big to fit on the bike cart with everything else we had.

"Okay... so we are definitely coming back for a lot of this stuff at some point," I said. "At least we will if the hardware stores are trashed."

"Plan on doing a lot of building?" Barry asked, and I nodded.

"Of course. There is only so much room in the bastion. Eventually, we will have to start making shelters and other structures in the bastion fields," I explained. "There's no way to predict what rewards I might get from my jumps, but I'm hoping to save a lot of people."

"I hadn't considered that," Barry admitted. "But your right, if we are going to save people-"

"... Who exactly will we be saving? From where?" Jessica asked, cutting Barry off with a voice thick with tension. "We've been riding around all day and haven't seen a single person! The whole town is a ghost town filled with monsters!"

The more Jessica talked, the larger the slight hint of mania started to seep out from the cracks in her composure. Before she could explode, Barry put his arms around her, giving her a firm hug. It was a good thing he did, too, because I was frozen in surprise, not having seen the slip coming at all.

"There are people out there, hunkered down and hiding," He assured her. "We just need to keep looking."

"And there will be people beyond the town center, too," I pointed out, finally breaking through my shock. "Lone people hiding in houses that escaped the high concentration of monsters. I mean, it's been less than a week, and the group is already up to seven."

Jessica let out a long breath, her eyes closed as she struggled for a moment to regain control of herself. After a long pause, she nodded, and Barry slowly released her. She gave the slightly younger man a grateful smile before looking apologetic.

"Sorry, I... I guess I just kind of spiraled for a moment," She admitted, rubbing her face. "It just keeps coming around, slapping me when I least expect it. What's happening, the reality of our situation..."

"It's alright. This whole thing has pushed us all too far," I responded, trying to sound supportive. "No one's mental health is good right now."

She nodded, and after a few more minutes of looking around the shop, we returned to the entrance. I quickly hooked the cart back to my bike before we left the school behind and headed back to the bastion.