

A Light in the Rubble

They were dead, along with the majority of the townspeople. Harlow glared down at the pile of ash which was once her home. She could see her brother's favorite scarf, burnt until there was almost nothing left. Dead. They all just lay there, her family, unconscious without a pulse. The ringing in her ears grew louder, as did the screaming of the local townspeople finding their loved one's bodies.

Weedmill Springs, which was once a beautiful town, was burning, along with many nearby. The war had been raging for what felt like years. It was almost over, but it was not quick enough to spare their lives. Her mother, father, and brother were dead and there was nothing Harlow could do about it. Her sister, Stormi, however, was missing and Harlow knew she had to find her. Stormi would not survive on her own. She was too young, weak and innocent to take care of herself.

Harlow dug through the rubble until she found the only thing that had survived the bombing. It was Stormi's stuffed bunny, gifted to her by Auntie Kay on Stormi's sixth birthday. Auntie Kay was one of the many villagers who lost their life in the first bombing many months ago.

"Honey," Harlow whispered, recalling her sister's silly name for the toy.

Harlow brushed the ash off Honey's fur as best she could and crammed it under her cloak.

The warm, salty tears that rolled down Harlow's cheeks burned the large cut below her eye. She wiped away her tears and turned away from the house without looking back. Harlow searched among the survivors, but Stormi was nowhere to be found.

“Stormi!” Harlow screamed. “Stormi! Where are you?”

The people walking by glared at her, but Stormi was nowhere to be seen

After several hours, Harlow's throat was sore from all her yelling. She joined her fellow survivors as they rushed to get to safety before nightfall and did her best to ignore the cries of the wounded children and their grieving mothers.

She couldn't help thinking about how Stormi might be severely wounded like so many of the children among the refugees, but she quickly pushed that thought out of her head. Harlow knew she needed to stay strong and continue searching for her sister. Harlow knew she was Stormi's only hope of survival.

The survivors walked for several hours until it was almost pitch black before finally stopping to set up camp for the night. Many of the survivors set up tents and started fires. The healthy ones passed out the food they had managed to take from the town, making sure the injured children were well fed. Harlow noticed that some people hid their food and refused to share it with others.

Harlow found what looked like a heel of badly burned bread outside of one of the tents. She snatched it and took a small bite, but tucked the rest of it into her cloak because she did not know if she would find any more food in the near future. She moved close enough to one of the fires to stay warm, then wrapped herself in her cloak and tried to fall asleep.

Harlow stirred awake before the sun had risen and noticed that some of the other survivors had already left the camp. She was cold and thirsty, but there was no water to drink. She wrapped herself tightly in her cloak and started up the road. She knew she was a few miles from the next village, but was not sure if it had survived. No one had heard from that village in a long time.

Harlow knew Stormi was a street-smart kid and would head for the nearest village. Harlow just hoped that she was heading in the same direction. She walked for miles as the sun came up and warmed her. At last, she reached the beginning of the village and felt a sense of relief when she saw that it was undamaged. Stormi might be here. She might be alive.

Many other survivors made it here before Harlow and she could that the supplies in the village were limited. There would not be much chance of getting food or shelter here and Harlow worried about how she would feed Stormi even if she did find her.

She made her way through the town peeking into every home hoping to see her sister's face. As she reached the edge of town, she was ready to give up hope. When she peeked into the window of the second to last home in the village, however, she froze. Sitting with a family Harlow had never seen before was her sister Stormi. She had a smile on her face and she looked better fed than she had when she had a home.

Harlow ran to the front door and raised her hand to knock. Then she stopped. She pulled the burned crust of bread from her cloak and paused. This was all she could offer Stormi and she didn't know if she could find any more food. Harlow realized that her sister was better off with these generous people than she would be with her. She knew she might not be able to provide her sister with the care she needed. If Harlow knocked on the door, Stormi would insist on coming

with her and Harlow knew she couldn't let her sister walk away from her best chance of survival. Harlow put the bread back under her cloak and pulled out the stuffed bunny she had found in the ashes. She leaned it against the door.

She patted Honey on the head and, holding back her tears, said, "Tell Stormi I love her."

As hard as it was for her to walk away, knowing that she would never see her sister again, the thought of Stormi being safe and part of a family made Harlow smile as she headed up the road.