

[b]Chapter 7: Shattered[/b]

"Was it Elian who saw them, or Andie?" Pietro says. "I wouldn't trust Elian, they were doe-eyed over Ms. Delacroix, so they were probably distracted."

"It was Andie," Catarina says significantly.

You're outside in one of the fields in a Science class while the students do quadrat samples, setting out their squares and recording any plant and animal life they find, and the condition therein. It's nearly lunchtime, and the sun is on the verge of becoming uncomfortably hot. Some of the sheep in the neighboring field are sheltering beneath the bushes and trees while others, including Matilda the much-argued-over young ewe, gambol haphazardly.

Korzha is over on the other side of the field, which gives the children leeway for gossip. Apparently, Viola and Simone were seen kissing at the art show.

"I don't care about whatever Simone was up to," Catarina says piously, then rather ruins it by saying, "Viola, though? Really? I thought she was on my side."

"Viola's not on anyone's side," Pietro says. "Remember when she stamped on my notebook because I said her parents were trash?"

7-quake *choice 30#1 (line 31)

- ★ This is entirely uncomfortable. "I really don't want to hear about anyone kissing, thank you." [+Emotional]
- I give them a severe look. "Whatever's going on, it's private. It's rude to pry." [+Humane]
- "You two. This doesn't sound like Science to me. Get on with your work." [+Decisive]
- They're old enough to understand the consequences for not paying attention in class. I let them be. [+Rebellious]

Pietro snorts a laugh behind his hand and bends his head to examine the quadrat.

Catarina rolls her eyes, but the talk subsides until the quadrats are completed and they're starting to get ready to go back indoors.

"I don't think," Catarina says, walking alongside you with Pietro, "I'd want to do that."

"What, at a party?" Pietro says. "But it's part of the thrill. At least, that's what it says in books. I haven't really...experienced that myself. Obviously I know how it all [i]works,[/i] and everything."

He's gone a little pink, but Catarina doesn't seem to notice. "No, the kissing bit," she says thoughtfully. "I mean, I get why people like it, it's just never been something I've been interested in. I don't know if I ever will be."

7-quake *choice 60#2 (line 75)

- "I never want to hear about any of this."
- ★ "It's great that you're figuring out what's right for you."
- I leave them to talk among themselves.
- "I feel like that myself. If you ever want to talk, I'm here."

Catarina gives you an appraising look, as though she's reassessing you after having dismissed you previously. "You know what, thank you."

"So do you think you'd want to walk out with someone," Pietro says, "if they were all right with the not kissing and whatever?"

Catarina stiffens a little. "Well. I mean, I'm very busy," she says. "I don't know. I'm not sure if I have time for romance and that sort of thing until I finish school. And it definitely wouldn't be with Simone, of all people!"

"I wasn't saying Simone," Pietro says, but Catarina is rather ruffled for the rest of the walk back to the laboratory.

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As you settle in for the students to analyze their results, Raffi comes to sit beside you as usual on one of the lab stools. Korzha, handing out textbooks, pauses briefly at your vantage point to give you a brief small smile.

As they go Raffi whispers, "I swear I've never seen them do that except with Matia. And definitely not in class! You must have a magic aura!"

7-quake *choice 111#2 (line 123)

- "Something like that."
- ★ "I've no idea what you're talking about."
- It's probably because of the work we're doing, though I can't say that.

Raffi carries on watching Korzha thoughtfully. He starts to murmur something else when the ground shifts beneath your seat. The walls judder; flasks fall and smash on the ground. Students shriek.

An earthquake.

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Korzha shouts instructions but their voice is lost among the panic. A few of the students know exactly what to do—Andie dives beneath the table, cradling the back of their head with their hands—but most are in a state of disarray.

"We should check on the animals!" Pietro yells, and he and Catarina start to make a break for the door.

7-quake *choice 147#3 (line 179)

- I shout quickly to be quiet and get on the floor. [Tests Decisive, +Dutiful]
- I act calmly, leading by example, and get to safety with Catarina. [Tests Objective, +Decisive]
- ★ I tell Catarina and Pietro they need to prioritize themselves first. [Tests Callous, +Objective]
- This is terrifying. I need to be as careful as I can. [Tests Cautious, +Emotional]

"It's not safe outside," you say. "Focus on your own safety."

Catarina hesitates, looking between you and Pietro. As the floor shudders again, a chair hits her in the side and she yelps in pain; you wrench your shoulder hauling her under the table. After a moment, Pietro follows her.

The ground rumbles again and Korzha's voice rings out again, this time loud and clear. You bundle more students under the desks, then join Catarina and Pietro beneath theirs, showing them how to crouch to protect their heads. Another judder, and something crashes overhead. There's a thud from somewhere outside.

Then, silence.

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"Keep under the desks," Korzha barks out as murmurs buzz around the laboratory. "And be quiet."

You breathe deeply while you wait for the moments to pass. There's one final smaller shock, and then silence again. It's several minutes before Korzha calls out once more.

"We'll go to the assembly point now," they say. "In silence."

You emerge from under the desk. Catarina is breathing carefully and has her hand pressed to her side, her face a little ashy; your lower back feels horribly painful. Catarina looks alarmed as she sees your face, but she obeys the order for silence.

Alarm gongs are ringing out all across the school. You're too far from the glass houses to see how they've fared, but you spot tiles that have slipped off the roofs of the classroom buildings,

and smashed windows. One of the cars in the parking area has slumped into a narrow fissure that's opened up in the dusty ground.

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Students and staff file silently into the assembly point in the drive outside the entrance. With the dogs Bramble and Lulu sitting tensely at her feet, Kass is issuing brisk orders: it all seems planned and well-organized, despite the emergency.

"All right, we're accounted for," Kass says, after taking a register of all the classes and adults. "Good. And the buildings seem to have weathered it all right."

7-quake *choice 232#3 (line 235)

- "There could be more quakes after this one."
- "We need to check the buildings for structural damage."
- ★ "Are the telephone lines and the generators all right?"
- "You should check for any fires or other hazards."
- "Korzha and I should check the glass houses."

Kass nods quickly. "I want some staff to head to Elene's Prospect," she says. "You'll go there while we clear up. Doria, Arturo, and I have things covered here. We've had quakes here in the past, and the buildings are far more modern. Town's more vulnerable."

Korzha does not exactly glare at her, but they clasp their hands behind their back in a way that shows their displeasure. "It's important that the laboratories are dealt with."

"Of course," Kass says, "but we have a responsibility to town as well. Thank you, Captain Korzha, that will be all. Specialist Tanse, I'd like you to go along to town too."

7-quake *choice 245#1 (line 246)

- ★ I nod. I want to show that I can deal with emergencies.
- "Of course. I have experience in this area."
- I nod. I'd like to check on Savarel and Matia.
- "What about Catarina?"
- "But there are important things here too."
- "But there are things I need to sort out with Korzha."

"You'll be invaluable there," Kass says.

You head to the parking area, where Maddalena's revving up one of the trucks. On Kass's orders, Tibor and Henriette are already piling cases of clean water and canned food into the back of another in case it's needed. It's not long before Raffi's driving you, Henriette, and

Korzha along the potholed road behind Maddalena and the others, swerving to avoid cracks. Korzha's in the front, silent, while Henriette's jiggling her leg nervously as she looks anxiously out of the window.

"It's the worst thing about living here," she says. "We hardly ever get this at home. Avalanches in the mountains, yes. But the biggest earthquakes just rattle the chimney pots a bit."

7-quake *choice 278#4 (line 291)

- "We'll handle it. I'm sure it'll be all right." [+Decisive]
- I keep quiet, looking out for danger. [+Cautious]
- "I don't see why we're leaving the school when that's where we should be." [+Callous]
- ★ "It's the right thing that we're helping out Elene's Prospect." [+Humane]

"Hmm," Henriette says crossly, reaching out to grip the door handle to steady herself. She looks a little sick. "It's not our job. I wish we were staying at Ozero."

"I don't like leaving Simone either," Raffi says, "but if we can do more in town, that's good, right? There's loads of people there who could need us."

Korzha does not respond, but from behind their shoulders look stiff. The noonday sun grows higher in the bright blue sky, shimmering a heat haze on the road ahead and the spreading plains. If it wasn't for the nervous energy hanging in the air, it could be a pleasant summer field trip.

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In Elene's Prospect, a crowd has gathered in the market square. Trestle tables have been set up bearing canteens of water, along with a first-aid tent which you recognize from the precautionary measures at the art show. Mayor Tedesco is holding a clipboard and standing at the end of a long line of townsfolk asking questions, ordering them to check through buildings and make sure everyone is safe. There's an air of urgency about the place, but not panic.

"Ah! Good! Thank you for coming," they say as they see your little group. They consult their clipboard and make a couple more notes. "Honored Lidia's going around the farms, Pastor Lopes is with Dr. Rojas. Specialist Tanse, I think you'd be best placed—"

Before they can finish their sentence, Savarel sticks her head out of the tent. Her face is smeared with dirt, but she looks in decent shape. Her dark eyes are alight with intense focus.

"I'd like you here," she calls. "Thank you."

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You join her and Dr. Rojas in the tent. You've not spoken with the doctor much, but you recognize her from trips to church and town meetings: she's a small, brisk woman a little older than you with brown skin who wears her dark hair in a severe bun. One market stallholder fractured her elbow as a door jamb collapsed, and Dr. Rojas is busy putting her arm in a sling.

While you're checking a young girl's ankle for breaks—it turns out to just be a sprain—Matia's mother Giorgia hobbles in.

"Elene preserve us," she says, sitting heavily on an upturned crate. "Matia ordered me to come here since I was feeling a little faint. He and Roland are sorting out things in the store. It's awful seeing it like that."

She sniffs and wipes her eyes.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she says as you give her a canteen of water. "I just feel a bit shaky. I don't want to take up your time. I should get back to the store."

7-quake *choice 329#1 (line 330)

- ★ "We're here to help you. That's our priority." [Tests Dutiful]
- "It's best to take every precaution to stay safe." [Tests Cautious]
- "I know you're worried. I am, too. But we're here." [Tests Emotional]
- "Worry about yourself, not us. We'll do whatever we can, no matter what." [Tests Humane]

Giorgia nods with a wan smile: there's a hint of her usual more jolly self. "I wish they'd come out with me," she says, fiddling with her handkerchief. "I hate to think of Roland getting stuck under shelves or something. Maybe I should go and see what they're up to."

Dr. Rojas looks up. "You stay right there, ma'am," she says sharply. "We're not having you keel over on my watch."

Giorgia sniffs. "I don't care for your tone, young lady," she says, but she sips her water and remains in place.