



The
Outside

Book 4

Sara Michelle

Day 14

*My New
Normal*

9:00 p.m.

I think the shocking information from Dr. Jenkins was enough for us this evening. Cecilia looked pale, and my stomach was twisted in knots. Everyone else just looked drained. This man could be the answer to our prayers, or at least he could provide some answers. Millions of questions ran through my head. Why did this happen? Was this disaster worldwide? Was

anywhere safe? And more importantly, what was next? According to Dr. Jenkins, more disasters were on the way.

There had been clues before the earthquake. But society had been too ignorant and busy to notice. Yes, it was obvious that the world had been in the middle of various crises. Why hadn't we realized that these "crises" were symptoms of something much larger? Theories of the apocalypse were reported like ghost stories around a campfire—only spoken of to arouse excitement or give a little scare. *That* wasn't reality. *That* wasn't anything to worry about. How wrong we all had been.

After Dr. Jenkins had finished describing his work, everyone in the shelter's kitchen sat shocked and silent.

You could hear a pin drop. Dr. J stood there awkwardly, his hands swaying slightly by his side. Renee's head rested motionless in her hands. Brittany chewed on her fingernails and stared at the floor. Henry and Michael stood quietly, unmoved.

I decided I should probably get the conversation going. I stood up and cleared my throat, awakening everyone from the spell of silence. I held my hand out toward Dr. J and offered him a smile.

“Dr. Jenkins, you're welcome to stay here. We have extra rooms with hot water and bedding.”

He looked confused.

“How in the world did you guys manage this?”

I smiled and glanced at Cecilia. “Pure luck, sir. My girlfriend and I wandered for days after the quake. But then we decided to check this place out. We figured that if it was made to withstand the deadliest blizzards, then it must still be in working order. Luckily, we were right.”

Dr. Jenkins nodded his head thoughtfully. “Very smart. Not many kids your age would be able to stay calm and think rationally after experiencing something like this.”

I nodded my head and watched as Renee stood up.

“We don’t have much here,” she explained to Dr. J. “But we have what we need to stay alive ... at least for a while.”

Dr. J nodded his head. “At this point I’m willing to eat absolutely anything. I’m just surprised everything is still working as well as it is.”

“So were we,” I said, sitting down across from Dr. J at the table. Everyone had dispersed from the kitchen and was doing who knows what. Renee stood over the oven, cooking. Cecilia, I guessed, had returned to our room. Brittany announced that Daniel needed a bath. The only people left in the kitchen were Dr. J, Renee, Henry, Michael, and me.

We decided now would be a good time to plan an itinerary for our supply mission. Michael, Henry, and I were planning to leave the day after tomorrow. We needed to come to some

agreement on a couple of things before then.

Michael was insistent on the idea of digging through people's houses to see what we could find. For some reason that just felt wrong. I also wasn't too fond of discovering any decaying bodies. We hadn't seen a lot of dead people, certainly less than I expected, but I knew it was bound to happen eventually. My goal was to avoid it for as long as possible.

I personally believed that looking through grocery, convenience, and other retail stores would be more promising than the houses. The buildings were built to commercial code, which meant they were (hopefully) more intact. Plus the chances of finding a

higher quantity of needed items in one spot would be much greater. Michael and Henry still felt like going through a bunch of houses closer together was a better way to go.

In the end, we agreed that we would be heading north toward LoDo: the Lower Downtown Historic District. Cecilia and I had arrived at the shelter from the south, so I had no idea what to expect in LoDo. But by traveling this way, we would pass by some of the richer suburbs, like Cherry Hills Village, as well as plenty of retail spots.

Survival supplies were the next issue on the agenda. How to handle the nights was the big topic. The weather had been pretty good the last day or so and much warmer than usual for

this time of year ... but it was still the middle of winter on the Front Range. The weather was the one thing that you could never count on.

Renee had discovered some sleeping bags while poking around the storage rooms. Plus we would each have a box of matches and food to carry with us. I had no idea how we could prepare for every possible situation, but I figured we'd have to make due.

Day 15

10:00 p.m.

Yeah, I miss my old life. Who doesn't? I miss eating full meals. Junk food. I miss television. I miss my mother's smile. I miss my cell phone. Texting. Xbox. You name it. I even miss school. On a normal night, I would be working on my chemistry homework. Mr. Krieger was brutal with the homework assignments.

The Super Bowl would have been coming up soon. Cecilia and I would