

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 begins with the narrator waking up in Cat's bed, feeling disoriented. This unusual sleeping arrangement was a consequence of wanting to avoid the painful memories of a recently lost roommate. Their shared bed wasn't born from intimacy, but rather as a means to comfort each other amid emotional distress, particularly surrounding Nasha and Eight. As the narrator slowly regains his senses, Cat asks about his plans for the day. Upon realizing that it's his day off, the narrator is left to contemplate how best to spend his free time, but the weight of their situation lingers over his thoughts. Cat, mentioning she only has a half-shift due to her close calls at work in Security, brings a sense of shared frustration over the unpredictability of their lives.

The atmosphere between them is casual but strained, underscored by their humble and worn-out clothing, a reflection of their bleak living conditions. The conversation transitions as Cat proposes breakfast, leading to light-hearted banter about sharing food. This small act of camaraderie stands in stark contrast to their isolated environment, with the halls of their facility nearly deserted. The narrator, grappling with the loss of community and the harsh realities of their situation, notes the smell of sweat in the air, symbolic of the exhaustion felt since their arrival. Their stop at the chem shower is a reminder of the scarce comforts they have, with hot water being a luxury that remains out of reach, further emphasizing their limited resources. These details highlight the gritty nature of their lives in this new, oppressive environment, where even basic needs are hard to meet.

As they reach the cafeteria, the lack of people becomes immediately apparent, reinforcing the sense of isolation. The narrator realizes he's running low on calories, likely a result of Eight's large breakfast earlier. Cat orders a yam-tomato scramble, while the narrator is left with cyclo paste—a bland, unappetizing meal. Their

conversation reveals a stark contrast between their experiences: while Cat seems to accept the limited food, the narrator struggles to cope with the constant rationing. The easygoing conversation soon turns to Cat asking about the narrator's past, hinting at the possibility of a criminal history, but the narrator swiftly denies the assumption, reassuring her that he's not a criminal. This moment adds depth to their interaction, as it introduces a point of tension while allowing them to further connect and understand each other's backgrounds.

After breakfast, Cat expresses gratitude for the narrator's companionship the previous night, suggesting that she would like to spend more time together. This sentiment reveals a growing bond between the two, though the narrator's mind is also preoccupied with the ethical questions surrounding their roles as Expendables. These lingering concerns about their societal status and value continue to weigh on him as he contemplates the complexities of his existence. Just as he's preparing for a quiet, contemplative day, a colleague interrupts his plans, calling him back to work for a new tomato experiment. This sudden shift in focus highlights the ever-present pressure of their roles, where even moments of respite are fleeting and quickly overshadowed by the demands of their work.

The chapter concludes with Eight returning from his duties, sharing disappointing news about the crops. The narrator, already burdened with the complexities of their situation, internally reflects on the tension building within their group. As he grapples with the fragile dynamics between the crew members, particularly concerning their roles and relationships, it becomes clear that their survival depends not just on physical sustenance but on the precarious balance of their emotional and moral decisions. This creates an ongoing tension, as the weight of their existence seems increasingly tied to navigating both their physical survival and the complicated, often conflicting, dynamics within their team.