**Infected**

“Hey George, it’s been a while!” Jono said as he gave me a high five. I sat down across from him and took a sip from my iced coffee.

“Ya, it sure has, how’s life been?” I asked

“It's been fine, but school's been a dragging.”

“Same here,” I sighed, taking another sip, “Same here.”

After a couple of minutes of catching up Jono asked, “How’ve the rest of our friends been doin’?”

“Peter finally got a job.”

“Really? I never thought someone that lazy could even get to the interview, let alone get hired.”

“We were all just as surprised,” I said, gulping down some more coffee, not knowing what else to do.

Our catching up was interrupted when the bell on the door rang as an odd customer shuffled in.

“What can I get for you?” The person behind the counter asked, trying not to be rude to the strange man who just stood there grunting without blinking or breathing. Suddenly, he attacks someone nearby. Luckily, someone beats the clearly insane man to death with a chair.

“Oh my god!” Jono yelled as he jumped out of his seat in horror. I reeled back in shock over what had just happened.

“What was that?” I asked. Everyone was clueless. Suddenly, an emergency news broadcast blares on the screen in the coffee shop.

“All citizens are required to be in their houses before 9 pm. All violators will be arrested and quarantined.”

“We need to get out of the city. Now,” I asserted, trying to get Jono to hurry up. He just sat staring at the infected man, now dead.

“But the traffic will be horrific,” he argued, “we'll never get out in time.”

“Let’s run then,” I said, getting ready to leave, “like, literally. We can take back roads and alleys and make it out before curfew.”

We were running down the sidewalk now. I guessed we had about 20-30 kilometres total to go to get out of the city. Jono took a left into an alley and I followed quickly behind.

“Do you remember how to get to my place?” I asked,”It's not far.”

“Still the same apartment?”

“Yeah.”

We were dodging the hordes of cars and infected. Skirting down the lesser known roads and alleys, we made good time. Seemingly, there were more and more infected as time passed. This wasn’t like any other disease I've seen. It seemed to resurrect the dead. Around 1-2 p.m., we finally worked our way to my apartment. Luckily, it's akin to a motel, meaning I could get to my room from the outside.

“Man, it's been awhile since I've been here. The memories this place brings,” Jono said as he plopped down on the couch out of exhaustion.

“Miss it already?” I responded, “It hasn't even been a year.”

“Did you ever end up finding a new roomie?” Jono asked, avoiding the mildly insulting question.

“Nah, I just put in some overtime to make up the difference, but you're always welcome here.”

“I’m tempted, my new college is way worse.”

“I can tell,” I said as I walked over to the closet and took my out backpacking backpack. I began to pack for the long trip we had ahead of us.

“What's that supposed to mean?” Jono asked.

“You’ve just seemed so drained since you started school over there,” I said having only paused my hasty packing for a second to gauge his reaction before continuing.

“Got another one of those?” he asked, referring to my pack.

“No, but I have my old school bag in the closet.”

“K.”

We packed all the necessities. All of the food I had, clothes, 10 litres of water, filtered, laptop, just in case, my journal, along with other odds and ends.

“Why do you have a handgun?” Jono inquired.

“Self defense,” I responded as I put a clip in and cocked the slide. “Emergencies only. This is an emergency. I’ve been trained and we’ll be better off with it.”

“Fine.”

“Wanna stay inside until tomorrow? We could get a good meal in, get a full night’s sleep, and feel better tomorrow. The power is still on, I can make coffee.”

“I don't know...”

“For old times’ sake?” I nearly begged.

“Fine, but only if I get two cups in the morning.”

“If that's what it takes,” I giggled.

It was just like old times. We sat on the couch in my tiny apartment playing PC games on the TV while drinking Dr. Pepper, the best soda. We ended up having to play offline because, as it turned out, the internet had gone down.

“We should probably go to bed soon,” Jono said, “We can get eight hours if we go to bed now.” He got into bed and I followed after shutting down my computer.

“Just one more hour,” I said jokingly.

“Fine.”

He got me up at 9:45 the next morning. We had poptarts for breakfast because, even in the apocalypse, we were too lazy to make a real breakfast. Two cheap cups of coffee later we hit the road again.

“Should we go to Peter's place and check on him?” I asked, “It’s on the way, right?”

“Yeah, sounds good. We can crash there tonight if he's still home,” Jono replied, turning a corner and starting to walk to the end of the alley, which was blocked off by a wire fence facing the street.

A cop was walking backwards down the street, shooting all of the infected he could. He went to reach for another clip. He didn’t find one. He freaked out. The cop started sprinting towards us, but the horde was gaining on him. He almost made it over, but the horde caught him.

He screams, “God save me!”

In his scramble to get over, he dropped his handgun on our side of the fence.

“I’m making a break for it,” I said.

“Don't do it, that fence is about to fall over!”

“I can make it there and back in time, just be ready to sprint.”

The second I get out of the way of the fence, it collapses. Jono and I scramble up a nearby fire escape to get away from the horde.

“Now, that, *that* was a close one!” Jono exclaims while trying to catch his breath.

“Agreed, do you know how to use this?” I asked while loading the handgun.

“Vaguely...”

After I taught him the basics, we just sat up there for a while and waited for the horde to shamble off somewhere else. We end up talking about everything that had happened in our lengthy time apart.

Somewhere between four and five we hit the road again, carefully climbing down the fire escape and keeping our eyes peeled for any infected. Nearly sprinting to make up for lost time, we do our best to avoid both infected and traffic. Finally, at eight, we reached Peter’s apartment complex.

When I went to open the doors, they suddenly flung open and a few dozen infected shambled out.

I screamed, blowing the heads off a couple while trying to not get bit. “Do you think Peter is okay?”

“I have no idea!” Jono screamed over the ruckus while trying his best to assist.

After whittling our way through them all we sprinted up to Peter’s room. Jono slammed his fists on the door as hard as he could.

“Peter!” Jono screamed at the top of his lungs, “get down here!”

“Jono, more infected!” I yelled to him as a couple shuffled down the hallway. After making quick work of them, Jono kicked Peters door in.

“Peter, where the is...” Jono noticed the open window. He snatched the note pinned on the wall. He just stared at it.

“What is...”

“The infected didn’t get him. He made sure of that.”

“No… he didn’t…”

“Yep,” Jono said.

“No,” I cried, “it can’t be.”

I sat down next to him on Peter's couch. I rested my head on Jono's shoulder and continued crying softly. Jono had a look of disbelief plastered on his face as he stared into nothing. We sat there for a long time, me leaning more and more into him...

“At least the infected didn't get to him,” I sobbed into Jono's shoulder.

“Yeah…” Jono said distantly.

“We should probably barricade the door.”

“Yeah…”

I got up off his shoulder and grabbed a couple chairs and did my best to block off the door.

“I'll make dinner tonight,” I said, “grilled cheese sound fine?”

“Sure...”

I hugged him. “There was nothing we could have done.”

“That's the problem.”

“We need to focus on moving forward,” I tried to console him, ”we can mourn outside the city.”

“I'll try...” He said, attempting to perk up some.

Sitting down at dinner, the conversation wasn't that lively, but at least he didn’t seem quite as depressed. We were both trying to hide our real feelings, at least for the moment.

“Wanna turn in early?” I asked, hoping he would feel better after a full night's sleep.  
 “That sounds nice.”

I woke up with something on top of me. An infected had somehow gotten inside, despite the barricade. Jono, realising what was happening, threw it into the wall and punched it into the face. He then grabbed the handgun off the bedside table and blew its brains out.

Jono screamed after killing it.

“Yeah.” I responded, shaken, but not affected that much.

“No,” he said, “God, no, you've got to be kidding me!” He screamed while holding his hand.

“What? Oh no. No, no, no this can't be true.”

“What's the worst that could happen?” Jono asked, in denial.

“You know the answer to that.”

“Ugh, after all of this, now I get bitten. Life blows.”

“Understatement of the century.” I said, “Let's hope for the best, but plan for the worse.” I grabbed the handgun from him. I went into the kitchen and packed everything. I needed to run, and this time I won't have any company. “The second we see the first convulsions I'm bolting.”

“Please no,” he cried, “Th-this can't be happening. This can't be happening.”

“Well it is and you know what happens. We’ll know in about fifteen minutes, won't we.” I cared too much to watch my closest friend die.

“Yeah…”

“This is the best option, I won’t have to kill an infected you or get bit.”

“Yeah...”

Sure enough, fifteen minutes later, it happened.

I screamed as he hit the ground. It lasted around thirty seconds, but it felt like an eternity. When one of your closest friends contracts a terminal illness in front of you, it changes who you are.

He stood up, tears streaming down his face. I hugged him. I handed him the handgun with a bullet in the chamber, kissed him, and sprinted. I didn't want to leave. I wanted to stay until the end, but I just couldn’t. I couldn't stand to watch him go like that.