The Zombie Chronicles Book 1: Outbreak

The First Ten Chapters

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A pdf preview of TZC: Outbreak

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Chapter 1

"My weekend? Not much new on my side. I did get up to the foothills and get a small hike in. Then I took the family out for…" Max was sitting at his desk writing an email to his buddy in Iowa when heard a terrible scream that brought his typing to an immediate stop. He waited a second, listening intently trying to determine if he truly had heard something or just imagined it. A second scream came echoing down the hallway and into his open cubical. Max was out of his chair and jogging down the hall immediately. As Max rounded a corner he nearly collided head on with Fred from accounting. He glanced off of Fred's right side and continued down the hall calling over his shoulder, "Call the police Fred, I think someone is hurt!"

After sprinting about a hundred feet, Max skidded to a stop in front of the Marketing offices. Inside he saw someone laying on the ground with another person kneeling over them. The woman on the ground appeared to be Nancy, head of the marketing department.

"I think she had a heart attack." said Bob, who worked in the neighboring department, 'Permits'.

"A heart attack? With all this blood?" Max questioned, still standing in the hallway.

"Hey, are you okay? There's blood on your shirt." Bob said pointing to Max.

As Max looked down at his shirt he noticed Fred lumbering around the corner,

"What blood? Hey Fred turn around and call for some paramedics! Dumb ass." Max uttered the last part quietly to himself.

"I think it is too late for an emergency crew, she's dead Max."

"No, look, her hand is starting to move, I had better start CPR." Max quickly got down beside the woman and gently put his right hand under the back of her neck, he then placed his other hand on her forehead and gently tipped her whole head back causing Nancy's mouth to open. Max pressed his lips to hers and suddenly her eyes sprang wide open.

In order to give Max the necessary room to work around Nancy, Bob had retreated towards the doorway. Looking down on Nancy and Max he said "Nancy you are going to be all right, we have someone calling for an ambulance, just stay still and....Aaah! Fred! What the fuck are you doing! Stop it man! Stop iiiiitttttt!" Bob's gurgling noises slowly rose in pitch until they took on the rhythm and cadence of a whistling train.

Max, trying to comfort Nancy looked up to see Fred nuzzling on Bob's neck like a newborn on his mothers breast, the man slowly pressed his lips and mouth against Bob's neck and slurped the blood that was coming out of his severed artery. Nancy started to rise, Max automatically held her down.

"Nancy you need to stay still until the ambulance gets here. Nancy! Stop it Nancy!" Max looked at the woman and saw a dull glint in her eyes, just like Fred's.

Mercifully, Bob's his high pitched gurgling had stopped and when Max looked back he saw that Fred was now holding Bob up and was more actively eating through Bob's neck. Slowly Max sat back into a crouching position, his hands no longer holding her down, Nancy rose up simultaneously focusing her intense gaze on Max. Quicker than he would have thought possible Nancy reached for Max with her colorless arms.

'I always liked that shirt on Nancy.' Max thought, followed immediately by, *'I gotta get out of here!*' Nancy's flailing arms caught on Max's shirt and started pulling him towards her now gaping mouth. Max pulled back and ended up on his butt, frantically backpedaling, stomach up, on his feet and hands to stay ahead of Nancy.

Backing into the wall in the hallway Max knew it was time to get up and run, he just could not bring himself to do it. The scene that was unfolding around him was just too much to be real. Nancy was slowly crawling towards him.

Sitting with his back against the wall, Max could feel the coldness of the tile floor on his hands. His brain was frantically sending messages to his legs to get up, get moving, but they did not respond. Slowly, Nancy crawled towards his out stretched legs.

...four feet away.

'*This had to be some kind of nightmare.*', Max thought, *'This cannot not be happening.'*

...three feet away.

Move legs, MOVE. The message was sent but all Max could manage was to spread his feet apart. There, picture framed between his feet, Max could see Nancy's slack face moving ever closer and yet he just sat still letting her get closer.

...two feet away.

He could feel the blood underneath him, who was it from? Nancy? Bob? Fred? Himself? It had spread across the floor and now was soaking into his pant legs. This was it, he was going to die.

Slowly he bent his right knee, pulling his foot backwards. Max's brain fired a signal and his foot snapped out towards Nancy's face. He had intended a direct hit on her nose, but the heel of his shoe glanced off of her left cheek exposing muscle and bone. Nancy still advanced, her cloudy eyes never leaving her prey. He kicked again, this time skipping a blow off of her forehead which caused her whole head to jerk back unnaturally. Nancy managed to wrap her lifeless hand around his left ankle. Her touch caused an uncontrollable panic to course through him. Frantically Max kicked again but the fear of desperation caused him to completely miss the intended target. Max could feel himself sliding towards Nancy, she was pulling him. Max spread his fingers and tried to dig his nails into the floor, something, anything to stop her. But the crimson liquid provided no friction against the tile. This was it.

Nancy lowered her head towards Max's calf and that spurred Max to act again, he swung his left foot around, briefly thinking of the old movie "My Left Foot", it swung around and thudded into Nancy's head. Her head snapped back and she let go of Max's ankle. Unable to regain his position leaning up against the wall, Max rolled his body like a log as far away from Nancy as he could get, then he went face down and climbed to his hands and knees. Nancy scrambled around uselessly on the floor, Bob's blood was working against her as she struggled to get some traction and make headway towards Max. At this point Fred chewed through the last of Bob's neck and the man's body fell on top of Nancy, distracting her from Max. As Max watched Nancy growled in a feral manner and started chewing Bob's legs, as if this horror was not bad enough, her positioning looked like something out of a pornography movie Max remembered seeing when he was in college. Fortunately Max was able to tear his eyes away from the gruesome scene before he could see the parody truly begin. Max climbed to his feet, then edged his way along the wall until he could muster his strength enough to run back to the dubious safety of his cubical.

"Holy shit! Dude, what happened to you?!" this voice was from Max's arch office rival, Steve 'the bastard'. Death has a way of changing all alliances and Max was really glad to see Steve, to see anyone who did not have the 'dead' eyes of Fred and Nancy. Slowly Max turned his head and looked at Steve and raised an eyebrow while bringing his finger to his lips in the universal gesture of 'Shut the F up' or 'shhhh' depending on the age of the target audience. Steve stopped in his tracks and, for once, shut up. Becoming more aware of himself Max realized he was coated in Bob's blood, his shirt, previously a nice button up of one hundred percent cotton, was now a wet bloody covered mess. His khakis had fared no better and both hands were crimson splattered as well. Had some of it come off on his lips?

Thinking quickly Max ran down possible things to say, 'I didn`t do it' sprang to mind, then he thought of explaining that apparently Fred and Nancy were zombies and eating Bob in Nancy's office right now, 'Nope', he decided, that would take too long. Instead he whispered, "Fred went crazy and killed Nancy and Bob, he is in Nancy's office. Go call the police!"

The blood, the 'shhhh' and the whisper must have worked as Steve turned without a word and ran quietly off towards his cube. Max followed just as silently, like a shadow and soon found himself sitting next to Steve while the man called the police. Steve could not get through and kept trying to redial, never saying a word as he looked at Max. Finally with the phone pressed to one ear he said quietly, "It was you, wasn't it? You finally flipped out."

Shaking his head Max replied, "Me? Me? C'mon Steve! It wasn't me! If I wanted to start a killing spree I would at least bring a gun. It was Fred, he was acting all weird, he attacked Nancy when Bob spotted him, Bob came and got me, we went to see what was going on. When we got there I tried to help Nancy, then Fred grabbed Bob and attacked him too, he would have gotten me, he almost did, but he slipped in all the blood and I kicked him in the head and got out."

"Yeah? So if we go back to Nancy's office he should still be there unconscious? Uh, yeah, yeah I am here!" This last was into the phone, the emergency operator had finally answered, "Send someone right away, a guy here went crazy and attacked some of my coworkers, there's blood everywhere. No, I think the guy who did it is knocked out. No, no guns, it must have been a knife there is blood everywhere. What? No I didn't see it, I got the guy who did right here, yeah he is okay, I think. You okay Max?" Max nodded yes, "Yeah, yeah he is fine. Sure I will stay on the line with you until the police get here."

Chapter 2

Finally able to catch his breath Max recapped his morning. It had started like any other with his quiet radio alarm going off at four twenty, he shut it off and fell back asleep almost immediately. Then he hit it again at four twenty nine, this time turning it off for good. Why did snooze buttons only add nine minutes to your sleep? Why not some normal amount of time like ten minutes or even better fifteen minutes, why nine? That seemed random to Max. He quietly left the bed so as to not wake Sarah, his wife of fourteen years.

Like a blind man he navigated his way through the darkness around the queen sized bed and out the door into the hallway towards the bathroom. He had showered, shaved, gotten dressed and was out the door by five. Max had his routine down perfectly.

As he drove his red nineteen ninety four Toyota truck to work he listened to his radio station WWEB. As usual there was a sports show on recapping yesterdays scores. Max enjoyed listening to morning dj, Blake 'the snake', he was hot headed, opinionated and usually irritated the hell out of Max. Despite this Max tuned in religiously to his show on the drive to work. Living in Colorado Max should have been a Rockies fan but Max was intently listening for the score of the Dodgers/Cubs game. He had always been a Dodgers 'faithful' ever since he transferred from Western State College in Colorado to the University of Southern California. A move that had cost him dearly in student loans.

"Cards five, Reds three." the voice on the radio announced.

At this time in the morning traffic was minimal. Max drove his way through the neighborhood streets onto Wadsworth, a main street that ran north and south through the towns of Westminster, Arvada, and Wheatridge. Crap, red light. Max used the delay to adjust the knob on his radio to try and get clearer reception. Glancing up from his radio he noticed what looked to be a homeless man, a drunk homeless man from the way he was slowly staggering towards the truck. Still waiting for the green light he watched the poor soul and wondered how this man had become homeless. Had he been fired? Maybe he had mental problems that didn't allow him to hold down a normal job?

"Ahhh hell, here he comes looking for a handout." Max's charity ended at feeling sorry for the homeless, not giving them money. "Change, change, change" Max chanted to the red light. The homeless man slowly put one uneasy foot in front of the other and continued on his path toward Max. Green light. Max, feeling only elation, stepped on the accelerator and sped off towards the on ramp to interstate seventy.

The engine responded and the needle on his speedometer started to move from thirty five to forty. Max leaned into the curve and then straightened out the truck preparing to merge onto the highway. The speedometer now read fifty five mile per hour. Max would soon be hitting eighty as he passed the all too familiar exits, Sheridan, Federal, Pecos, and finally, what Coloradoans called, the 'Mouse Trap'. This was where the two major interstates came together in one snarling mess where a single accident could bring all traffic to a halt. From here he could see the first rays of the sun starting to make their way over the horizon. Max turned the steering wheel of his truck so that he could merge onto the other highway, interstate twenty five, and head south.

"Braves six, Mets zero."

Max had a busy day planned, there was usually a full day of work to be done on a Friday before the long fourth of July weekend. Since Monday was a holiday he figured that most of his colleagues would be gone today extending their vacation. Less people around meant that he might actually get something accomplished.

"Astros four, D-backs one."

Max enjoyed his early morning drive to work. Sure there were other vehicles on the road, mostly trucks. Delivery trucks, Fed EX, UPS, Hostess, guys drinking coffee from large plastic travel mugs driving F150's with their companies name stenciled on the door. Contractors, subcontractors, and consultants he speculated. Who else would be up this early in the morning? Max was none of the above. He was a computer programmer for the MAC Corporation and just liked to get an early start to his day so that he could avoid some of the ever increasing traffic.

"Pirates eleven in a shootout over the Giants with nine."

Max had worked for the MAC Corporation for four years now, one more year and he would be vested in his retirement plan with the company and he would also receive fifteen days of vacation a year in lieu of the usual ten that a new hire was awarded. That's why he was working today. It was only July and Max had already spent six of his vacation days. Plus his philosophy was, why take a day off when no one else was going to be around? Save it for skiing this winter was his plan.

"Jays seven, Yankees zero."

Crap, the radio announcer had moved on to the American League, he must have missed the Dodgers score. No, Max was not your stereotypical computer programmer. He was not over weight, he showered, tried to eat healthy, and had interests in things other than Sci-Fi movies and the latest computer games. Not that such 'stereotyped' programmers existed anymore anyway, now being a programmer was just another way to make a living. Max's four wheel drive truck allowed him to enjoy all that the Colorado outdoors had to offer. He hiked in the summer and skied in the winter. On these trips he usually he went solo. Sarah had other interests to keep her busy, although she had camped with him from time to time. Max didn't mind going alone or with his son, it gave him time to think about life and enjoying silence was one of the reasons he went.

Glancing down at his watch, he read five thirty three. Not bad, he was about ten minutes away from the Tech Center where the MAC corporate building was located and he would only be a little late this morning.

As he returned his attention to the road ahead of him Max could see red and blue lights flashing in the early morning light. A cop. Instinctively he hit the brakes and slowed his truck down to the posted speed limit. The police officer had his cruiser parked on the shoulder of the road behind some unlucky motorist. Max couldn't resist taking a quick glance to see what was happening.

The police car was parked behind a white four door sedan. The driver's door was open but Max could not see the owner of the vehicle. Or the cop for that matter. Maybe they were on the other side of the car changing a tire. Or perhaps, in the dim morning light and based on the fact he was doing fifty five miles an hour he had just failed to notice them. Either way, Max was happy it was that guy, and not him, who had gotten the early morning ticket.

The last ten minutes of his drive were uneventful as he passed the usual landmarks; Mile High Stadium, the Gates Rubber factory and a few other exits before finally getting off of the freeway. A few minutes later Max had turned into his normal parking spot and killed the engine. Even though there were a hundred or so empty parking spaces Max always steered his truck to the same spot every morning, Monday through Friday. It was one of those "creature of habit" kind of things.

As he walked towards the side employee entrance that provided the shortest distance from the parking lot to his ground floor cube Max went over his to-do list for the day. First he had to email his buddy and see if...

"Max! Did you hear me? The dispatcher wants one of us to go to the main entrance and wait for the police. Since I'm on the phone that leaves you. Get going, I think I hear sirens."

That is how his day had begun, simple, quiet, normal. It had now evolved into something as far from his daily routine as he thought it could get. Pushing open the door to the hallway he wondered what he would find next.

Chapter 3

The hallway was as quiet as church on a Friday night, that was not good. The main entrance was past Max's desk and though he hated to do it he stopped by and picked up his 'office' bat. Signed by Steve Garvey this Louisville Slugger was a minor prize among the items in Max's collection, not too valuable to keep in his shrine at work, just impressive enough to 'ooh' and 'ahh' his co-workers. Now if Garvey ever made it into the hall of fame, the bat would become something more treasured and might have to be brought home for the 'wall of fame' that Max was slowly building next to his mantle. For now it should prove useful if Fred or Nancy came calling. He made his way to the front doors of MAC co. without seeing anyone. The security guard the company employed to sit at the desk in the lobby didn't start until seven forty-five, so this was not unusual.

Without seeing anyone? Something was definitely wrong, a few phones were ringing, he did hear a muffled conversation, but he saw no one. In an office building, during business hours? On a Friday? Sure, sure it was only seven in the morning, but a few of the regulars should have been in by now. Max held his bat and waited, shifting his grip around, looking at the number 'six' on the end of the handle and the 'Good luck, Steve Garvey' in faded ink near the top of the bat. Bloodstains, were now pretty evident from Max's grip, he looked around, thought for a moment, propped the front door open with a trash can and then ducked back into the hallway towards the men's room. It had only been a couple minutes, no way the police could get here that quickly with the rush hour just starting but he didn't want to take a chance of missing them.

Stepping into the men's room the first thing Max saw was a pool of dried blood on the floor in front of the handicapped stall. That door was closed, but not completely. Max stopped, looked around and slowly lowered the tip of the bat down onto the floor then used this to lower his body down and get a look under the stall door. Two sets of legs, one, obviously on the pot, feet pointed towards the stall door, one set shuffling about slightly, pointed towards the toilet. Suddenly a slight sucking/chewing sound came from the stall, as if an animal had been feeding, was briefly interrupted

and then decided to start eating again. Blood was running down the basin of the toilet bowl, towards the rear of the stall and the industrial sized drain located there.

Blood. Right. Max slowly stood up, looked over at the paper towel dispenser, at the door, at that handicap stall, then at the blood staining his precious bat. Tick. Tick. Tick. Between the sounds of eating Max could hear the sounds of his watch hand ticking in what seemed like thunderous noise to his ears. He took a step towards the paper towel rack, the eating sounds stopped, after a few seconds they resumed. Max took another step, the eating did not pause, two silent steps later Max was at the paper towel rack slowly easing towels out of the dispenser onto the counter next to the sink, steadily watching the stall door and listening to the sounds within. As he reached for more towels his hands found empty air, he swung around to see what the problem was and caught the bathroom view in the mirror above the sink.

A zombie! Right there! Max let out a scream and swung his bat up, the same time the zombie swung his arm up and around. Max whirled around swinging behind him in an instance, only no one, was there. He was still alone in the area in front of the sink. After a second Max realized he had not seen a zombie, he had seen his own reflection, bloody shirt, a thin line of blood vertical over his lips from when he 'shhhh'ed Steve and wild eyes. He even had drying blood in his hair on one side, congealing and making the hair stand stiffly out from his head at a ninety degree angle. Max started laughing at his mistake, a kind of 'whew glad that was nothing' sort of laugh, that he could not stop himself from releasing. The noise from the handicap stall door swinging outward and hitting the wall startled Max from his revelry.

No one or better yet, no 'thing' immediately emerged from the stall. Seconds felt like minutes. Slowly Max again placed the end of his bat on the floor and used it to lower himself for a peek under the stall.

There were still two sets of legs but now both pairs of feet were pointing away from the toilet.

Fight or flight? Max had remembered hearing that statement but could not remember where. Had it been used to describe animal instincts on the Discovery Channel? He couldn't recall. All he knew was that he had a decision to make and he had better make it quick.

Fight or flight?

The decision was made, flight sounded pretty damn good right about now especially since the close confines of the bathroom didn't allow Max to swing his bat as freely as he would like. With three giant strides Max ran towards the handicap stall and with his right hand he slammed the door back towards the occupants inside. If Max could make it out into the hallway he was sure he could out run any pursuers.

Max didn't know if it was his imagination but he sensed hands clawing at his back. This feeling caused the hair on the back of his neck to stand on end and gave him a queasy feeling in his stomach. He lowered his shoulder and blasted into the men's room door swinging it wide open. The door clanged against the adjacent wall and slowly the pneumatic closer fastened at the top of the door started to move the door to the closed position. Too slowly.

The collision with the door spun Max around and he lost his balance and tumbled to the floor. He could hear the hollow sound of wood clanking on the hard floor tile as his bat bounced away from him. Max loved that sound, it reminded him of hot summer days spent watching overpaid baseball players and drinking cold beers.

Max rolled onto his stomach and then frantically crawled on all fours back to the men's room door. From inside he heard a low moaning. When he reached the door he spun around and sat on his ass and braced the door shut with his back. Something tried to open the door. Max sensed himself once again starting to slide on the highly polished floor tiles. The door cracked open an inch.

"Steve!" he yelled as he tried to dig his heels in. Was he still on the telephone?

Max tried to hold his position but the thing on the other side of the door had better leverage. Slowly he started to slide a little more.

"Steve! Get your ass over here! Help! Steve!"

Would Steve ignore his calls for help? He couldn't. Could he? Not at a time like this. They had their differences but this was life or death; not who gets the next promotion.

Max heard footsteps, quick footsteps, running footsteps. Steve was coming. If he could hold the door for just a little longer Steve would be there and they could trap the thing in the men's room.

The door was now about a foot open. Above his head he could hear the slapping of flesh on the metal of the door.

"Hold it right there!" The yell came from the lobby and was that of a woman. Max lifted his head and looked right into the barrel of a pistol. It was a police officer, a blond female police officer. Her feet were spread apart for stability and she held the gun firmly clasped between both hands. Her left eye was pinched shut but Max could clearly see her right eye looking down the barrel at him.

"I said hold it right there!"

"You've got to be kidding me."

"Don't move!"

"There is a…" *'There's a what?'* Max thought. *'A zombie eating someone on the other side who wants to eat me you if you don't blow his head off? Would a trained officer of the law believe this story?'* Not likely.

"...I've got a murderer trapped and if you don't do something about it we are both in big trouble."

Max then heard two sounds. The first being the squeaking of his hands sliding across the floor. He was soon pinned between the door and the adjacent wall.

The second sound was a loud explosion that was amplified by the hard surfaces of the floor and walls. His ears were left ringing in the aftermath of the shot.

Max pushed his hands against the wall and fell back against the floor. The men's room door did not completely close. There was a set of blood stained designer suit pants pinned between the door and the frame.

"Murderer, huh? Looked more like a zombie to me." The officer said. Max turned his head towards her. She was standing above him with an outstretched hand. He grabbed it. It was warm but not sweaty. Must be the training. Regardless, it made him feel a little safer. She pulled Max to his feet.

"Are you hurt?"

"No, I think most of this blood is someone else's. What took you so long?"

"Hey, count yourself lucky, we've been dealing with these problems all morning. Had I not been on my way back to the station when I got the call you would have been on your own."

She grabbed the radio from her belt and spoke into it. "Officer Stewart to HQ." They both waited for a response.

"Officer Stewart to HQ."

As they listened to the silence on the radio Max took survey of Officer Stewart. She looked to be in her mid-twenties and stood a little over five and a half feet tall. She wore the standard Denver Police uniform, dark blue, with a black leather belt housing multiple items; handcuffs, pepper spray, a club, her side arm. Her left forearm was wrapped with a bandage. She wore no hat but her hair was pulled back into a tight pony tail. 'To Serve and Protect' read a small gold pin above her badge. Max thought that she was surprisingly cute for a cop.

"Are there others like him wandering around here?" Stewart asked as she pointed at the feet sticking out the doorway.

"Yeah, two, or possibly three now, that I know of."

"What about normal people, any of those left in here?"

Normal? That sounded funny. Max guessed that Steve could pass as normal.

"Ah, yes, one more, Steve, back the other way. But that's all I've seen this morning."

"Actually, I'm right here." Steve said as he crept from an office entrance.

Just how long had Steve been there? Had he witnessed the entire thing and made no attempt to help him? Max wouldn't put it past Steve to do a thing like that. It seemed unimaginable but he guessed that some people would do anything to protect themselves. Max retrieved his bat and looked at Steve and Officer Stewart, "What do we do now?"

Chapter 4

"For starters let's see if we can block most of the doors, at least we need to push furniture up against them and make it hard for the lumbering undead to get into the building. Then we round up any survivors, then we finish off any trapped undead, clearing the building room by room." Said Stewart.

"Whoa-whoa-whoa there little lady." said Steve raising his hands in front of him as he spoke, "Undead? What the hell are you talking about?"

"Alright tough guy, listen and listen carefully. All morning we've been getting calls where people are being attacked, um, no, more like eaten by other people. There were a few calls as early as last night. Some pizza delivery guy chowed a family of four. I've personally taken out nine of the things so far, including that guy in the men's room. Now, if I were you, I would call my friends and family and tell them to start boarding up their window and…"

"Oh shit, I gotta call my wife." Max said as he fumbled for his cell phone. Once he got it out and started a call back to his home, he moved down the corridor a little to get away from Steve and Officer Stewarts' arguing, which was growing quite heated. "C'mon, c'mon, pick up honey, pick it up!"

"Hello?" a sleepy voice said on the other end of the line.

"Sarah! Sarah! Are you okay baby?"asked Max.

"Okay? Okay? Max what are you talking about, of course I am fine. What has happened? What is wrong?"

Standing there in blood coated clothing that was hardening around his body like an eggshell, Max really didn't know where to begin.

"Sarah, things have gone wrong, there are some really bad people out running around the city and I want you and the kids to stay safe. In fact I want you to stay more than safe. Barricade the back door and the doors from the garage, move tables and chairs in front of them. Leave the front door locked and dead bolted, if I can get home I will come to the front door. Then I want you to.."

"Max, Max, stop it Max! What are you talking about? Bad people? What bad people? Terrorists? In Denver? Why would they come for me? Is it your job?"

"No, no honey, nothing like that okay, worse in a way, they won't come for you….Hold on a sec honey… Hey Steve! Stewart! Keep it down you wanna just tell everything in hearing distance we are here? Go move the furniture in the lobby in front of the doors, okay, but stop yelling! Sorry hon, no I don't have time to tell you everything, but I guess there are some really bad people running around and there could be a lot of them from what I just heard. You need to take the kids and hide up in the attic, bring water, food, blankets, everything. Get the porta-potty I use for camping out of the garage and move it up there if you can do it. You have to promise me you will stay there no matter what you hear in the house, if everything is quiet you can probably come down

to use the bathroom when you need to. Oh, fill up the tub with water and the sinks and any containers we have laying around too."

"Max, I am looking out the drapes, there are some people out there walking around really slow, like they are on drugs or something."

A chill went up Max's spine, "Honey, don't let them see you, the uh, druggies are very, very violent! Slow but violent, like, um, zombies. And they will kill you and the kids if you let them see you!" Max was practically screaming into the phone now, "Take your cell phone up into the attic the zo..druggies have lower coordination when they are..high and cannot climb things really well."

"Max you are scaring me, you're scared too, aren't you? I will do it, you just get someplace safe, come home if you can. I will get the kids up into the attic right now and wait for you, are you coming home right now?"

"As soon as I can baby, as soon as I can."

"Max" said Sarah with near hysteria in her voice, "Max are you going to be okay?"

"Relax baby, relax, I have a police officer here with me, she'll take care of me, I am more worried about you. I don't know what's happening in the rest of the city but from what I hear, it's not good. That's why I want you to get the kids, some food and some water up into the attic. Just do it okay? Honey, one more thing."

"No." Max could tell Sarah was still crying, but her voice was firm.

"Aw honey, c'mon you gotta do it, it will make me feel better just know you have it with you."

Years before Max had inherited a German Luger his grandfather brought home from his years of service in world war II, coming from a family that owned guns Max knew how to care for them and considered the Luger more of an investment than a home protection device. Sarah, on the other hand, used to have a younger brother. When he was eleven he went over to a friend's house to play and never came home. Playing that day involved the handgun collection of his friend's father and in a day and age where safety locks were not yet mainstream his friend had shot and killed her brother. The trauma of losing her brother provoked in Sarah a hatred of guns that was beyond illogical. When Max inherited his grandfather's gun, Sarah had taken the kids to a hotel for three nights, eventually she returned home when Max had installed a gun safe to hold the gun, a wall safe to hold the ammo and a child safety lock with two keys, one normally kept in a safety deposit box at the bank, and one on Max's key chain. Sarah knew the combination to both safes and as they had recently decided to close their safety deposit box the second key to the gun lock was now in the same safe as the gun's ammunition.

"I won't Max. Look, you know I don't even know how to fire it, it won't do me any good anyway and I will feel like I am leaving a rattlesnake laying around no matter where I put it. I will grab a bat from Nick's room and that will have to do. Any druggies managing to get up into the attic will have to contend with an aluminum bat to the head. And if you still need the gun you can get it when you get home."

"Okay, okay, I would just feel better if you had it with you. Anyone coming in and not yelling your name, you brain em, okay?"

"Don't worry Max, no one will get in anyway. I will call you when the kids and I are up in the attic, some of those druggies look kind of bloody and I don't want to chance them breaking in on me before I am ready."

"I gotta go too, it looks like the police officer and Steve are about to kill each other. I love you baby, take care of the kids and I will talk to you when you are safe."

"Well I like the police officer already, she shows good judgment. I love you too. Max, be careful. Bye."

"Bye baby."

Chapter 5

The MAC Corporate building was built in the early nineteen eighties and from the outside looked like four stories of steel and reflective blue glass. The structure had very little to offer from an architectural view point. No fancy atrium, no grand entrances or spectacular artwork adorned either the outside nor inside of this relatively plain, rectangular building. When compared to the neighbors around it, the MAC Co building was average at best.

After the September eleventh terrorist attacks upper management decided to invest in added security and emergency equipment. Every entrance was modified and now required a card key to gain access. When the card was swiped past the reader a security system would record the identity of the card owner, check to make sure that the person was allowed in that section of the building, and if approved, the system would then release a magnetic lock at the top of the door. There were some who speculated that the security system was management's way of tracking when they arrived, when they came back from lunch, if they took too many smoke breaks, and if they left early for home.

Another change that resulted from the increased security was the installation of a large generator on the south side of the building. Should MAC Co. lose power the generator would automatically turn on and supply emergency power to the building's main systems, security, telephones, and designated lighting.

"How many entrances does this place have?" Stewart inquired.

Looking at Steve for confirmation Max responded, "One main entrance and three side ones. One on each side of the building." Steve thought for a moment mentally counting to himself and then nodded his approval of Max's answer.

"Is that the main security desk that I passed?" Officer Stewart did not wait for an answer, made her way to the desk and plopped down into the empty chair behind it. There was also a computer monitor showing shots of the cameras located by the building doors and, of course, a computer. The computer was mostly used by the security guard for solitaire but it also served the intended purpose of displaying the key card information when an employee entered or exited the building.

"It has been nice hanging out with you guys and Officer I appreciate what you did for me, but I have a family that needs me so I'll be leaving now." Max announced.

"You're welcome. Good luck getting past them." Stewart said pointing at the television screen. The north camera that provided the best view of the parking structure showed somewhere in the neighborhood of five or six figures milling about.

"You don't understand. I have a wife and kids that need me."

"I'd bet that they need you alive more than dead." Steve added.

"You know what? Fuck you Steve. What do you have? A stupid cat waiting for you? Bite me, asshole."

"Hey man, go for it, don't let the door hit you on the ass on the way out."

Max looked at Stewart and studied her face trying to determine what her opinion was. Unfortunately, he saw that she agreed with Steve.

"Don't look at me" Stewart said, "the most significant relationship I've had over the past year was a one night stand with some jackass I met after a Broncos game." From the look on Steve's face, that was the best news he had heard all morning.

"You think the army or national guard will be called in?" Max asked, hoping.

"I'd say that the current situation justifies it but who knows? It is not good out there and I think it is just going to get worse, much worse. If I can't even get anyone at HQ, well, that tells you something too."

"Not to change the subject, but I will. Since it sounds like we are planning on staying, no one without a key card will be able to get in, right?" Steve asked.

"Not if you move that Steve-o." Stewart said pointing at the trash can propping the door open.

Steve dragged the trash can back into the building and tested to door to make sure that the lock activated.

Stewart managed to pull up the security log on the computer. "As of right now I see twenty entries of people who should be in this building. That leaves twenty unaccounted for."

"No, no eighteen, no wait, two guys in the bathroom, that's sixteen left unaccounted for. Let's see that list, Bob, dead. Fred, undead. Ditto for Nancy. I think that guy in the bathroom was named Rod, not sure, but there is a Rod Uberton on the list so that was probably him. Plus the guy on the toilet, I didn't look, but he was toast too. Anyway Rod, undead and dead again."

"Hey, is there a function that allows you to deny all access? If there is we could lock up the building so that no one else can get in or out."

"I don't know, Steve, if I want to be locked in here." Max offered "and what if someone who isn't…isn't one of them wants to get in? Needs our help, what then?"

"Fuck 'em. Not our problem. Let them find their own building I say."

"What do you think?" Max said looking at Stewart for support.

"I don't know if I want to be locked in either. I highly doubt that our friends, the undead, are smart enough to break in and if I were on my way to work and found myself being chased by a few of those things and expected my card key to work, only to find my ass hanging in the wind I'd be pretty pissed off. Before we let anyone else in, we need to make damn sure that they are not going to want a bite of us, agreed?"

"No shit?" Steve said sarcastically.

"No shit. Alright, let's all go check the remaining doors and then figure out where's the best place to hold up and defend if need be." Stewart announced standing up from behind the desk.

Max could not believe that he was trapped and unable to reach his family. It made him impatient, really impatient, as if each minute that slipped by put one more zombie between him and his family. He felt guilty for so easily being convinced to stay put. Was he being selfish? Putting his own safety before that of his family? Max forced himself not to think about it, there was nothing he could do now other than make sure that he survived long enough to give himself a chance to see his family again. That's all he wanted, a chance.

As the three of them began their check of the building, the security log registered a twenty fourth entry. Nancy Wieden, Marketing Department, seven thirteen, East Door Interior Card Reader, Approved. Nancy was hungry and somewhere in the back of her mind she remembered leaving the building when she ate. Clients. The blood and flesh she was able to consume from Bob had partially restored her. It had given her a portion of her memory back and allowed her to think in a slow, sluggish way. She recalled having breakfasts, lunches, and dinners with clients, new and old. That's what someone in marketing does. Yes, and she had been damn good at her job. She needed to find a client in the worst way and fast. She could already feel Bob's energy slipping away. With one high heel missing and Max's favorite shirt covered in drying blood, Nancy started her lopsided walk across the parking lot.

The search for new clients had begun.

Chapter 6

The first stop was Max's cube. Steve elected to stay at his cube a dozen feet away so long as Officer Stewart stayed halfway between both areas, with her gun drawn and ready for trouble.

'Another Stevism, making friends and influencing people.' Thought Max. Safely in his cube Max went through his desk drawers looking for the work out clothing he usually kept there. *'It has been awhile, maybe I brought that stuff home? Nope? Ah-ha! Oh no.'* Max had not brought his work out clothing home, a pair of shorts, running shoes and a gray t-shirt was awaiting him, the problem was the shirt, one of those funky sayings he was pretty sure was not too appropriate for the day's events, "Smile, at least your alive!" Somewhere back in his head he remembered picking up several of these lame t-shirts at a Christian church yard sale, all of the logos tried really hard to make a concise, political zinger, all of them were pretty close to "Smile, at least your alive". It was even worse that the spelling for "you're" was "your", which was another reason Max bought the thing in the first place. Sarah had thought he was being pretty vicious and sarcastic about it and had threatened to throw it out if she ever caught him wearing it again. Hence it was regulated to the work exercise clothing bin.

"Fuck."

"What is wrong Max?" Stewart asked.

"Ah nothing, nada, just my workout clothes kind suck, but given the alternative, I will take 'em. Hey Steve don't suppose you have a spare t-shirt I can have?"

Steve prairie dogged over the cube and said, "Nope, only losers work out at work, I hit the gym every day at four thirty before I come in."

"Every day?" Stewart asked sarcastically.

"Now that you mention it, can we head over to the company gym so I can at least shower off real quick?"

"Abso-lute-a-mente, compadre. I would insist myself, you might get brained if someone who was not your close personal friend saw you right now. I will use the phone in the loser workout room while you shower. Officer Stewart, have I mentioned I am single? You can look in on both of us while I am calling from the list and you are showering off the blood." said Steve.

"Single? You don't say Steve? I wonder why you haven't been pulled out of circulation by some lucky lady." to Max Stewart said, "Don't worry Max one of you two will have your back covered."

"See?" said Steve, "She likes me already."

"Say Max is Steve looking like a zombie to you? He is starting to look a little gray around the throat and face to me? Plus he is spewing 'zingers' worthy of someone without any brains… Yeah I better cap him before he attacks us." Stewart starts to swing her gun around.

"Whoa! Whoa! I was kidding!" Steve ducked back under his cube wall, after a second or two he said, "Let's get going, alright? It is bad enough we have to wait around for shower boy and time is a wasting."

"Team players, gotta love em." said Stewart.

They made their way to the company showers, bat, gun and a golf club that had magically appeared in Steve's hand as he emerged from his cube, at the ready. Along the way Max asked Stewart if she had a first name as referring to her as 'Officer Stewart' was getting tedious. Stewart beamed at him and said, "You can call me Jane." Turning to Steve she said, "But 'Officer Stewart' or 'ma'am' will work just fine for you."

The trip to the gym was mercifully short, it was located just down the hall, through the main receiving dock. The door leading to the men's room required a three button code to get in. "What's the super-secret code?" asked Jane.

"Two-One-Three." replied Max.

With a click the door opened and Jane lead the two men inside. Max ducked down and checked under the single stall, then in each of the two shower stalls, empty. Thank God for small favors! He stripped quickly and fired up the shower, a few minutes later he was drying off and poking among all the unlocked lockers looking for some other t-shirt to wear. An old sweater with the 'Corn Huskers' logo on it, ugh! Max was not that desperate, the heat was bad enough, but wearing a Nebraska team sweat shirt was liable to get him brained on general principle here in Buffalo territory. Sighing Max pulled his 'Smile at least your alive' shirt over his head and moved out into the gym, heading for the loading dock where he could hear Steve was arguing with Jane again.

"All I am saying is not all these people are dead, twenty one calls and no answers? They ran and hid somewhere, we need to get on the PA system and call everyone to the main entrance or one of your conference rooms." Argued Jane.

"Fuck that, they are deaders, leave em and lets make a break for my ride. We can get out of here then and go check on Max's family, then head for the hills."

"Oh, c'mon Steve, just use the PA and call everyone to the conference room." Max said.

Stewart examined Max briefly, "Nice shirt. At least you don't look like a butcher anymore. Steve doesn't know how to use the PA system and he is worried that maybe the dead can understand some words and will meet us wherever we announce. Now that you're here you can use the PA and get us rolling. YOU'RE. Get it?"

Steve snorted and Max looked a little embarrassed then said, "Ah, I don't know how to use the PA either. I picked it up as a joke, at least it is a hundred percent blood free. Who is on the list of people who came in today? Any admin assistants?"

Steve looked down the list, "Well, well, we do have one 'Miss Amelia Bryon', she is Kirkpatrick's assistant on the second floor. Or was, she ain't answering her phone."

"Try again. Didn't you hit on her at the last company party? I seem to recall something about…"

"Yeah, yeah, lets mention how Steve got shot down again. C'mon man I was two months out of my divorce! The phone is ringing." Holding the phone out to Max, "See? No answer, she is a goner."

"Nah she is probably holed up in Kirkpatrick's office, this is perfect he has like the biggest office on the second floor and it looks over the main entrance and into the parking lot, so we can see when the national guard gets here, makes sense to go there anyway, eh?"

"Ah, I still say we make a run for the parking lot and our cars, once in our cars we should be safe, we can just run anyone down who gets in our way." said Steve.

"Steve! Come on!"

"Fine." Steve hung up the phone.

On the other end a voice finally answered, too late for Steve to hear.

"Hello? Is anybody there? Kirkpatrick's gone crazy he…he's noticed me! Help me! Send help! Oh God! Stay away from me!"

Chapter 7

Nancy's memory was like sand slipping through her fingers. Images freely came and went. Was she married? Did she have a family? Where did she live? For a few minutes, if she concentrated hard enough she could remember an apartment or a loft. The floor plan was wide open, must have been a loft, she thought. She could see that it was decorated just like a page out of a Pottery Barn catalog. Rich wood floors, brick walls adorned with trendy black and white pictures of people and

places. Nancy couldn't remember if she had taken those pictures, where they people she knew? Family? Had she been to any of those places? She just couldn't remember.

Those thoughts were too distant. Her short term memory served her better. She had forced herself to come into work early that day. She usually spent several nights a week entertaining clients and rarely arrived at the office any earlier than ten. As head of her department she had a substantial expense account that she used to retain current clients as well as lure new business. It had taken her a while to adjust to the marketing lifestyle, lots of smiling, listening to stories you could care less about, eating, drinking, flirting, presentations, making deals on a promise and a handshake, this was all part of the job.

When someone was stupid enough to ask her how old she was Nancy would answer, forty one, when in truth she was almost forty seven. Appearances were a major plus in her job so she routinely exercised and regularly visited the salon to have those gray hairs dyed brown. Nancy was taller than the average woman and she liked to wear high heels to increase her height. For some reason it made her feel more powerful, more in control of her surroundings.

Nancy traditionally worked long hours and had promised herself that she was going to make the three day weekend into four days of rest and relaxation. In order to do this, she had a few loose ends that she needed to take care of and had decided to get in before any of her staff arrived.

Her in box had shown thirty three unread emails. "Shit" this would slow her down. Nancy started addressing the important ones and simply deleted everything else. She was not accustomed to how quiet her office was that morning. Usually the phone would be ringing, Peggy, her admin assistant, would be standing at her door waiting for approval to enter and discuss some pending issue. All Nancy could hear was the hum of her computer and the gurgling of the coffee pot on Peggy's desk. Usually Nancy would have stopped on her way in at the local coffee shop and bought her caffeine, but nothing had been open so she would have to make due with Peggy's private stash.

Nancy soon became absorbed in her work. She needed the second quarter financial reports from last year. They should be in the top drawer of Peggy's file cabinet. As she rose from her desk Nancy could hear the last drips of coffee falling into the pot. Perfect. She would multi-task, grab a cup, the reports, and life would be good.

The first part of her plan worked out but when she opened the file where the reports should have been all she found was a yellow sticky note with Peggy's handwriting.

"Fred borrowed 06/28/05"

It didn't surprise her to find Peggy's note. She always created a paper trail. That's why they made such a good team. Peggy was meticulous and Nancy shot from the hip. Peggy had been Nancy's best hire. She had great people skills, was very organized, and a great self-motivator. At first Nancy wondered if Peggy was a threat to her career. That she might somehow be a Nancy-in-training. However, she would remind herself that Peggy was just an administrative assistant and that made her feel better. The only fault that Nancy found with Peggy was that she was younger and prettier. Nancy knew that it was more of a weakness within herself but nevertheless she couldn't help but hold it against Peggy.

"Not a problem, more time to suck in this sweet caffeine." Nancy told herself as she placed both hands around the cup feeling the radiating warmth. She strolled out of her office and headed down the hall to the accounting department. Her high heels clicked on the floor tiles.

Nancy was confident that she would be able to find the file because Fred, being an accountant, was border line insane when it came to neatness. "Hell, the file probably had it's own private corner of his desk all to itself" she mused.

Immediately Nancy knew something was wrong when she arrived at entrance to the accounting department. Papers were strewn about the commercial grade carpeting. The bamboo

plant that usually sat on the stand outside Fred's office had been knocked to the floor. A pizza box lay on its side with the remaining slices of pepperoni laying on the carpet.

Nancy felt her heartbeat rise. "Fuck me, Fred had a stroke or a heart attack. Poor bastard was probably working late when it hit him and there was no one around to help. What a way to go."

The light to his office was off. That and the idea of Fred sprawled across is neatly organized desk scared the hell out of her. Nancy knew she had to find out what truly happened to see if there was anything should could do and yet she still stood in the hallway with her fresh coffee warming her hands.

It was time. She had to do something, "be a big girl and just get it over with" Nancy convinced herself. She took a step and froze dead in her tracks. There was a popping sound, like someone snapping bubble wrap between their fingers.

"What the f…." she whispered. Nancy could feel the sweat under her arms and down her neck. Looking down she could see that the sharp point from the heel of her shoe had punctured a piece of paper causing the sound.

"Big brave Nancy" she mumbled and relaxed a bit.

Fred's door was closed. This was the fun part. Nancy grasped the doorknob and pushed it open. The office was in the same state as the common area she had just walked through. Papers, office supplies, trash, reference books, all lined the floor. Fred was sitting in his chair, upright, mouth open, head cocked back, eyes staring at the acoustic ceiling tiles, as though he had fallen asleep in his chair, but with his eyes open.

"F-fred…"

At the sound of Nancy's voice his head snapped forward. Fred started to stand up.

"Fred. What the hell happened? You ok?"

When he did not answer she took a step backwards. Pop.

"Fred!"

His hand dragged along the desk knocking more papers to the floor as he continued toward Nancy. She took another step back. Pop.

"I swear to god Fred if you don't…"

Right before he lunged at her, Nancy could see Fred's lips pull back and expose his yellowish teeth. Nancy flung the hot coffee into Fred's face. In slow motion she watched him pass by her and slam into the wall next to where she was standing. She did not hear his expected screams of pain nor did he even bother to bring his hands to his face. He bounced off the wall and stood there, dim eyes moving side to side.

'Get the fuck out of here!' her mind screamed and her legs listened. Nancy spun around and sprinted towards the hall. She could hear footsteps shuffling through the debris behind her. She ran back to her office and slammed the door shut. The whole wall shuddered from the impact of the door.

She dialed the police and an operator came on almost instantly. "Yes, help, please send help" she breathed into the phone. "What? No, I was attacked by Fred." *'Shit, what did Fred mean to an emergency operator? Get a hold of yourself!'*, she thought.

"Yes sir, he is still in the building. No, I am in my office with the door closed. Yes, you have it correct, the MAC building. First floor. No, I am all alone. No, all the doors to the outside are locked until seven thirty. The main entrance? You would need a key card, or someone to let you in. I don't give a fuck I'm not leaving my office, tell them break one down. Yes, I understand but I'm telling you I'm not leaving"

Her whole body was sweating now, her heart was busy pumping blood to her vital survival organs, her head, arms and legs. With the phone still to her ear she reached across desk and snatched a Kleenex from the box.

Every muscle in her body froze. She could see Fred's bloated pale face pressed against the pane of glass adjacent to her door. This design was standard for all MAC executives. It allowed them to have their door closed for privacy but still see into the common areas.

Fred's eyes were completely swollen shut and yet his head still followed her every movement.

"Holy fucking shit! He is here! He is right here!" She yelled at the operator.

The door knob turned but stopped short of releasing the lock holding it. The door started to rattle in its frame.

"Screw you, I'm not going to die talking to some asshole!" Nancy said as she slammed the phone down. The operator had all of her information and she wasn't going to take a chance that the police would arrive in time or if they even could get into the building without someone letting them. She needed to find someone to let them in or better yet, bash the shit out of Fred.

She sat down behind her computer and brought up the company phone list while Fred continued to work at opening the door. Fuck. She never got in this early and had no idea who might be here. The phone list was alphabetical by department. Nancy skipped accounting and dialed the Budgeting departments main line. No answer. Contracts. No answer. Human Resources. No answer.

She didn't know how long to let the phone ring before giving up. This was not working. She had to do something else. Wait. She turned from her computer and looked out the window scanning the parking lot for familiar cars. Near the front entrance she saw a black Honda Accord, it's lights flashed twice and the alarmed beeped letting the owner know that all was safe and secure. The owner then put the keys into his pocket and proceeded towards the front door.

Outside of her office one of Fred's hands twisted the doorknob enough to release the catch, the door swung open under his next flailing blow.

Nancy slammed her hands on her office window to try and get the Honda owner's attention but he continued down the sidewalk not noticing. Quickly she released the lock on the window, it would only tilt out half way but it was enough for her to fit her head through.

"Help! You've got to help me!" She screamed out the opening.

This got Bob's attention.

"What's wrong? Where are you?" Bob yelled back.

"Hurry! H…"

Nancy disappeared from view as she was pulled back into the building, screaming as Fred dragged her inside.

Chapter 8

Amelia's day had started off as any other; she headed in to the office early, to beat the seven am rush, stopping along the way to get her and Mr. Fitz Kirkpatrick, her boss, their favorite brews at a coffee shop. She was always reimbursed for the coffee and Fitz, let her charge her entire trip in to the company at thirty six cents a mile, plus the cost of the coffee to his expense account, a win-win for everyone. She liked Fitz, he knew she had gotten the job on both her ability to make order out of chaos and her trim, fit body that indicated Fitz was a player in the MAC company politics. He even took her on two company trips, she had been half expecting a pass or maybe a demand for a sexual favor, one she may or may not have declined, she was a free agent after all. Although Fitz was as old as her father, the man oozed charisma and charm. He never even made a play for her and after the first trip she decided she did indeed love him exactly how he was and their relationship grew closer in a father-daughter kind of way. He even reprimanded that guy Steve in front of everyone at the

company holiday party, Amelia would never forget it, "Steve, back off, everyone is trying to have fun here." With extra sarcasm on the 'Everyone', thinking of it still made Amelia smile.

The second trip with Fitz his wife had come along and she was trophy in her own right, but that is not all she was. In her Amelia discovered the woman behind the man in power, if anything she played politics more viciously than Fitz ever did and when she saw Amelia it took her about twenty seconds to decide to bring Amelia 'into the fold'. The minor benefits soon followed and started added up, Amelia knew she was only attending college in the evenings because of Mrs. Kirkpatrick, the connections that woman had never ceased to amaze her.

Arriving at work Amelia dropped her purse into her desk drawer and headed into Fitz's office after knocking softly once, their pre-arranged signal. She backed into his office using her behind to push the door open, as both hands were full of coffee then turned to put Fitz's coffee on his desk, as she sat it down she froze. Kirkpatrick had blood on his arm, which was sitting on his desk at an unnatural angle. His dull eyes tracked her movement and seemed to focus on her in a strange way that made Amelia recoil in fear.

"Fitz…Fitz what happened, what is wrong. Oh my God I am calling an ambulance. Don't die, don't die!" Kirkpatrick slowly stood in his chair, the chair he had finally succumbed to undeath's harsh embrace only twenty minutes before and started to climb over the desk towards Amelia, a groan escaping his throat.

Amelia back pedaled bumping into the door from his office and stammering, "Fitz…stay, st-st-stay right th-there, I ww-will call an ambulance and g-get you h-help." Her voice shrunk to a whimper, "No Fitz, stop. Stop..."

Amelia turned and fled the office closing the door behind her. She then raced behind her desk and stood watching the door, somehow knowing Fitz would be trapped inside his office, knowing he could not open the door handle anymore, not in his condition. She squeaked out a cry worthy of a mouse when the handle slowly started to turn. Then ducked and hid under her desk, pulling her chair in as far as it would go after her. Thankfully her desk front went all the way down to the floor something she really liked as she could kick off her shoes when she was working during the day. Thinking of which brought to the fore front of her mind the fact that she was sitting uncomfortably on a spare pair under the desk, she maneuvered slightly to get them out from under her then froze when she heard the door swing open from Fitz's office. She heard her former boss step-shuffle-step away from her, heading towards the hall and elevator and thought she was in the clear when the phone on her desk started ringing. Between rings she held her breath and listened for footsteps, they appeared to be heading back her way, mercifully the phone stopped ringing, "Praise the lord and voice mail too." She thought hysterically to herself as she tried not to breath. The footsteps stopped a few feet from her desk. She heard the low grunts that Fitz had been making come from above her desktop, she heard the papers and 'in' box being shoved around and some paper and pens fell off the back of her desk, making her flinch, then the steps started to move away again. Amelia sighed quietly and relaxed, then jumped again as her hand got burned by the hot coffee cup she had somehow retained for her entire flight from Fitz's office. Shrugging she took a sip. *'Fucking good.'* She thought*, 'This is the taste of life!'* In that moment she felt more alive than she had in a long time.

As she was reveling in her victory her phone started to ring again, and ring, and ring, and ring, it did not cut off after four rings as it should have, but continued to ring, she did not hear any grunts or footsteps returning to her desk and in a brief, maniac moment, Amelia jumped up and grabbed her phone. She saw Fitz as she rose, he was only ten feet away and between her and the elevator, worse he was coming right towards her. This phone call had better have been worth it, hopefully it was the police, the army, or building security.

"Hello? Is anybody there, Kirkpatrick's gone crazy he…he's noticed me! Help me! Send help! Oh God! Stay away from me!" It took her a second to realize she was speaking to a dial tone.

Chapter 9

Nancy remembered the terrible panic she felt when Fred's teeth punctured the skin above her right ankle. At first she had felt no pain. Much like when you touch a hot stove, your body automatically jerks your hand away to prevent further damage. Nancy tried to pull her leg free from his grasp but Fred had a firm hold on her. He worked his jaw up and down tearing flesh with each bite.

It didn't take long for the pain to become very real. She could feel Fred's teeth scraping against her shin bone like a hungry dog chewing on a treat. He had pulled her from the window and they were both lying on the floor, Nancy, face down on her stomach. Fred resembled a child at a picnic eating a piece of corn on the cob. He too was face down with his elbows braced against the floor, hands securely holding her. When Nancy felt her Achilles tendon snap and roll up into ball inside what was left of her calf muscle her vision went pink and then black. She willingly let her body go into shock and passed out.

Fred had not been dead long and the energy he absorbed from Nancy crashed upon his body like a strong ocean wave. It was as if he had been awakened from a deep sleep. He was still almost completely blind from Nancy's coffee and yet, he could see colors, energy. Fred did not need his eyes to see this energy as much as he could feel it. It radiated like thermal heat patterns he had seen on the nightly weather forecasts. Fred looked down, he was holding something, as he stared it went from a bright red color to, orange, yellow, green, and then a deep blue. His black fingers contrasted against the color of Nancy's leg as if he held a fluorescent light bulb. His whole body radiated this black, ghostly energy.

Even though Fred could already start to feel his new energy fading, he had fed on enough to make himself feel better, much better. It was like the best rush he had ever experienced. He got to his feet. He had to find more. He scanned the room. The computer had a green tinge, outside Nancy's office the coffee pot was a burning red, and rest of the room was cool blackish violet color.

Fred was drawn to the hot red of the coffee pot and he eagerly started moving towards it. He was close to his destination when he was forced to a sudden stop. Fred looked down to see what was blocking his path. In his hands he still clutched Nancy's leg. It had gone from blue to the same blackish violet color that radiated throughout the room. Unknowingly he had been dragging her body. She had flipped over onto her back and upper body had become wedged between her office door and it's frame. He watched as the remaining color from her body vanished, she was now as black as he was.

Fred forced his hands to release their grip and continued towards the red energy. The coffee blistered his throat but he felt no pain nor did he receive the same rush as he had experienced from Nancy. Confused he dropped the coffee pot to the ground.

Fred thought about waiting for Peggy to arrive, he desired her as much as ever but in a much different way. Somewhere in his malfunctioning mind he knew that the woman was supposed to be here. Peggy would have the same energy as Nancy. In the end Fred couldn't wait that long, he needed to feed. There was nothing left in the Marketing Department that attracted Fred's attention so he decided to see what the rest of the building had to offer. He stepped into the hallway looking for that delicious red energy.

Chapter 10

Max took the lead heading up to the second floor, with Officer Stewart behind him and Steve bringing up the rear. It came as a surprise that Steve did not make any remarks about Stewart's ass, which probably saved his life. As they approached the second floor landing high above them in the stairwell the fourth floor door swung open. They could all hear a shuffling sound on the top landing, but could not quite see anything. Max switched to, a slower, quieter pace and listened intently as he approached the door leading to the second floor. The shuffling sound continued above them.

"Should we yell out?"

"Fuck that, no way." said Steve.

"We don't know that they are zombified yet, they might be human."

"We can't leave them in our exit, either Steve." whispered Officer Stewart, "What if we have to make a hasty retreat; we don't want to be dealing with this guy in the stairway?"

"Look he or she or it will hear us on the PA, I'll watch the stairwell from Kirkpatrick's office and if no one comes out the door we know we have zombie issues here, right? Why find trouble?"

Max found both arguments reasonable, however he was in favor of just yelling up the stairwell to see if he got a response.

"Wait, what if I snuck up the stairs for a peak? I could motion to whomever it is to get them to join us if they are still human?"

"Hmmm… It should be me, I have the gun." stated Stewart.

"No-no, I should go, I have a bat, it would be easy enough to whack someone if they are shambling along, right? Almost no danger at all."

"Yeah like the bathroom?"

"Hey! I didn't know what I was up against then! Plus I had dropped my bat!"

"Fine, fine if you think you can handle it go ahead and go…"

"Hello!?" a man's voice called from the top floor landing, "Is someone down there?"

"Oh sure, see! You let it know we are here!" whispered Steve angrily.

"What are talking about, the guy is alive, he is calling for us. Why are we still whispering?"

They all heard someone coming down the stairs, "I can see you there. Why won't you answer me?"

Sure enough the trio saw a face peering down at them through the railings, the face stopped coming down the stairs, waiting for an answer.

"Sure we are here." said Stewart, "Who are you? I am Police Officer Stewart."

"A police officer! Friggin-a! You gotta come up here, old man Sawyer went insane and killed Rhonda Pulcher and attacked me! I locked him in the break room, he does not seem to be thinking too well and can't get out. Come on!"

"No, you come here, where we can see you. Sawyer will have to wait we are trying to get to somewhere else. We have to do one thing at a time right now, that's it, come on down here. What is your name?"

The figure coming down the stairs was a young male, maybe twenty two, he had brown hair and a straight, lanky build. He had an id card and name badge, but it was still too far away to be read. He came forward slowly, but steadily and seemed to be favoring one arm. His pant leg on one side was coated with blood.

"I'm Tom. Tom Eby. I work in ITC, networking. Who are these guys?"

"I am Max, this is Steve, we work for George Gains down in Licensing, I think you reset my password for me about two months ago when I locked myself out, you work nights right? What happened to your arm and leg?"

"Gains, yeah, I keep the batch processes going and help out any of the early birds who have problems in the morning. Sawyer friggin' grabbed my leg and tried to bite me. Bite me! Couldn't believe what I saw, I saw him munching down on Rhonda in the break room, I went to back out and slipped on all the blood, none of it is mine, but it made a mess. Anyway I punched Sawyer in the face, musta broke his nose, cause he backed right off and let me go. I crawled out the door and slammed it behind me. You know that file cabinet by the break room? No? Yeah you probably don't get up to the fourth floor too much. Anyway Joe and Frank blocked me in the break room one night as a joke by moving that cabinet in front of the door. I just heaved it over, I got it about halfway over the door and Sawyer couldn't get out. I think I sprained my shoulder."

"You were alone in ITC? Where were Joe and, uh, Frank?" asked Max, struggling to remember the people who manned the help desk during the day.

"They called in sick last night, leaving me and Sawyer to hold down the fort, it was kinda busy too, with only two of us. Anyway Sawyer took off about six for a break and never came back, no big deal the last batch jobs ended around five thirty so we were in the dead phase of the shift until the early people got in, even then it is pretty slow this time of day. I was supposed to be off by now and I wanted to go home, but no one came in, no one called in either. I hated leaving the TC, uh, Tech Center, empty, but I had to go, I am, was, tired. That is when I found Sawyer and Rhonda. I went back to the TC and could not get a line out, all busy. I texted one of my local buddies and told her to call the cops for me, 'cause I could not get through to them by voice, she said she did." To Stewart he said, "I thought you were them. I guess it really doesn't matter, you're here now."

Max quickly went through what the rest of them had been through and explained that they were trying to get to Kirkpatrick's office. Tom had no weapons with him. After a brief debate they decided to continue to Kirkpatrick's office and see if they could figure out how to operate the PA system.