

Soul Survivor

A gripping tale of the living, the dead, and the
struggle to survive in an apocalyptic world.

A Novella

From The Universe of "The Demon Dead"

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By Arthur M Wyatt

Also By Arthur M Wyatt:

The Demon Dead: Tres Zombies(Book One Of Two)

The Demon Dead: Troubled Waters(Book Two Of
Two)

This story takes place in Arizona. I have taken certain temporal, fictional, scientific and geographical liberties.

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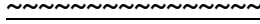
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“The world began without man, and it will end without man.” - Claude Lévi-Strauss

“It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.” - Confucius

Soul Survivor

“What a caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.” - Richard Bach



The sun hovered low in the western sky. The orange disc just beginning to touch the horizon.

Amy and her companion continued on their journey. Where they would end up she wasn't quite sure but she was hopeful.

They struggled forward. Making slow, agonizing progress.

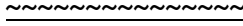
As they plod along steadily and slowly on US-180, watching the sunset is the only pleasure they have left. The pale blues, violets and shades of red and orange danced around the sun as the disc continued to sink farther and farther until it disappeared below the horizon all together.

Their search for survivors and food seemed to be an exercise in futility. Because, it appeared, there were neither.

She felt helpless. Helpless to affect the outcome in any way. She wanted to cry, to scream out, but she couldn't.

The next couple of days should be interesting, she thought.

No-one wants to die but at this point she would be glad when it was over.



Amy moved to Flagstaff just over a month ago after finding a great job in a law office as a paralegal.

At thirty five she was a five foot six, one hundred and forty pound redhead with a fiery disposition. She had always been very independent and the move did not scare her at all. It was like a great adventure and she felt it was now or never. She had no children and after a failed marriage of six years wanted a fresh start.

She loaded all of her belongings into a rental trailer, filled her new truck to capacity and hit the road with Abby, her five year old Miniature Schnauzer.

She felt exhilarated as she pulled onto the interstate. Carrie Underwood blasting on the radio. Downtown Charlotte disappearing in the rear view mirror.

With both parents gone, killed in a traffic accident, and her sister having moved away to the west coast, there was nothing to keep her from leaving.

She spent all of her time since the move working, setting up her new home, and getting to know the neighbors.

She hoped to make the short trip to the Grand Canyon soon. She had always wanted to see it. She put that at the top of her list of things to do once she was settled in.

Amy went to work Monday, enjoyed a relaxing evening at home watching a movie, eating popcorn and sipping a glass of red wine. She went to bed at her usual time of 11:00 p.m. after walking the dog and locking the doors.

Most of the time Abby slept through the night but occasionally she would wake Amy with an urgent need to go out. Tonight was one of those nights. They had only been asleep for one hour. Groggily Amy stepped into her slippers.

“Abby you better really have to go,” she said as she headed off down the hallway, the little dog leading the way.

As she walked out the door and stepped onto the front lawn, bright meteorites streaked across the sky above her. The cool night air felt good against her skin. A slight breeze rustled her hair.

Suddenly Abby began to bark in that hysterical little dog yapping Amy was so familiar with.

“Oh my God,” she said. “What’s your problem?”

Some of the neighbor’s dogs began to join in.

“See what you did?” Amy said as if the dog could understand her.

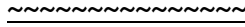
She stood staring into the heavens. The streaks of light were continuous and numbered in the hundreds. She had never seen anything like it.

Abby attempted to bark and pee at the same time. Her habit of lifting one leg off the ground while squatting made this almost impossible. Looking down and seeing the trouble she was having Amy couldn’t help but giggle.

After Abby finished her business they went back into the house and turned on the TV. The news channels were breaking in with video of the meteors as they streaked across the sky. There had been no warning of this event the announcer said.

Amy thought that was strange. How did they not know?

She had to be at work the next morning so she turned the TV off and went back to bed. She was soon fast asleep. It was 12:50 a.m.



The alarm sounded at 06:30 a.m. Amy had to be at work at eight but she could leave the house at fifteen minutes before and still get to work on time. She never quite understood people who get to work early. She worked hard and stayed late but she didn't do early. Sleep was too valuable.

She put on her housecoat and headed to the kitchen to make coffee. The morning sky was ablaze with yellow, orange and red at the horizon then transitioning to bright violets and blues higher up.

She started the coffee maker and tried to get Abby to go out with her to get the news paper. News papers were being overtaken by technology but Amy still liked the feel of an actual paper in her hands.

The little dog refused to go. She seemed nervous, which was strange because she was always excited to go out in the morning. Unless of course it was raining.

Amy left her where she was and went out to retrieve the morning paper alone.

She stepped out onto the lawn but the paper wasn't in its usual spot.

Tommy must be running late, she thought.

Across the street and two houses down she saw one of her neighbors, an older retired lady Amy knew as Miss Lillian, out walking in her front yard. She was wearing a pink nightgown but had on no house coat and only one slipper.

That's strange, Amy thought.

The ground was cold and covered with dew. She watched for a moment as the lady walked slowly in a circle. She was raising her feet with every step as if she were stepping over something on the lawn. She stopped, slowly turned and waved weakly.

Amy kind of waved back raising her right arm slightly from its position by her side. Even in the dim light and at that distance she could see the dark circles around the ladies eyes. The sockets looked empty. Amy, a little spooked, looked away.

Her attention was drawn to a figure standing by the street next door. It was her neighbor Bob. He had helped her tremendously in her short time here and she considered him her first friend in Flagstaff. He was an

older retired widower and mostly kept to himself. He occasionally helped Lillian across the street but they actually didn't seem to like each other very much. Amy thought that was a strange relationship.

His back to her, he stood a little unsteadily peering down the street. She walked toward him and called his name. He didn't seem to hear her.

She approached him and tapped him on the shoulder. She noticed the blood on his arm and stepped back.

"My God Bob are you ok?" she asked as he turned to face her.

His sleeves and the front of his shirt were soaked with blood. As their gaze met Amy saw that his eyes were wide and hazed over and there was this god awful hideous, lip-less grin on his face. He looked like a crazed homicidal clown. His hair was matted with blood and his nose was a mangled bloody mess. He was groaning as though he were in pain. She stood in shock, staring.

He screamed, bringing Amy out of her trance, and lunged at her. She turned to run. He fell down behind her but managed to grab the bottom of her housecoat causing her to trip. She fell face first into the grass. He had a hold of her ankle now and was trying to get into

position to bite. She turned onto her back and kicked him in the face as hard as she could. His head snapped back as he let out another angry growl. He didn't loosen his grip on her ankle. She kicked him again.

Looking around for a weapon she saw only one possibility, a lawn sprinkler, with a metal spike on the bottom, sticking out of the lawn three feet away.

She kicked him two more times in the face and turned over and crawled toward the sprinkler. Clawing at the dirt and dragging her neighbor's zombie behind her, she finally made it and jerked the sprinkler out of the ground. She turned and kicked him one more time in the face.

Raising the sprinkler over her head with both hands, she brought it down as hard as she could, plunging the spike into the top of his skull.

It seemed to sink in slow motion, squirting blood in a crimson geyser as it sank into his brain.

A vision flashed through her mind of the "Sword And The Stone". The sword stuck in the stone awaiting the true king to come and remove it.

He who removes the sprinkler from the skull of the zombie, shall be King, she thought.

The thought left her mind just as quickly as it had come.

As the spike plunged into the depths of the zombie's brain, his grip on her ankle weakened, he slumped to the ground and was still. She crab walked several feet backwards and sat staring at the dead man while trying to make sense of what just happened. Despite the cool air she had started to sweat profusely. Her heavy breathing causing her chest to rise and fall. Her heart pounded in her ears.

"Holy shit Miss Amy!" It was Tommy the paper boy.

Tommy was a twelve year old boy who lived at the other end of the street with his Mother, Father and sister. He was short for his age and a little overweight. Curly brown hair stuck out from underneath his Sun Devils ball cap. She noticed that his shirt was on inside out. He had been the first to welcome Amy to the neighborhood.

He was standing on the sidewalk. His bike on its side, newspapers strewn all around. She hadn't even noticed that he had ridden up.

"I saw the whole thing, are you ok?" he asked

"I think so," she said weakly.

He walked up and handed her the paper as if it was a normal morning. "Sorry I'm late," he said.

Her neighbor would have attacked and killed Tommy had she not come along. So she started the first day of the end of the world by killing her neighbor and saving her paperboys life.

All in a days work, she thought.

People were starting to come out of their houses. Bloodied and shuffling along slowly. They wandered into the street. There must have been fifteen or twenty of them. The street had been empty just minutes before.

Across the street, Mrs. Lee ran out of her house screaming. Covered in blood. Right behind her was her husband Fred. His face bloodied and bruised. Close on his heels was their teenaged son Brian who was growling and snarling as he chased his Father out into the street. His eyes were wide with rage.

Mrs. Lee ran into the path of another one of them who grabbed her by the neck and raised her arm to his mouth. She screamed in agony as its teeth sank into her flesh. There was nothing Amy could do and Mrs. Lee's attempts to escape were futile.

Fred ran past them and bolted down the street. He was met by three more of the slower moving ones who grabbed him as he passed and dragged him to the ground. Fred's son leaped onto him and began to rip his chest and abdomen open with his bare hands.

He held two handfuls of entrails high above his head and let go an evil scream unlike anything Amy had heard this side of a movie screen. The scream echoed through the neighborhood as Mr. Lee was butchered alive.

Amy stood terrified. Hardly breathing and frozen in place.

A crowd had converged on Mrs. Lee who was on her back and flailing wildly. One of the un-dead monsters ripped her throat out, the wind pipe dangling from its mouth. The screaming stopped. She laid there, her body seizing and convulsing. Blood flew into the air in all directions as if she had stepped into a buzz saw. The ravenous diners screamed with evil delight as they ripped her from limb to limb.

"Oh my God!" Amy exclaimed. "There eating her."

The rest hadn't seemed to notice Amy or Tommy yet. They were all converging on Mr. and Mrs. Lee to join the others for breakfast.

Other than the now defunct Lees, and possibly the lady she saw earlier across the street, it appeared to Amy that she and Tommy were the only ones on the street not affected by whatever this was that was happening.

"Tommy, get back on you bike and get home as fast as you can!" Amy said. "Are your Mom and Dad ok?"

"I don't know I left before any of them were up."

"Go tell your Mom what happened and tell her to call 911. Then lock your doors and stay inside until the police arrive," she told him. "And stay away from those... things."

"You mean zombies," Tommy said matter-of-factly. "They look like zombies."

"What-ever just stay clear," she said. "Now go!"

Tommy jumped on his bike and rode off. He flew by the two groups of dead so fast that when they looked up he was gone.

Amy turned to go into the house and almost bumped into the lady from across the street who had walked up behind her.

"Are you ok Lillian?" she asked noticing a grey haze over the old lady's green blood shot eyes. Blood ran

from her nose. A Bloody tear leaked from the corner of her right eye. "Lillian?" she repeated realizing now that she was looking a dead person in the eyes.

Her heart raced and she expected the lady to lunge at her. Instead they both stood there for a moment as if frozen in time. Lillian bent down and picked up one of the newspapers from the ground. She looked at Amy, grunted something unintelligible, and headed back toward her own house. Amy watched her as she high stepped across the street once again walking as if she were wearing swim fins or trying to step over something.

The screams of the mob devouring Mrs. Lee brought her back to reality. She raced back into the house, grabbed the phone and dialed 911. There was a fast busy signal. She tried her cell phone. It was dead. She called the city police station. There was a recording telling everyone to stay in their homes and keep the doors locked. It said the situation was under control.

Yeah right, she thought as a siren wailed off in the distance.

For a very brief moment she thought about calling in to work but abandoned that idea quickly.

Amy turned the TV to one of the news channels. There were reports coming in from all over the world of widespread bloodshed and death. Billions of people were dying only to get up and walk away minutes later.

Whatever it was circled the globe quickly, the announcer said. Far more quickly than any rational could explain. In a matter of hours no island, city or continent was spared. Widespread infections were reported on every land mass on Earth. Ships at sea fought outbreaks onboard or drifted with the ocean currents, no one at the helm. Manned only by crews of the undead.

I wonder if this has anything to do with the meteors? Amy thought,

For most, death came quickly. The symptoms appeared without warning. High fever and vomiting followed by unconsciousness and coma. Death soon followed. And reanimation only minutes later. A small number of people were immune.

The talking head was telling the public to stay in their homes and keep the doors locked. These zombies, as they were calling them, were everywhere and they feed on the living. This disease was highly contagious they said. And lastly, they were almost impossible to kill.

"Unless you drive a lawn sprinkler into their skull," Amy commented. She made a mental note of that fact for future reference.

The announcer continued. While their grip can be very strong, and their bite deadly, in general they are weak, slow and uncurious creatures who become excitable quickly when stimulated by the smell of fresh meat.

"Fresh meat?" Amy said out loud to herself. "You have got to be kidding me..."

The last bit of advice given was to stay inside and not bring attention to yourself. When a survivor was spotted they will always attack.

Ok, she thought. Slow? Most of them were but what about Mr. and Mrs. Lee's son. He was anything but slow and he seemed much more evil than the rest. And that scream.

She could still hear it echoing through her mind.

And if they always attack the living why didn't Miss Lillian attack me when she had the chance.

None of this made sense.

"Shit! I forgot about my coffee!" she said. "No wonder I'm so nervous."

Some things never change. The end of the world or not Amy had to have her morning coffee.

She poured herself a cup, cream no sugar, locked all the doors, closed the blinds and drapes and peered out the front window.

The walking corpses were wandering around the streets grunting, snarling and looking otherwise quite unpleasant.

Strangely enough they weren't the least bit interested in each other. Only fresh meat would do she guessed.

There were two standing in the front yard looking down at Amy's dead neighbor. These things obviously weren't very intelligent. Without a clear target to go after they just wandered around aimlessly, waiting on one of the others to sound the alarm whenever a survivor was spotted.

Mr. and Mrs. Lee lay where they had fallen. Both far too damaged to make a comeback. The crowd gathered around them was starting to disperse. The bodies had been quickly picked clean as if by a pack of hyenas.

Amy watched curiously as two of the walking corpses began to fight over a scrap of meat. The fracas ending only after the meat had disappeared down the gullet of

one of the them. The other looked at him disgustedly, screamed and shuffled away.

Amy went to the kitchen, took several long butcher knives out of the drawer and set them on the dining room table. She retrieved an aluminum softball bat from the laundry room. She placed it by the back door and went to her nightstand and took out her 9mm pistol. She had fired the weapon exactly once.

Oh my God, she thought. I hope I remember how to use this thing.

She had several boxes of ammunition for the pistol which she stuck in the waistband of her pants and laid the ammunition on the table. Next she gathered three flash lights and all the batteries she could find.

She topped off her cup of coffee and went to check the news again.

Amy turned to one of the local channels. They had a camera on the roof of their building filming the chaos. The living dead were ravaging the city and everyone in it. Hundreds of the un-dead filled the streets. The few living that could be seen were running for their lives. Most didn't get far before being overtaken.

The picture cut away to the Mayor. He was sitting in a chair in the TV studio. It looked as if he was going to make a statement. He was pale and sweating profusely. He looked very confused.

He started to speak, but it was as if he couldn't think of anything to say. A strange look came over his face and he threw up on the desk in front of him. He calmly pulled his pen from his pocket, held it in front of his face, and studied it closely for a moment.

Suddenly he screamed and plunged the pen into his right eye, twisting it as it went in deeper. Blood shot out and splattered the front of his shirt.

A tall heavy set man calmly stepped from behind the camera, walked up to the Mayor and hit him in the head with a steel pipe. The scream stopped and the Mayor fell from the chair.

The man reached down and took the microphone from the Mayor's jacket, stepped up to the camera and spoke, "This will be the last broadcast from this station. God help us all."

There was a crashing sound and the camera swung around. Streaming through the doors of the studio, a group of the dead was coming directly at them.

The man who stepped in front of the camera with the pipe, went on the attack. He was soon overwhelmed and disappeared in the crowd. The camera was rushed. The screen went blank as the camera was knocked over and blood covered the lens.

Amy sat there for a few minutes staring at the screen. Not believing what she had just seen. She turned the channel again and there was a televangelist. She didn't wait to see what his message was but was sure it had something to do with how disaster could still be diverted if only everyone would send him one thousand dollars.

The signal faded and was gone completely. The satellite was out. She began to regret sending Tommy away. She hoped he was ok.

She retrieved the radio from the cabinet and put in new batteries. She would try to find a station that was still broadcasting later. Right now she knew she had to concentrate on turning the house into a fortress.

She double-checked all the doors and windows and made sure they were locked and properly secured. The house had a large attic. Because of possibly needing to retreat there, she decided to keep most of the food and water there just in case.

Amy was just about to pull down the ladder when she heard a scream outside. This wasn't one of the dead. It sounded like Tommy.

Running to the front window and looking out she could see Tommy peddling up the road on his bike weaving around the dead and being chased by the ones he had already passed.

Running to the back door she took a quick look outside. The coast was clear. She unlocked the door, pulled the 9mm from her waist band and ran to the hedges that separated her yard from Bob's.

Slipping through bushes she went around the back of Bob's garage and up to his back door. It was standing wide open. Bob lived alone so she hoped as she ran through his house that no one or no thing would be inside.

The front door was open. She ran to the sidewalk just as Tommy was passing, jerked him off the bike, and held him up in front of her.

"It's ok Tommy," she said. "It's me Miss Amy."

Pushing him toward Bob's house, she screamed for him to run inside. The living dead were at their heels, howling like ravenous hyenas. Tommy made it to the

house first. Amy was right behind him with one on her trail breathing down her neck.

As she reached the top of the steps she turned and raised the pistol. The zombie was close enough to grab her shirt. She clutched him by the throat and pushed him back. At the same time she put the gun to his forehead and tried to pull the trigger. Nothing.

"Shit!" she screamed. "The safety."

She flipped the safety off with her thumb, still holding the zombie by the throat, and pulled the trigger again.

The back of the zombie's head exploded as blood and brains splattered the ones behind it. She shoved the body down the steps as hard as she could sending it crashing into the ones behind it. They fell out onto the lawn like bowling pins.

Amy turned and rushed into the house. As she came through the doorway Tommy slammed the door shut, locked the dead bolt and latched the chain.

"Wow!" Tommy said. "That was freaking awesome!" He looked around the room. "Why are we in Mr. Jones house?"

"You'll have to trust me Tommy," she told him. "And do exactly as I say, ok?"

"Ok," he said.

"We have to go out the back door and over to my house as quickly and quietly as possible," she explained. "Follow me, stay close and keep quiet. Got it?"

"Got it," he said as he moved toward the back door.

Amy looked out and saw nothing. She could here the dead in the front. A crowd of them had gathered at the front door and were banging on and clawing at it trying to get in. She took the key out of the dead bolt and stepped out onto the back porch locking the door behind her.

Crouching they made their way beside and to the back of the garage. She looked down the driveway and saw more of the dead converging on the front of Bob's house, alerted by the screams of the others.

Finally there were none crossing the driveway so they crossed the few feet to the hedge and made their way through and into Amy's back yard.

Quickly and quietly they made their way to the back door and into the house. Very gently she closed the door behind them and locked it.

There was a lot of commotion next door. The walking corpses were really trying there best to get inside.

"Tommy, be quiet ok." Amy said. "Hopefully they'll give up and go away."

"Thanks," Tommy whispered. "I would have been a goner for sure. If you hadn't gone through Mr. Jones's house to get me they would be banging on your door right now. You're a genius".

"Shh..." Amy said putting a finger to her lips, "Quiet."

"Ok," Tommy whispered back.

Amy grabbed some water, went to the hallway and sat down beside Tommy on the floor. They listened to the moaning and groaning coming from the dead still trying to get into the house next door.

After a while the commotion trailed off and stopped completely. Amy went to the end of the hall and peered out the bathroom window that overlooked the driveway. From the window she had a clear view of Bob's driveway and the side and front of his house. Their driveways were up against each other and the two houses sat right beside the driveways.

The sun was up over the houses now and was shining directly on the dead. Obviously the bright light was uncomfortable to them. Most shielding their eyes and

headed for cover. They didn't seem to be in pain but were clearly trying to get out of the sunlight.

She called to Tommy to check on the dog in the dining room. She had forgotten all about her. Tommy said she wasn't there. They did a thorough search of the house and she was nowhere to be found.

“She must have ran out when I came to get you,” she told Tommy.

They looked out the windows all around the house but there was no sign of her. She hoped the dead didn't eat dogs too. Although even if they did the chances of them catching one was pretty slim.

The streets and lawns were clear. At first she thought they were all gone but upon further observation saw them standing in the shade, under trees, beside houses and inside open garages. They were just standing around, swaying back and forth.

She was about to turn away when she noticed someone walking down the sidewalk toward her house. She squinted to see better through the crack in the blinds. It wasn't just someone. It was the mailman. And he was walking like the lady from across the street. Lifting his feet high with each step and slapping it back down again as he moved along. He reached Amy's house and

high stepped up to the porch.. She watched him as he reached into his bag as if to retrieve something but his hand came out empty.

By this time Amy could see that the man was obviously one of the dead. Only he wasn't like the rest. Blood soaked the side of his face and the front of his shirt. His left cheek had been ripped away leaving his teeth exposed. Shiny white enamel shone through dried blood. Bloody red spittle ran out of his mouth where there was no lip to catch it.

More than a little freaked out by now she watched as the mailman stepped off the porch and headed out across the yard. He had gone only ten yards from her doorstep when out of nowhere came Mrs. Lee's son Brian.

He bounded across the street. She thought at first he was going to attack the mailman but at the last second he veered off. She looked in the direction he was headed and saw that he was after another one. Walking just like the mailman, it was trying to move down the street as fast as possible but obviously too slow to outrun this faster thing.

It reached the slower zombie quickly and leaped at the hapless dead man bowling him over. She watched as it grabbed the man's zombie by the throat and ripped at

his neck until the head was liberated from the rest of the body. He stood, raised it above his head and let out a blood curdling scream.

He turned and sprinted off down the street. Still clutching the man's head by the hair.

The dead who had been milling about nearby looked up for a moment and went back to killing time as they had been before. They seemed unconcerned.

The mailman's zombie headed off in the opposite direction as quickly as it could.

"What's happening?" Tommy asked.

"It was one of the zombies," she said. "Brian Lee just killed it."

"You mean it was alive?" Tommy asked.

"No... I mean.. yes. Oh my God," she stammered. "He was one of those dead things, but, but Brian Lee tore him to pieces. It was.. just evil."

"They're all evil," Tommy said.

"No this was different. The mailman was different. I don't know. It's all so weird," she swallowed hard. "It's like there are three different kinds of them."

"Three kinds of zombies? That's crazy," Tommy commented.

"I know. It's like the mailman was trying to go about his business like he did any other day. It's like he doesn't know he's dead." Amy let the words hang in the air for a moment. "And then the thing that used to be the Lee's son. It's not like the others. Not like the slow ones and not like the mailman."

They went back to the hallway where they stayed for a while.

Finally Amy spoke. "I need to go and check on Abby," she told Tommy.

She pulled the 9mm out once again, reloaded the clip, and told Tommy she was going outside for a moment. She told him to lock the door behind her very quietly and wait for her to return. She may need to get back into the house quickly.

"Can you handle a baseball bat?" she asked Tommy.

"Does a bear shit in the woods?" he said.

"Seriously?" Amy said as she handed him the bat. "You think just cause it's the end of the world you can start talking however you want to?"

"Yep," he replied.

Amy looked at him and grinned. "Just don't get carried away ok?"

"Ok Miss Amy?" he said. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll explain when I get back," she said. "Also, I think under the circumstances you can just call me Amy now"

"Ok, I'll try Miss Amy," he said.

She checked her pocket to make sure she still had the key to Bob's house, unlocked the door and stepped out onto the patio. A quick look around told her she was alone in the backyard. She heard the door close and lock behind her. She studied the back yard a little closer and saw that there was nowhere for one of them to hide.

She couldn't see Bob's back yard because of the hedges. Only the roof of his garage was visible over it. She crept over to the edge of her house and looked down the driveway. The driveways were clear.

Good, she thought.

She went to the back of her yard and looked through the hedge behind Bob's garage.

"Damn it," she said under her breath.

There was a zombie at the back of the garage. No doubt hiding from the sun.

He seemed to be asleep on his feet. She would need to come back this way so she was going to have to take care of him now and without firing a shot.

The noise would bring the others for sure. She put the 9mm back in her waistband and looked around for another weapon. There was a large smooth rock just on the other side of the hedge. She would have to get to it without the zombie hearing her.

Slowly she belly crawled under the hedge. When she emerged on the other side he was at the other end of the garage about twenty feet away. He hadn't heard her and his back was turned. She picked up the rock.

She couldn't tell if she knew this person or not. He was covered in blood and filth. She knew she would only have one shot at this. One scream and she would be besieged.

She crept up behind him. Just at that instant the thing seemed to wake and sniff at the air. Amy froze in place. She could feel the hair stand up on the back of her neck.

The dead man suddenly turned. He swung both arms at her but she ducked, and stepped out of the way. The zombie grasped at empty space as Amy raised the rock over her head with both hands and brought it down hard.

There was a sickening sound as the rock shattered the things skull. Blood and brains poured out of the dead man's open forehead. Blood splattered the front of her shirt.

The zombie fell to the ground. There was a moan and it was still. This time it wouldn't get back up.

She was amazed at how calmly she went about this business of killing the dead. No remorse, no guilt. Nothing. Just complete and total indifference. She guessed it was because she knew it was kill or be killed. Although she didn't think you could actually call this killing.

They're already dead aren't they? she thought. *The person they once were was long gone.*

She dropped the rock at her feet and carefully took her shirt off being very careful not to get any of the blood on her skin.

Now with only her bra for a top she crept over to the side of the garage and looked around the corner. The back yard was clear and so was the driveway. Luckily this zombie was a loner.

She ran over to the back of the house, took the key out of her pocket and unlocked the door. She pulled out the gun, held it at the ready and stepped inside.

There was a pile of unfolded laundry sitting on top of the dryer by the door. She grabbed a t-shirt and pulled it over her head.

She proceeded to check every room. She was alone in the house.

She found a shotgun, along with four boxes of shells, in a closet in one of the bedrooms. She fumbled with it for a while to make sure she understood how it worked, loaded it and laid it on the table.

She found plenty of stuff they needed in the kitchen. Canned and dry goods. She grabbed a laundry basket and filled it with food.

She made two trips to her house, leaving the shotgun with Tommy after the first. She decided to go back for a third time.

She was looking for batteries or whatever else they could use this time. She went into the bathroom and opened the cabinet.

She put everything of use in the sink in front of her and closed the cabinet door. Seeing movement in the mirror, she looked up in time to see the shower curtain being pushed to one side. Before she had time to react the zombie lunged at her. It tripped over the tub but managed to grab her hair as it was falling to the floor.

Amy, still in the dead man's grasp, fell on top of him. The zombie had a firm grip on her and was pulling her closer to its face.

She managed to get her elbow on the dead man's throat while frantically trying to get the 9mm out of her waistband. She was being pulled closer and closer to the bloody face of her attacker. She was close enough to feel the cold damp air being exhaled as it growled and snapped its teeth. Its breath was a sickening aromatic cacophony of putrid rotting flesh. She could clearly see the white gleaming bodies of tiny maggots crawling around the corners of its eyes.

Finally she was able to get a grip on the pistol. She put it to the zombie's forehead and pulled the trigger.

The zombie's head snapped back as its body relaxed and let loose its grip on her. She put another round in the top of his head for good measure. It lay unmoving beneath her.

Struggling to her feet she leaned against the wall. She stared down at the body as a pool of blood slowly spread out from underneath it.

"Shit, shit, shit!" she screamed.

Taking a deep breath she collected her thoughts for a moment, examined herself for wounds, and went back to what she had been doing.

For a brief moment she felt like crying but fought the urge.

There would be no time to cry from now on, she thought.

She stuffed the pain meds and antacids into her pockets, stepped over the zombie and out of the bathroom. She headed up the hall and to the kitchen.

As she rounded the corner she was met by another one standing at the back door blocking her path.

Still angry about being attacked she stood there staring the dead man down. She raised the pistol, aimed between the things eyes and waited for it to charge.

“What are you waiting for?” she finally screamed.

The zombie flinched as if startled by her outburst but made no move to attack her. It stood there for a few more seconds, grunted at her, turned and stepped out onto the porch. It walked down the steps and into the yard. She walked outside and watched as it high stepped down the driveway.

“Strange,” she said softly to herself, “he’s just like the mailman and Miss Lillian.”

Just as she came to the bottom step, another one shuffled around the corner of the house. His arms were outstretched and the hands were opening and closing like he was trying to grab something. He was growling through clenched teeth like a rabid dog.

For some strange reason this reminded her of a Little rascals episode she saw many times on VHS tape as a kid. The episode where a wild man from the deepest darkest jungle had escaped from the circus and was chasing the our gang kids around the house saying “yum yum eat ‘em up, yum yum eat ‘em up”. She smiled at the idea, a little amused at herself for having such a thought at a time like this. She shook the notion from her head and tightened her grip on the pistol.

The dead man that had just walked away turned back to look and picked up its pace as it moved down the driveway a little faster.

Amy stopped and waited for this one to stop and stare. It didn't. It shuffled closer and was obviously intent on killing her.

She pointed the pistol at the thing and pulled the trigger. The dead man's bottom jaw flew apart. Its head jerked to one side but the zombie continued forward, the top row of teeth and the jagged white remnants of its jaw bone now exposed. The bloody bruised tongue darted around its shattered mouth like a wounded snake.

Amy aimed more carefully this time and squeezed the trigger again. The shot entered between the thing's eyes forcing the contents of its skull out a gaping smoking hole in the back of its head. It took one more step and crumpled to the ground in a lifeless heap.

Alerted by the gunshots, those that had been milling about in the street and yards nearby turned toward the sound and were heading in her direction. She couldn't risk them seeing her go back to her house so she ran back into Bob's.

Amy went to the front door and peered through the peephole. There were five dead on the porch. She opened the door quickly and kicked the closest one in the chest sending it into the others. All five tumbled down the steps and onto the sidewalk.

She fired five shots in quick succession into the group and slammed the door shut. The growls of anger started up immediately. She hoped this would draw them all to the front of the house so she could make her escape.

Rushing to the back door she stepped out and looked around the corner. All the activity was now in the front. The dead that were heading up the driveway a few minutes ago were now at the front with the rest. All clawing and beating at the thick wooden door.

She retraced the route back to her house and tapped lightly on the back door. It swung open and she was safely back inside. They quickly and quietly locked and barricaded the door. She leaned against it and let out a long sigh.

“That isn’t the shirt you had on,” Tommy commented.

“I’ll tell you later,” Amy answered.

They retreated to the hallway and had a lunch of Vienna Sausages, crackers and water.

“I wish we had some pickles,” Tommy commented.

Mentally and physically exhausted, Amy finished eating and passed out on the floor and slept. Tommy lay quietly nearby.

She awoke with a start several hours later to the sound of clawing and barking at the back door. She rushed to the kitchen and peered out the window. She could see Abby.

She moved the barricades and was about to open the door and let her in when two of the dead came around the corner of the house making straight for the little dog.

She charged them and was biting at their ankles. One of them reached down, picked her up by the neck and held her there while choking her at the same time.

The dog fought and squirmed at first but quickly went limp. The zombie ripped the dog’s throat out and dropped it to the ground.

In an uncontrollable rage Amy snatched the shotgun off the table and stepped out onto the patio. The two dead saw her and started toward her. She put one shell

into the chest of the first one, pumped the shotgun and put another into the second. Both were knocked over backwards to the ground.

She placed the shotgun on the ground and retrieved the bat from beside the door. Tommy watched from the doorway, eyes wide and mouth agape.

She walked up to the two zombies, both trying to get back on their feet, and gave each one a full swing of the bat. The bat crashed against their heads sending both zombies crumpling to the ground face first.

Still enraged she took up the shotgun once again and put a shell into the back of each one of the zombie's heads. Their skulls exploded in a shower of blood, bone and grey matter.

Justice had been swift and revenge was sweet, she thought.

She heard a shuffle and a grunt behind her. She pumped another shell into the chamber and spun around.

Lillian, the lady from across the street was walking toward her. Still in her night gown and one slipper, she walked with that strange high stepping gate Amy had seen earlier in the mailman and the zombie at Bob's

house. The old lady looked at Amy and let out a weak groan through clenched teeth.

She dropped to her knees, raised her arms, opened her mouth wide and let loose a scream of pain and anguish that made Amy's blood run cold.

The scream resonated through the air and sounded as if she was screaming out for help.

After a moment the scream faded and Lillian fell silent. She remained in this position for a few more seconds and looked Amy directly in the eyes. A bloody tear ran down her cheek.

Amy stood there, stunned at what she was seeing. Finally the old woman lowered her head as if to look at the ground.

After a couple of minutes the sound of more dead advancing up the driveway brought her back to reality. She pulled the 9mm from her waistband and put one round in the old lady's head putting her out of her misery. Her body flopped over on its side and she was still.

She looks strangely peaceful, Amy thought.

By this time every zombie on the block was alerted and a mob was heading her way.

She rushed back into the house and barricaded the door.

Soon the back yard was full of the dead.

“Miss Amy, you remember what I said about you being a genius and everything?” Tommy said.

“Yes.”

“Well, I take it back,”

“Really?”

“All that trouble you went through to make sure the dead would think we were next door was for nothing,” he exclaimed. “They definitely know where we are now.”

For some reason this struck Amy as funny and she began to laugh. Tommy, a little perplexed at first, soon joined in and they laughed until their sides hurt.

Once the laughter died down they moved most of their supplies to the attic. They would sleep there at night just in case the dead somehow found their way inside the house.

She cut the rope from the ladder so that it couldn't be pulled down. They raised it up behind them and wedged a broom handle between the ladder and the

door frame so that it couldn't be lowered. She made sure the pistol and shotgun were fully loaded and the bat was close by. Exhausted they each got into their sleeping bags and tried to go to sleep.

"Amy," Tommy whispered, "are you awake?"

"I'm awake, is something wrong?"

"I just want to go home," Tommy said weakly.

She could tell he was on the verge of crying. "I know Tommy. I'm sorry but you can't go home."

"I know but I'm still homesick," he said and rolled over and went to sleep.

The dead stayed out side clawing and tapping at the windows all night.



By sunrise it was as if the dead had forgotten why they were there and most had wandered off.

When Amy woke she lowered the ladder, descended into the hallway and checked the house. The doors were locked and dead-bolted just as they had left them.

She checked the front door. It seemed to be undamaged. She peered through the peephole. There

was no activity on the porch or front lawn. Slowly she opened the door.

Tommy had climbed down from the attic and stood quietly behind her.

Looking down Amy recoiled in horror. On the small porch in front of the door were bodies stacked like firewood. All of their heads smashed in. There was an awful stench coming from them.

“Oh my God, they stink,” Amy said looking down at the pile of flesh.

“What is it?” Tommy asked peering around from behind her.

“I don’t know but it smells like road-kill, vomit and zombie pee.” Amy answered. “Why would they do this?”

Off in the distance a scream began. An evil blood curdling scream. It started low and became louder as it reverberated around them.

A chill came over Amy’s entire body causing her to shiver.

“It’s not human,” Amy said closing the door and locking it.

“What is it?” Tommy asked.

“I think it’s Brian Lee or at least one like him,” she said.

They retreated to the kitchen and sat down to eat.

The electricity had gone out sometime during the night. Amy tried the battery operated radio. Nothing but white noise.

They had several cases of bottled water and after eating breakfast Amy filled every container she could find. The water pressure finally dropped to a trickle and stopped all together.

They had enough food and water to last at last several weeks Amy guessed.

They passed the next few days without incident. Then on the night of the tenth day that all changed.



Amy laid down, blew out the candle and closed her eyes. Suddenly there was a scream from the front yard. Tommy stood up and tried to make it to where Amy lay. He tripped over a box and fell in a heap at her feet.

She grabbed the flashlight she kept by her pillow.

"Tommy are you alright?" she asked shining her light on him.

"I'm ok," he said rubbing his knee. "What was that?"

Before Amy could answer there was another scream and a loud bang at the front door. There was another bang and a crash as the door gave way.

Amy jumped up and had Tommy get behind some boxes. She took hold of the shot gun and made sure a shell was in the chamber.

"What is it Amy?" Tommy asked.

"Shh... listen." was the only answer he received.

They could hear footsteps approaching. Amy handed Tommy the pistol.

"The safety is off. Do not put your finger on the trigger unless something happens to me," she whispered, "ok?"

The footsteps drew nearer until it was directly beneath the attic hatch. Amy crept over to the hatch and pointed the barrel down.

They could hear a low growl emanating from whatever it was. The sound of another one shuffling down the hallway met their ears.

This sounds like one of the regular dead, she thought.

The shuffling came to the area beneath her and stopped. She heard the first one growl angrily. Evidently not happy about the arrival of a companion.

She stood silently listening. She could imagine the evil thing standing just below her. Looking up with hate filled eyes.

Amy slowly removed the broom handle from the door. Another growl came from below.

With the shotgun at the ready she kicked the door open. The ladder unfolded and fell out barely missing the thing.

It raised its head its red hate filled eyes meeting hers. Standing behind it was one of the droopy, hazy eyed slow ones.

Suddenly the first one leapt and started up the ladder.

Amy pulled the trigger blowing the top of its head off. Blood, brains and pieces of bloody scalp pelted the one behind it. The zombie winced and suddenly straightened up and turned its gaze to Amy. It was no longer droopy eyed. The stare burned right through her and chilled her to the bone. A scream exited its throat as it jolted forward. Amy pumped the shotgun once

and fired again. The shot grazed its shoulder but did not slow it down.

By this time it was almost to the top of the ladder. Amy stepped back and attempted to pump another shell into the chamber but she lost her footing and fell over backwards striking her head on a rafter.

The zombie grasped the top of the ladder and hoisted itself up. Standing upright, its arms bent and its fingers curled up like claws, it screamed down at Amy who was laying five feet away and frantically trying to work the shotgun.

The zombie was just about to launch itself at her when a boom echoed through the attic. The dead thing lurched to the side as a bullet took off its lower jaw. Before it could recover another shot rang out. This one entered the left temple and blew a hole big enough to stick your fist through on the other side of its head.

As Amy gasped for air it collapsed to its knees at the top of the ladder.

Tommy, the smoking pistol gripped tightly in his hand, calmly walked from behind the boxes and gave the evil monster a shove in the chest with his foot. It fell over backwards and tumbled down the ladder.

Amy looked at Tommy in awe. "You saved my life," she said.

Tommy offered her a hand up. "I guess we're even then right?"

"Right," Amy said managing a smile.

She stood on unsteady feet, examining the knot on her head with her fingers, and stepped over to the ladder. She shined the flashlight on the scene below. The dead lay in heap. Their bodies twisted in grotesque poses.

"What just happened?" Amy said.

"I don't know," Tommy answered leaning over to look down.

"The first was like Brian Lee, but the second... the second was just a regular zombie.... and then it changed..." she said shaking her head.

"Into one of those... those demon things," Tommy finished the thought for her.

"Demons?" Amy said looking at him puzzled.

"Yeah they're like demons or something. Demon dead."

“Demons, zombies, demon zombies, demon dead...” Amy said letting the words hang in the air for a few seconds. “I don’t know what they are but they’re definitely different from the others. More evil. If that’s even possible. I think demon dead pretty much sums it up.”

“Maybe they’re zombies possessed by demons.” Tommy said.

“You’ve been reading too many comic books Tommy,” Amy said. “Besides... I don’t believe in demons.”

“What about zombies?” Tommy asked. “Do you believe in zombies? I bet you didn’t a few weeks ago... what about now?”

“You know Tommy... that’s way too deep a thought process for a kid your age.”

“Well?” Tommy said.

Amy had no answer. They stood in silence for a few seconds. She lit more of the candles spread around their small living space.

“We have to get them out of the house and fix the door,” Amy said. “Give me the pistol.”

She took the 9mm, reloaded the clip and handed it back to Tommy.

“Stay here and be ready to shoot,” she said. “When I pull these guys out of the way climb down and stand guard.”

Amy climbed down and stood staring at the front door listening. She thought she heard something moving and stood still for a few more moments. When she was sure she had heard nothing she grabbed the first one by the feet and dragged it out of the way. She did the same with the second.

Tommy came down from the attic and stood off to the side. The pistol in one hand and the flashlight in the other.

Amy dragged both bodies to the back door and unlatched it.

“Let me have the flashlight for a second,” she told Tommy.

She directed the beam of light out into the back yard. She saw nothing but the bodies from before. She made a point not to look at her dog. She still felt guilty about not being able to save her.

When she was satisfied there was no danger she handed the light back to Tommy. One at a time she dragged the two bodies out into the yard then closed and locked the door.

“We have to close up that gaping hole in front,” Amy said. “Hopefully the door isn’t so damaged it can’t be salvaged.”

“Ok.”

“Just stand guard. If anything happens don’t shoot me.”

“I’m not,” Tommy said feeling a little insulted.

Amy took the flashlight from Tommy as they walked to the front room. The door lay on the floor but was still in one piece. It was splintered where the hinges once were attached.

Hearing a noise in front of her Amy shined the light at the open entrance.

She recoiled with a gasp. Standing on the porch staring at her was the mailman. Before she could act a shot rang out from behind her.

A piece of cloth and flesh flew off the mailman's shoulder as the bullet impacted. He winced but seemed to feel no pain.

"No," Amy said loudly, "don't shoot it."

"But it's a zombie," Tommy said.

"I know but it's one of the normal ones," she said realizing instantly what a ridiculous thing that was to say.

"Normal?" Tommy asked.

"I mean... I don't think it knows it's dead," she answered.

The mailman stepped closer to the doorway. The stack of bodies had been moved to the side. He reached into his shoulder bag and pulled out several pieces of mail and held them out to Amy.

"Don't," Tommy pleaded.

"It's ok," Amy said stepping slowly over to the doorway. "I don't think it wants to hurt us."

She reached out and took the mail. The dead man grunted, turned, walked off the porch and disappeared into the darkness.

Amy directed the beam of light to the envelopes.

“Oh my God! You have got to be kidding me,” she said obviously annoyed.

“What’s wrong?” Tommy asked.

“Well...,” she said shaking her head in disgust. “Even in the middle of a zombie apocalypse I’m still getting bills from the credit card company...”

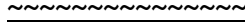
Amy took a box of nails and a hammer from the kitchen closet. She picked the door up and put it back in place. She nailed it up as best she could. They removed the door from the closet in the hallway and nailed it diagonally over the other.

“That’ll have to do,” Amy said. “Help me with the couch.”

Together they moved the couch and pushed it up against the door. Amy stacked everything she could find on top of it to add weight. They stepped back and were satisfied with their work.

Retreating to the attic, they pulled the ladder up and closed the door.

Amy replaced the broom handle. It took a while but they were finally able to go back to sleep.



The next morning Amy woke with a jolt. She looked around the attic. Tommy was still sleeping soundly. She held her breath and listened. She could clearly hear footsteps below. They drew closer until she heard them directly underneath them.

She heard voices. Muffled and whispering. She couldn't make out what they were saying. Their voices were obviously male. There were at least two maybe more.

She glanced at Tommy again. His eyes were open now staring at her. He was obviously frightened

She held her finger to her lips to signal him to stay quiet and reached for the pistol.

The voices faded as the footsteps moved off to the kitchen where she heard the door slam shut.

She had no idea who the visitors were.



The following week passed without incident. They watched quietly from the windows as the uncurious dead wandered about outside the house. Oblivious to their presence.

They continued to wait for help to come and rescue them. Amy had a picture in her mind of what happened after hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. She could imagine groups of rescuers going house to house searching for survivors. So far that help had not materialized. Amy thought there probably was no-one left to man or form the groups.

Occasionally there would be a straggler who would come into the yard and inspect the house but none of them made any attempt to get inside.

One day as they were sitting quietly in the living room reading they heard a scream.

“That’s not one of the dead,” Amy said jumping to her feet and rushing to the front window.

They peered out the just as a woman, clothes ripped and hanging in tatters from her body, ran screaming by the house. Close on her heels was another one of the demon dead. Much faster and more agile than the others, it was closing the distance quickly.

It caught her in front of the house next door and tackled her to the ground.

Tommy jumped back from the window and looked away.

Amy watched as the thing began to tear the woman apart.

She felt her stomach retch as she witnessed the woman being disemboweled by the zombie.

She was about to turn away when the thing suddenly raised its nose high into the air and sniffed like a wolf checking the wind for the scent of prey. It slowly turned its head and seemed to be looking directly at her. Her blood turned cold as a chill ran through her body. Her scalp tingled, her breathing stopped. She was frozen with fright.

She knew there was no way it could see her, but... it sensed her presence.

A slow one appeared from behind the house across the street. This drew the other's attention. It growled loudly at the slow zombie which stopped in its tracks. It watched from nearby hoping to get the scraps when the demon zombie had its fill.

Amy stepped away from the window and pointed down the hallway. "In the attic now," she whispered, "and don't make a sound."

Tommy nodded in the affirmative and slowly tip toed back to the attic where they remained for the rest of the day.

They passed the following days watching from the windows as the dead wandered about outside.

They had noticed after two weeks that some of the dead were quite literally starting to fall apart. It was not uncommon to see them missing arms, hands or even a leg. They saw a few crawling along the ground, the bottom half of their bodies useless. The majority though, unfortunately Amy thought, seemed to be unaffected and wandered aimlessly about the neighborhood.

After three weeks the dead who had fallen littered the streets. They had simply crumpled to the ground and lie there moaning and struggling.

Except for a few stragglers, the others soon wandered off and did not come back. Where they went Amy had no idea. But... she knew they were out there. Somewhere.



After three and a half weeks they were low on water and their food supply was running low.

They decided to take Amy's truck and drive into town. They had seen very few zombies near the house in the past two days.

Amy checked the weapons and filled a back pack with ammo, water and a days worth of food.

She armed Tommy with the 9mm pistol and had him put extra rounds in his pocket.

Amy moved the barricades and unlocked the door. They stepped out onto the patio and were smacked in the face with the stench of death. They had become somewhat used to it over the past couple of weeks but it was much stronger outside. They scanned the area for the dead but saw none.

The two zombies that killed the dog and the old woman were still where they fell. But now they were a mass of stinking rotting goo. The juices from the decay spreading out in a greasy puddle around them.

The other two were where Amy had dragged them some days ago. They were now black and bloated. Their skin crawling with so many maggots it seemed to be alive.

It was early morning and the sky was clear. The sun was low in the eastern sky. It looked as if it would be a beautiful day.

Amy told Tommy to wait at the door and to go back inside and lock it behind her if needed.

She walked over to the side of the house and looked down the driveway. She saw two of the dead walking around in one of the backyards a few houses down the street. Three more were writhing and squirming on the ground nearby in their last desperate attempts to stay undead.

They clacked their teeth together, slowly and rhythmically. One was trying to pull itself forward with his arms but was making no progress. Amy told Tommy to lock the door and follow her.

She pointed to the three un-dead nearby, "Ok Tommy, lets put these down," she said.

Tommy looked at her nervously. His grip on the pistol tightened. Sweat began to break out on his forehead.

They walked up to the first zombie. It turned its head toward them. Eyes wide he looked directly at them making eye contact. Tommy raised the pistol.

“Don’t shoot yet Tommy,” Amy said. “Wait until I tell you. There’s something different about this one.”

It made no threatening movement toward them and seemed to be pleading with its eyes. Begging them to end it for him.

Its nose was completely gone leaving a gaping hole where it once had been. One ear was missing and the scalp was peeling away from the side of its head.

It propped itself on one elbow and raised the other arm toward them as if reaching out for help.

Tommy stepped back.

It lowered its head. Its hands closed tightly digging into the lawn and clutching the grass.

“Now Tommy,” Amy whispered quietly, “now.”

Tommy fired once, the reverberation echoing throughout the neighborhood. The zombie went limp and crumpled to the ground. One last breath escaping its body. Its grip on the grass loosened as the muscles relaxed.

They stood in silence. Amy looked at Tommy as a tear escaped the corner of his eye and rolled down his cheek. A lump formed in her own throat, her eyes

became misty and she had to choke back the urge to cry.

This was the first time she had become emotional during this entire nightmare. The realization of that hit her suddenly and she was a little troubled by how hardened she had become.

There was no satisfaction from killing this one. This was different.

She thought back to Miss Lillian. There had to be some kind of connection.

Miss Lillian, as well as this one, seemed to want their life as one of the un-dead to come to an end.

Amy closed her eyes and said a prayer. It was the first time she had prayed since all this began.

They stood for a moment then the struggles of the other two drew their attention.

These two were snarling ferociously, teeth snapping and clawing their way toward them.

Regular old zombies, Amy thought.

Their eyes were wild, hazy and filled with hatred.

Two rounds were unceremoniously fired into each. They flopped to the ground face first. Blood spread out around them staining the ground. Amy felt nothing.

They scanned the street looking for movement. Bodies littered the sidewalks and lawns. There were no birds chirping, no squirrels, no sound at all. The street and the neighborhood was lifeless.

“Lets go,” she told Tommy.

They threw their things into Amy’s truck and started the engine. The sound of the throaty V-8 was music to her ears. She hadn’t heard that sound in almost 4 weeks.

They made their way slowly down the driveway and out into the street. The sound of rotting corpses squishing and crunching under the tires was nauseating.

A glob of greasy red matter splattered a mailbox after a particularly loud pop came from under the truck.

“Oh my God,” Amy said feeling sick.

She tried to avoid running over the bodies as best she could but sometimes it couldn’t be helped.

There was no sign of life or the living dead. Amy saw bodies stacked at the front door of several of the houses as they passed by. She was puzzled by what this could mean of anything.

She didn't point them out to Tommy and he said nothing if he noticed.

They made their way out of the neighborhood and onto the main street passing many scenes of death and devastation on the way into the heart of town.

The stench of death was overwhelming. Bodies in various stages of decay and dismemberment lay scattered about.

There was still no sign of life as they pulled up to the red light at Birch Avenue.

In the middle of the intersection was a police cruiser. The driver's side door open. In the driver's seat sat a dead police officer slumped over the steering wheel.

The sound of the idling truck reverberated through the morning air.

"What is it?" Tommy asked.

"Shh..." Amy whispered. "I think it moved."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth the dead police officer raised its head to look at them. Chills went through Amy's body.

"Uh oh," Tommy said.

The zombie slid out of the seat and stood up. Amy could see his shiny black shoes underneath the door.

"Give me the pistol," Amy said quietly.

Without taking his eyes off the zombie Tommy handed her the gun.

The dead officer stepped from behind the door and faced them. Gripped in his right hand was a pistol.

"He has a gun," Amy said. "Get ready to get down."

Tommy stayed where he was. Too afraid to move.

Just as Amy was about to get out of the truck and start shooting, the zombie stepped to the center of the intersection in that high stepping manner she had seen in the mailman and Miss Lillian.

"It's ok," she told Tommy. "He's like the mailman."

He stood staring at them.

"What does he want?" Tommy asked.

"I'm not sure," Amy answered.

The officer's zombie stood still. Watching them closely.

Amy looked at Tommy, reached up and turned on her left blinker.

The zombie stumbled back a few steps out of the way and raised its left arm to waved them through.

"Go," Tommy said. "He's letting us through."

Amy pulled out slowly and turned onto Birch. Tommy nodded as they passed the dead officer who was standing with a heavy list to the right. It nodded back and continued to wave them on.

Just as they finished the turn a scream echoed through the truck.

Amy stopped and looked up in the mirror. Tommy turned in his seat to see what was happening.

"Oh no," she said. "It's one of them and it's heading straight for the policeman's zombie."

Amy grabbed the shotgun and jumped out of the truck. She raised the barrel and was ready to shoot. The zombie was only yards from the dead officer by now.

They watched in amazement as the officer's zombie raised its pistol and fired. The recoil knocked the pistol out of the policeman's grip and the gun flew backwards landing in the street six feet away, but, the bullet had found its mark.

The demon zombie's skull exploded sending a red mist out the back. It stumbled a few more steps and fell face first sliding to a stop at the officer's feet.

The officer kicked at it weakly with its foot as if to make sure it was dead, went back to its cruiser and sat down.

Amy lowered the weapon. "That's the craziest freaking thing I've ever seen," she said getting back in the truck.

"Cool," Tommy said still looking back.

They continued on and soon pulled up to the corner in front of the courthouse, stopping by a yellow fire hydrant and park bench.

The courthouse was a two story red stone building with a clock tower on the front corner. There were two large green doors on each side of the tower. The doors on the right were wide open. The glass had been blasted out. On the left side one door was hanging haphazardly by one hinge and the other, mangled,

twisted, full of bullet holes and covered with blood, lay at the bottom of the steps.

Blood stained the side walk. Bodies lie on the front steps where they had fallen. The red stone around the entrance was pock marked with gun shots. Sunlight glistened off the bullet riddled glass of the upper floor.

A police cruiser and a TV news van were parked in the grass near the entrance. Blood was smeared on the outside of both vehicles. An arm dangled from the open door of the van. The arm began to move then a head appeared and turned to look at them.

They watched as the dead man crawled out of the van and stood facing them.

Tommy raised the pistol. "Don't," Amy said. "It's not one of them."

The zombie stared at them for a moment and high stepped over to a camera lying in the grass a few yards away. It picked it up, headed off toward the courthouse and disappeared through the green doors and into the darkness of the building.

Amy checked their weapons and stepped out of the truck. She gripped the shotgun tightly and stood for a moment listening. A cacophony of silence met her ears.

She realized for the first time just how loud silence can be. It was overwhelming.

She gestured for Tommy to join her. He exited the truck and stood beside her pointing toward a Deli across the street.

Amy gave Tommy a thumbs up. "We'll look for food first," she said, "then check out the courthouse."

"Alright," Tommy said. "I bet they have pickles."

"Keep your guard up," Amy added.

She was concerned about going into the courthouse anyway. This would give her a chance to consider how to approach it. If at all.

She had a very bad feeling about this. Even though she had hoped to gather information about what was going on, maybe they would skip the courthouse altogether and go back home. Live to fight another day. Amy gestured toward the Deli and they turned to cross the street.

Suddenly a scream echoed through the courthouse shattering the silence.

Amy pushed Tommy behind her as another scream came from an open window on the second floor. A

zombie, half its body leaning out the opening, glared at them from above. The sound of someone bounding down a wooden staircase drifted out and met their ears.

The zombie stared down on them with hate filled eyes. She knew instantly it was one of the demon dead.

Just as it pulled itself back inside the window another scream was let loose as one of the evil dead burst through the courthouse doors and sprinted toward them.

Amy took the 9mm from Tommy's hand and began firing. She fired six rounds in quick succession managing to only hit it in the torso. It continued to bear down on them.

With the thing only twenty-five feet away now, she took more careful aim and squeezed off two more rounds. The second one finding its mark and entering the zombie's head just above the left eye. It stumbled for a few more steps and finally fell face first and slid to a stop.

Before she had a chance to savor the victory, another one, possibly the one in the window, came flying out and leaped over the steps. It landed in mid stride and

bolted for them. Another one of the slower regular dead shuffled out behind it and started down the steps.

Amy ignored the second one and took shaky aim. She fired four more shots from the pistol emptying the clip. None found their mark. The zombie continued unabated.

Dropping the pistol to the ground she pulled the shotgun, which had been slung over her shoulder, up for a shot. She fired a low un-aimed shot shattering the thing's right knee. It stumbled, fell and struggled to regain its feet.

Amy advanced as it tried to get up. She fired again. This time a more carefully aimed shot that shattered the other leg. It fell to the ground again on its knees. Now un-able to stand.

Amy pumped again and fired into its body knocking it over backwards. She fired again hitting the left shoulder and neck area. It collapsed to the ground.

She determinedly walked over to it and stopped a mere three feet away. Their eyes met, Amy no longer feeling afraid.

It clenched its teeth, growled and tried to rise up.

Amy pumped another shell into the chamber. “What the hell are you?” she spat.

The zombie snarled and hissed. It made one last attempt to lunge at her.

Amy stepped back and began to scream. This wasn’t a scream of fear but one of anger.

“Fuck you!” she screamed.

She fired once again into its body knocking it back to the ground, pumped the shotgun again and stepped closer. She fired at point blank range. The zombie’s head came apart in an explosion of blood, brains and bone. The fragments of which littered the ground behind it.

She pumped to fire again but the shotgun was empty. Smoke rose from the corpse. Amy’s scream still echoed off the walls of the surrounding buildings.

She looked up to see the slow zombie shuffling towards her. She reloaded the shotgun and headed off to put it down.

When she was only a few yards away it suddenly straightened, its eyes widened, and the look on its face changed.

Amy stopped in her tracks. This was the same look she had just seen.

The zombie screamed and lunged at her, seeming more like the other two than the slow zombie it had been only seconds before. She fired into its face and stepped to the side just as it stumbled by and fell to ground. Dead again.

“What’s going on with these things?” she said as she stared down at it.

She stood still scanning the area for several minutes, watching and listening. After a few minutes she was satisfied the immediate danger had passed.

Calmly she turned and walked back to Tommy.

“We can’t trust the slow ones to stay that way,” she said to Tommy. “Something weird is going on. They can change.”

“How?”

“I don’t know.”

Amy picked up the pistol at Tommy’s feet and dropped the clip. She reloaded it, put it back in place, chambered a round and handed it back to him.

“Are you ok,” he asked.

"Yeah, just still a little pissed off," she said. "How about you? Are you ok."

"I'm good," he answered.

"Good," she said smiling and patting him on the head. "Lets go get those pickles."

They started across the street again and walked up to the front door of the deli. It was pretty much intact. There was no broken glass and it looked like it had just been closed for the night. The doors were closed but not locked.

"Alright, lets do it," Amy said.

Amy stepped through the door first. There were a few things scattered on the floor but for the most part the place was still clean and orderly.

There was rancid meat and cheese in the glass case. Dried and molded bread sat on the counter.

Shotgun in hand Amy searched the Deli and the restrooms. Nothing. The place was empty.

They stacked cans of ham and turkey on the counter and filled several boxes with chips, soda and water. Tommy spotted a massive jar of pickles and set it with the rest of the food.

“Tommy I think we’ll skip the courthouse for now,” she said. “Lets load up everything we can find and go home. It’s too dangerous out here.”

“No argument from me,” Tommy said feeling relieved.

They were about to start loading things into the truck when Amy noticed the walk in cooler.

“Hey, maybe there are some goodies in there,” she said.

She clutched the handle and pulled. In an instant the door flew open knocking her back.

Two dead burst from the cooler and were on Tommy before he could react. They knocked him down. One of them leaped on top of him as soon as he hit the floor.

Before Amy could act, the zombie began ripping at Tommy’s throat. It turned toward Amy and growled as if it were a wild hyena protecting its kill. Blood ran down it’s chin. Flesh hung from its mouth.

She leveled the shotgun and pulled the trigger. The zombie jerked from the blast and fell over to the side. Its head mostly gone.

The other one turned to look at Amy as she pumped a shell into the chamber and fired again. It fell dead over Tommy's body.

She kicked it off of him revealing the damage. His neck had been ripped apart. His jugulars laid open. A huge puddle of blood was spreading out on the white tile around his body.

His eyes were wide with terror and unblinking. He was gone. At least for the time being.

Amy knew what she had to do. She picked up the pistol, put the barrel to his forehead and pulled the trigger. A hole appeared between his eyes. The red puddle beneath him grew larger. He would not rise again.

Amy fell to her knees and began to weep. Something she had promised herself she wouldn't do. After all they had been through Tommy was dead now. She was alone.

Suddenly there was something heavy on her back as she felt the pain and pressure of teeth sinking into her left shoulder.

My God, there's another one, she thought.

The smell of its putrid, rotten breath entered her nostrils. She gagged and threw up in her mouth.

She had let her guard down and it had cost both of their lives.

There was another sharp pain and a tug as she felt a huge chunk of skin, tendon and muscle being ripped away from her shoulder.

She elbowed the zombie hard in the ribs and whirled around and raised the pistol to meet her attacker.

He lunged at her again just as she fired. The bullet entered its left eye. The back of its head flew apart. Blood and brains spilled out the gaping hole in the back of its head and dropped to the floor with a sickeningly wet thud.

His momentum sent him crashing into Amy's legs causing her to slip on the bloody floor.

She stuck her elbow out to try to catch herself on the counter. As her arm hit, it bent back toward her body. The impact causing her to accidentally pull the trigger.

The force of the blast caused her to lose her grip on the gun and it fell to the floor with a metallic clatter. She knew instantly what had happened.

The bullet entered her stomach, ripped through her liver and blew up through the right lung severing the pulmonary artery before exiting her back.

Her head came down hard on the counter top. She saw flashes of light and everything started to fade. She felt herself losing consciousness and knew she was dying as she hit the floor. The last sensation she felt was the cold tile against her cheek.



Minutes passed. Consciousness began to flash in and out like an old neon sign. Amy's vision began to clear. She saw Tommy's body and the bodies of the two dead that had attacked them. She saw her own body, lying in a pool of blood, below her.

She felt confused but soon realized that she must be dead. She was amazed at how calmly she took it.

So this is what it's like to die, she thought.

She hovered there for several minutes trying to make sense of what was happening. Trying to come to grips with what she saw laid out below her. Trying to understand. Trying desperately to understand.

The arms and legs of her body moved.

She was witnessing the process of a lifeless body becoming one of the living dead. And this zombie was her own.

She was thankful she was no longer in there.

The eyes opened wide as her zombie moaned. It struggled to its hands and knees, raised its head and began to scream.

Amy had risen from the dead.

At that instant she began to spin around the room as if in a whirlpool. She tried to scream but nothing came out. She tried to grab something but had no physical body with which to do so.

She was spiraling lower and lower and faster and faster. Suddenly the scream ceased and was replaced with the sound of rushing air. She was sucked into her body and there was a stunned silence. She was back. Trapped. That wonderful peaceful feeling gone.

She felt a sudden sense of anguish, sadness and anger. She had not wanted to return.

She could see clearly through her zombie's eyes. The sound was muffled but she could also hear. She had no

control over her zombie's movements whatsoever and had no sense of touch. There was no connection with the rest of the body. She had to observe whatever the zombie was observing. She could not look where she wanted to.

Her zombie struggled to its feet, stepped over the bodies and walked around to the front of the counter.

She was grateful that the hunger for fresh meat hadn't set in yet. She wouldn't have been able to take it if her zombie had stopped to dine on Tommy.

They stood by the front door all afternoon. Unmoving.

This gave Amy time to ponder her own existence. She soon came to realize that most of the dead that she had dispatched in the past few weeks were actually vessels for the person they once had been. Like herself they were stowaways on a ghost ship. Unable to affect the outcome in anyway. Just along for the ride. It was a sobering thought.

How terrifying would it be to be part of a roving pack of the dead. Chasing down and devouring prey. Being an unwilling participant to mass murder.

She wondered what it was like at the moment of final death. What is it like when the dead die? How terrifying is it to meet your fate for a second time?

How can I be dead and alive at the same time? She thought.

What was the next level of existence? If any. Would she continue on or just blink out like a light. Or, as she hoped, would her *soul survive* and be free to emerge from its cocoon to continue its journey.

A Richard Bach quote kept repeating in her mind. "What a caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly."

She came to the conclusion that she was her consciousness. Her soul. Existing separately from the physical brain that had been hijacked by the zombie.

Amy's zombie began to get restless late in the afternoon. Just before sunset, it stepped out of the deli and onto the street.

Amy was calm even though she had no control. The sense of detachment was strange. She tried to will this thing to move and act as she wanted but it was no use. Her zombie obviously wasn't even aware that she was there.

She wondered again about the dead from earlier that morning. And the old lady, the mailman and the zombie in the front yard. She thought someday, somehow, the consciousness or souls of these people were somehow influencing the actions of their dead. Why was she different?

She wished she had become one of them. But she wasn't. She could tell by the way her zombie walked and acted. Sadly she was just a garden variety zombie.

At least I'm not one of the demon dead, she thought. At least not yet.

At last they set out heading North. Amy's zombie scanned the streets from side to side occasionally but mostly kept its gaze straight ahead as they plodded along. They headed down the Street and continued until they reached US-180. They marched steadily on through night and early morning.

They stopped for the day around 11:00 a.m. Amy wasn't quite sure why, but the zombie sought shade and stood almost as if asleep for five hours. They resumed their pointless quest when the sun was no longer high in the sky.

Amy in some strange morbid way wished she could feel what her zombie felt. Was it tired? Did it have a

head ache? Could it feel pain? Did it have any thought process at all or did it act purely on instinct like an insect?

She calmly excepted her fate and settled in for the rest of the journey.

They continued on. Always stopping for about five hours during mid day and continuing on around four.

They saw no survivors the first three days. Then one day just after sunrise, as they were making their way through Tusayan Arizona, she noticed a lone zombie standing on the roof of the Holiday Inn. He stood silently on the edge, three stories up, following their progress as they made their way along the street. He was missing his right arm and was dressed in some type of work uniform.

A maintenance man possibly. Amy thought.

Amy's zombie stepped over to the side of the road near the hotel and stopped. After a few grunts of apparent greeting, they stood there staring at each other for several minutes.

Finally it looked down at the concrete and back at Amy's zombie. It leaned over the edge and fell head first into the pavement below. The zombie

disintegrated on impact. His torso split open and his limbs detached and flew out in all directions. Blood, pus, bones and internal organs spread out in a huge stain. It reminded Amy of a bug splattering a windshield.

Her zombie groaned. It gave her the feeling that it thought it was all alone now. The last one.

Amy's zombie grunted once more and turned and took up the steady gate of a zombie on a mission. What that mission was she had no idea.

They were soon out of town. Still heading North. Judging by the mile markers, Amy thought they were making about one mile an hour.

Pretty much top speed for a zombie, she thought.

One of the disadvantages of being one of the slow ones.

If only my zombie was like the mailman we could make three times that, she thought.

By her best guess they were only about a days walk from the canyon.

They walked on for three more hours before stopping in the shade for the day and continuing around five in the afternoon.

The next morning when the sun rose she noticed that her zombie's left arm had fallen off during the night. Evidently more damaged in the encounter with the zombie at the deli than she had thought.

The legs however still seemed strong and their pace had not slowed.

A little further on they passed a sign that read "Grand Canyon National Park South Rim Visitors Center - 6 Miles." A six hour walk. They were getting close.

What a caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.

The quote flashed through her mind again and again. Giving her some strange sense of comfort.

She knew that at some point it would be over. She just hoped the end wouldn't be violent. She had had enough violence. And even though she was ready for this nightmare to end and to finally be released from the prison her physical body had become, she hoped that her zombie would continue on for at least another day or so.

After all, she thought. I always did want to see the Grand Canyon.



Five hours later Amy saw the visitors center come into view.

Oh my God, she thought. Almost there.

She watched intently as her zombie plodded along bringing them closer and closer. It was already past their usual stopping time, but they continued on.

Finally they reached the shade of the awning. Amy's zombie stopped and looked around. She could see the canyon observation deck not far away.

The zombie stood there for a moment and turned and headed for the door. Amy watched as they drew near. She could see their reflection in the mirrored glass.

When they were merely a few yard away Amy's vision went and everything faded to black. ait blinked in and out rapidly a couple of times and came back.

Her zombie stumbled, recovered and stopped. It swayed unsteadily on its feet.

Amy suddenly had the feeling of vertigo.

How is that possible, she thought.

The zombie started toward the door again. It took several steps and stopped, moaned, and began to scream.

Amy's vision blinked out again and came back quickly.

The zombie began to shake violently. Amy suddenly felt a searing pain in her head.

Her zombie bent over and began to wretch. A bloody black mixture of coagulated blood and bile spewed from its mouth. She could taste the acid and rotten chunks of undigested food as it passed over her swollen tongue.

There was a sudden stabbing pain in her gut as her stomach cramped. The pain was unbearable. Her insides felt as if they were on fire. Her head as if it would explode any moment.

Amy's zombie began screaming again. Amy joined in and screamed with it. She could hear two distinct screams at first but then the screams merged and became one.

Consciousness began to slip away as the scream trailed off and her zombie crumpled to the ground.



Some time later Amy wakened. Slowly she opened her eyes and blinked. They felt like they were filled with sand although there was no discomfort. Slowly her surroundings came into focus. She could see the

reflection of her zombie's body in the mirrored glass. The sight reminded her of a crime scene photo with a dead body lying on the sidewalk. The only thing missing was the chalk outline.

She no longer felt the pain she had earlier.

She blinked hard again. Her eyes darted back and forth and she realized she was controlling them.

She was stunned.

Her stomach churned. She had the taste of rotten stomach acid and bile in her mouth. It did not strike her as being unpleasant.

The feeling began to return to her limbs. They felt fat and tingly. As if they had fallen asleep.

Her hand felt like a balloon. Her fingers tingled with thousands of tiny pin pricks.

She raised her hand in front of her face, turned it several times front to back and extended and curled the fingers. She was amazed that she was actually able to will them to move.

Some of the feeling began to return to her face. She touched her lips and nose. They were partially numb

and tingly. Her tongue was black and blue and twice its normal size.

A bird landed nearby on the sidewalk. It hopped over to look at her and reached in with its beak and pecked at her cheek. She felt a small chunk of flesh being torn loose. The bird hopped away a few feet. The piece of meat hanging from its beak. She watched as it raised its head and dropped the flesh down its gullet.

All she could muster was a grunt. The bird flew away.

She rolled over on her back and lay there for a moment.

Well, she thought. Being a zombie isn't so bad. I've had worse hangovers than this.

Suddenly her lips curled, she growled and her mouth opened bearing her teeth. She opened and closed her mouth violently several times snapping her teeth together so hard she was afraid they would break.

It was completely involuntary and she had no control over it.

She concentrated and tried as hard as she could to prevent it from happening but couldn't. It reminded her of having the hiccups. Finally after a few minutes it stopped.

Guess I'm not in total control after all, she thought.

Rolling onto her side again she managed to get to her knees. She struggled to her feet. Unsteady at first she stood there until she felt comfortable with her balance.

She could tell she had a slight list to the right side and her arm hung very low. At first she was puzzled by this but remembered that her left arm had fallen off during the night.

She stood for a moment and tried to move her feet. She couldn't. Each feeling like it weighed several tons.

She strained with all her might and finally managed to get a foot to break free from the concrete. It flew into the air about knee high and slapped down again.

She repeated the action with the other foot and was able to move forward a little.

Finally she managed to high step over to the mirrored glass.

She was shocked at her appearance. Standing before her was a messy, filthy creature she barely recognized. Her hair was matted with blood and her face was dirty and bruised.

She stepped closer. Her nose almost touching the glass.

Staring back at her was a set of large green eyes. Her eyes. She was shocked to see that they were clear and seemed unchanged.

As she gazed deep into her own soul a bloody red tear escaped the corner of her right eye and started down her cheek.

She reached up and wiped it away with her one good arm.

A thought occurred to her and she began to smile. She turned toward the observation deck and headed off in that direction.

She high stepped her way to the platform and shuffled over to the wall.

The sun cast long shadows off the canyon walls. The river moved swiftly far below.

Slowly Amy crawled up on top of the rock wall and stood soaking in the sight. Taking pleasure in the feeling of the wind blowing through her matted hair and over her partially numb face. Another bloody tear made its way down her cheek.

Very deliberately, she leaned forward, stepped off the wall and went onto a free fall.

The end has finally come, she thought. It's over.

She watched the canyon floor draw closer and closer. The rush of air felt amazingly exhilarating as it swept past her dead body. She felt free... Alive... A broad smile broke out across her face.

What a caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly.

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