

# **Preppy Zombies**

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## Abstract

Preppy Zombies

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Preppy Zombies is a novella aimed at skewering the social structures of boarding schools, the notion of an elite population, and the small towns in which they reside. The story positions itself early in the narrative as a work of popular fiction in order to later subvert, and satirize, genres such as the campus novel, romance, and coming of age. A forbidden love between two teenagers at an Ontario prep school is threatened not only by disapproving adults, but—more radically—by an airborne toxic event. A poisonous gas has seeped out from a chemical plant, which the town's elite have bought and paid for, along with the belief that they will be protected from any harm. The ensuing chaos blends horror and humour to deconstruct family relationships, social hierarchies, and a loss of innocence.

## **Preppy Zombies**

*By: Sean Gallagher*

If everything had gone according to plan, this would have been an altogether ordinary love story. Teen romance, from an external perspective, just isn't that interesting. On the surface, the characters, and even the setting of this story, might be accused of being too generic. The lovers—Wolf and Sarah—are, like most teenagers, self-involved and one-dimensional. And their budding romance began like many before it: the headmaster's son at a "prestigious" prep school falls for the untouchable *it* girl, and the two struggle to keep their love alive despite vicious bullies and a social hierarchy that simply cannot abide the two of them being together. This, however, is not a story of 'will they, or won't they?' To hurry things along, the short answer is yes, yes they did. (!) And while Wolf thought it was the most spectacular moment of his life, Sarah thought it was just OK. Nevertheless, infatuation bound these unlikely lovers together. Of course, even the best laid plans of teenagers often go horribly wrong; sometimes there are just bigger forces to contend with.

There's only one place in the world where a simple teen romance story could turn into a slightly more complicated horror story: Port Hope, an absurd town with unimaginable secrets. And while the players in this tragedy may seem insignificant for the first fifteen pages or so, the fate of the world will eventually rest in their hands.

Sarah Goulding's attraction to Wolf started as pity. Teachers' kids never have it easy in high school, but Wolf Treadwell's hell as son of the headmaster at Trinity College School was something entirely different. Things to know about being the child of a headmaster at a prep school: the other students have more money than you and like to remind you of it; your status will always be subhuman; every time your father does something unfavorable, you will be held responsible. Wolf's father, Michael, once a decent and well-liked man, had grown increasingly more tyrannical since the death of his wife. Stricter rules from the headmaster resulted in harsher bullying for Wolf. Name calling, and light shoving eventually degenerated into weekly sessions where his head was plunged into the toilet of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor boy's room, courtesy of Hunter Hainey and the rest of the Senior Grizzlies rugby team.

Despite her impossible beauty and her family's unfathomable wealth, Sarah, a recent transfer, didn't see Wolf the same way the others did. In fact, she spent a fair bit of alone time trying to figure out exactly why her school was so cruel. One afternoon, months prior to the titular catastrophe, Sarah's pity sparked a connection neither of them planned.

"Had enough, Wolfy? You little fag," Hunter asked, rhetorically.

*What do you think? Oh, that's right, you haven't strung together a coherent thought since your last concussion, and it was pretty touch-and-go before that. Hey Hunter, how bad does it feel that as rich as your family is, they can barely buy you passing grades? Maybe you can't find*

*a girlfriend because you're too dumb even to use Tinder. Not that your mug would attract anyone better than your 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> cousins, but isn't that what your type goes for anyways? .*

Wolf bit his tongue, but a quick snicker slipped out.

“What was that?” The grip around Wolf’s neck tightened.

“I was coughing. I can’t breathe. Yes, for goodness’ sake Hunter, I think you’ve done it. You win. Congratulations.”

“Thank you Wolfy. I did win, didn’t I?”

“You certainly did, Hunter. You’re the man.” *Poor dolt*, Wolf thought. If sarcasm didn’t go straight over the Rugby Boys’ heads, he surely would have had his teeth knocked out ages ago.

Wolf slunk out of the bathroom amidst a spirited round of palm slapping and chest bumping performed by the rugby team. The humiliation was unbearable. Aside from having his face shoved in a toilet, Wolf was certain there was also an element of locker room ass grabbing going on that was really just sexual assault. Emerging from the bathroom, he was greeted by the silent stares of his classmates, all of whom had planned their afternoon around watching Hunter’s spectacle unfold. Some gave looks of sympathy, but most just came for the show and to snap a picture of Wolf’s walk of shame. Wolf thought he might cry. He felt his head getting hot and a lump forming in his throat. He stared at his feet and pushed through the hall as discreetly as possible. With his tousled hair soaking wet, it was next to impossible to be invisible. The only thing Wolf could do was stare at the floor and keep moving.

“Wolf!” Elliot Densmore chased after his best friend, but Wolf shot him a look that said stay back, stay invisible.

Wolf bolted to his hiding place, and Elliot knew not to follow. He sped through the school’s old quad, a pristine square of lawn enclosed by the original limestone buildings covered in ivy. Between the chapel and clock tower a throughway led to the new campus. The new quad was a second square of ‘beacons of higher learning’ but these were largely modern and made of steel, glass, and sharp right angles. He scooted past the gleaming, new Dr. & Mrs. Osgoode Sportsplex, and finally to the back corner of campus. What remained there were the last of the brutally ugly concrete buildings erected in the 60s and 70s. The buildings, although perfectly functional, were slated to be torn down and replaced in an effort to save face in a manner that Trinity couldn’t possibly afford. For the time being, this forgotten corner was Wolf’s sanctuary. Through the doors of the old gymnasium, Wolf had always found solitude, and for him that amounted to safety.

However, on this chilly Tuesday afternoon in late October, Sarah trailed a safe distance behind him. Through the quad, past the buildings named after generous benefactors, and towards the old gymnasium. She watched as Wolf fumbled with an old set of keys, breaking into tears before getting the door open. She walked over in silence and reached out for the keys. Wolf looked up, wiping his eyes. Neither could think of anything to say. Sarah opened the door, and Wolf led her to his hiding place.

After that first encounter, every Tuesday for the next six months, Sarah waited for Wolf at the old gymnasium. They talked, and laughed and sometimes cried. It was a beautiful friendship.

Until it became more than a friendship.

The two could not keep their hands off each other. However, both knew they had to keep their love a secret. It didn't help that the whole school suspected their clandestine meetings, and every move was under the microscope. Students began to follow the two around, hoping to catch a glimpse. They were desperate for gossip, and nobody wanted the trophy girl to belong to the headmaster's son. Everyone tried to undermine their "friendship" every step of the way. Wolf was careful not to act too familiar with Sarah in the classrooms; he already had too much heat on him without Hunter explicitly knowing.

The day that Wolf decided he had endured his last swirly, was also the last day he and Sarah would ever be alone. Unaware of this ominous future, Wolf finally decided that he and Sarah must emerge from the shadows. He knew nothing would change unless he took control. He wasn't happy with the status quo, and neither was she. There had to be more for Sarah, too. She didn't have to be the shell of a person everyone expected her to be; beautiful and silent. Wolf had had enough. Today was the day he was going to let the school know that it was *their time*. As he approached the gym, he began to march with determination. Wolf was surer of his feelings for Sarah than he was of anything else. As she came into sight, her smile made him sense she felt the same way. So determined, and so aggressively did Wolf pursue his future happiness, he suddenly lost his footing.

One giant step into a pothole sent Wolf tumbling forward. He crashed to the ground knees first, and his body did a half somersault that left him covered in grass stains and more than a little embarrassed. It was this sort of clumsiness that made Wolf an easy target. Sarah couldn't help but laugh. Determined not to look rattled, the young man picked himself up, locked eyes



with his beloved, grabbed the back of her head, pushed her up against the door, and took her lower lip in his mouth, biting down just the right amount.

Sarah kissed back. “Nice recovery.” She ran her hand over his face and into his hair, his damp hair. Taking a step back and surveying the hot mess in front of her, Sarah thought she might like to wash her hands and whispered, “We’d better get you cleaned up.” The two slipped into the gym, making sure the door was firmly locked behind them.

Fortunately for everyone the old showers still worked, and some hours later, Wolf came to on the sofa in a trance. *Did that just happen?* The relentless flashing of his phone snapped him back to reality. 5 missed calls, 3 voicemails, 6 texts, 7:30pm. Shit! “We are so late. My dad is going to kill me. Kill us!”

As Wolf panicked, Sarah remained calm. “Do you regret staying as long as we did?”

“Are you kidding? Of course not. Sarah that was...”

“I know, I feel the same way too.”

“I’m not sure you do. How could you?”

“Wolf, I think I love you.”

Surely this was a dream. *Did Sarah Goulding just say she loved me?* Wolf’s eyes welled up, his lower lip started to tremble. *Get it together Wolf. GET IT TOGETHER!*

“It’s okay, I know you love me, I think it’s sweet. But we have to hurry, it’s time to go.”

“Wait!” Wolf fished around in his back pocket and pulled out a key attached to a long red ribbon. “You’re right, I do love you. I snuck into town and made you your own copy. This place only means something when you are here. I love you so much. I just...”

“I know, but we mustn’t ruffle any feathers. I’ll meet you here tomorrow after school. I love you. Everything will be different now, you’ll see.” Sarah placed the key around her neck, kissed Wolf on the nose (she’d aimed for the lips, but in a fit of excitement, Wolf nervously jerked his head at the last second and motioned to leave. She’d always had a knack for knowing

how to make an exit. Wolf couldn't help but envy her grace as he fumbled with the zipper on his pants, finally getting it on the third try.

The two emerged from the old gymnasium with new purpose. As Wolf stuffed his shirt tails back into his trousers, and Sarah adjusted her bra, a very patient Penelope Thomson managed to snap a photo while ducking in the bushes. She'd been there for almost four hours and had snapped the two of them going in (#before). Her kilt was covered in burrs and she had snagged a button on her blazer, but it was totally worth it. Three hashtags and one click of the send button later, the couple's beautiful connection was reduced to a single image of post-smut (#after #justhadsex), and Penelope figured she was about to have more lunch invitations than she knew what to do with.

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After running home, an out of breath Wolf prayed his father would be busy with a prospective student or a prominent alumnus, and he could sneak in unnoticed. Once he'd seen his father literally tap dancing in the living room in order to demonstrate the merits of the Trinity's arts program to a nice Chinese family who didn't speak much English. Wolf had shot them a sympathetic look. Mr. and Mrs. Leung seemed grateful, but their child never did matriculate. Today, Wolf crept onto the front porch and managed to open the ancient door without as much as a squeak. However, Wolf's relief was short lived when his father thwacked him on the side of the head with a copy of the *Bull and Bear*, the student newspaper.

“Oh Jesus Christ, Wolf. Tell me this isn't true! I'm begging you, tell me this is just a.

rumour! Do you have any idea what you have done?” Michael— or rather, Headmaster Treadwell— was furious. His face was beet red, his nostrils flaring, and he looked like a rabid badger with a bad case of alopecia. On a good day, the right tweed blazer and silk bowtie made the Headmaster look borderline distinguished, but Wolf was always amused by how quickly that veneer gave way to the animal his father really was. Michael was not an attractive man, but a lifetime in private schools, and a shameless penchant for ass kissing had made him an ideal Headmaster. “Sarah Goulding? Breaking and entering with Sarah Goulding to do God knows what! It’s all over the internet! News has already reached parents in Toronto — my phone is already ringing. This little stunt of yours could be the end of us. You’d better thank Christ, or your mother, or whoever the F—, “ Michael paused to collect himself, “or whoever you actually respect, that her parents are out of the country and I have time to contain this mess. You really are an embarrassment. I have worked so hard to make sure anything you wanted from life would be handed to you. Doctors, lawyers, bankers, artists; making exceptions for their asshole children so that you, YOU can call in any favour you want. And for what? For nothing apparently.”

“Are you finished?” Wolf asked, the side of his head still stinging.

“Not even close. This ends now. So help me God, if I hear even a whisper of you and that girl carrying on, you will finish out your education in Lennoxville. If you think I’m joking, look in the coat room.”

Wolf glanced around the corner and found two fully packed duffle bags. Michael had acted quickly. Or maybe he just always had two bags packed to ship his son off for an inevitable scandal. His heart sank. Wolf knew that Lennoxville’s Bishop’s College School only took the kids no one else wanted; his life there would be a nightmare. Not to mention it was ten hours

away in rural French Canada. Wolf fancied himself an intellectual, but he did not parler Francais. “I hate you.”

“Good, then do not underestimate me. Dismissed.”

Wolf stormed up to his room and slammed the door.

On his bed sat Nick Gibson, Wolf’s other best friend and TCS public enemy number one. Nick, a local whose test scores revealed an uncharted level of aptitude, refused to play the role expected of him and had had a short-lived career at Trinity. Nick was a townie, a scholarship student, a savant, and gay. He was the school’s dream come true. He was the boy who was to be paraded around in front of the media and mentioned at equality conferences. Contrary to school literature, Nick was the only recipient of financial aid from the school. The Headmaster expected him to be his bitch, and be grateful. Nick was also a brilliant athlete, a quality not acceptable in a gay and a local by the likes of Hunter Haaney. The first and last time Hunter attacked Nick, Nick broke out of Hunter’s grasp, put him in a chokehold, and dragged him through the quad on a leash he fashioned out of the boy’s tie. Word had quickly reached parents and expulsion quickly followed, but Nick was forever Wolf’s hero. It wasn’t unusual for the boy to scale the vines and slip through Wolf’s window, so the two had remained great friends.

“You OK? I heard everything.”

“No, but we will be.”

“We? So it finally happened? You and Sarah? Ha, who am I kidding, the rumours have been flying all afternoon at Port Hope High. Half the boys idolize you, the others want to kill you. I’ve been doing my best to ‘console’ those ones.”

“Ha, I’m sure you have,” Wolf said with an exaggerated wink and the boys laughed. Wolf admired Nick’s confidence, and in many ways wished he could be more like him.

“Guess that means you’re off the market?”

“You couldn’t afford me.” Wolf’s joke was sharp, and he instantly regretted it.

“I was asking for the dog. She’ll be crushed.” Nick didn’t skip a beat.

“I’m sorry, I’m feeling a little raw, but I’m sure it’s me who couldn’t afford you. Look you know I love it when you wait in my room to try and attack me, but you really shouldn’t be here right now. The Right Honourable Headmaster Treadwell has never come so close to shitting his pants I’m sure.”

“Hah! I dunno, anyone that uptight must be walking around fully loaded at all times.”

“Gross. But seriously, I’m glad you’re here, just please don’t make any more trouble for me tonight. I might combust.” Nick understood. He stayed until he was sure Wolf had calmed down and leapt out the window. *Dammit*, Wolf thought, *why is everyone more graceful than me?*

Wolf’s head was spinning. He was so close to everything he wanted, but in between sat two packed bags, an ape of a father, a vindictive set of classmates, and the threat of being shipped off to remedial school. But everything was different now. Sarah had said it herself. Their latest obstacles seemed trivial in comparison to being lost and alone at the beginning of the year. The only thing to do was let things cool off. Wait until something, or someone, else was in the spotlight. A new scandal was never far behind. *But how long would that be? How can I even pretend that we aren’t together?* Such an absurdity was an abomination. It was unnatural.

Reluctantly, Wolf took to his phone. *We need to talk.* Absolutely not. What a terrible preface to a conversation. OK, so how about simply, “*Hey.*”

The message was sent. Five minutes later, it still hadn’t been read. The wait was unbearable. Days, months, years had passed; or perhaps just another five minutes. In text time, ten minutes was an eternity. Wolf thought something must be wrong and considered calling. He stood up, pacing up and down his room, quietly, so as not to incite any more of his father’s rage. Wolf changed his shirt three times. First out of his school uniform and into a T-Shirt, a V neck. Wolf caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. He concluded that the only thing worse than being hysterical about an unanswered text, was doing so in a V neck. He settled on an old plaid. It was worn in and rugged, a man’s shirt. Wolf wasn’t even fooling himself. He was beside himself.

The phone rang. It rang three times because Wolf was so distracted by his wardrobe choice that he’d lost track of the phone. It must be Sarah. His heart palpitated, but it was the most normal Wolf felt all night. “Sarah! I’m so glad you called!” Wolf still needed to learn about playing it cool.

Had it actually been Sarah calling, she would have been thrilled by his enthusiasm. “Good God, Mr. Treadwell, stop panting and pull yourself together.” Wolf’s heart sunk. The voice was unmistakable: Evelyn Harper. A contemptuous middle-aged divorcee who’d been TCS house mother for as long as the boy could remember. She was a miserable old sow who only aspired to bring those around her down to her level of wretchedness. Wolf didn’t even need to hear another word to know he was in for bad news.

“Do not phone Sarah Gouling, do not text, do not Facebook. I see everything, I hear everything. Your foolish romance will only end in heartbreak. I know what your father has in store for you, but trust me, Sarah’s punishment will be far worse. Your father knows that’s the only sure fire way to set you straight. He will transfer you, but he will keep Sarah so locked up she’ll never see daylight until after she graduates. We both know what he is capable of.”

This was, of course, a bluff, and not a very good one at that. But the hysterical teenager on the other end of the phone was easily rattled. “If you really love her, this must end now. I will not be party to such disgraceful behavior. Your actions are a direct reflection of the headmaster and this academy, and we won’t have you sullyng Trinity’s good name with your DISGUSTING behavior.”

Harper paused to catch her breath, more shrill than even she’d been prepared for. Wolf had to listen to her wheeze on the phone for half a minute before she finally found her inhaler. “Have you no respect for your father, or this institution? You are lucky to get this warning. Don’t think you will get another.”

The conversation ended as abruptly as it began. Once again, Wolf was berated and not given a chance to speak. *What the hell was going on? Why was this union so unholy?*

He knew the answer.

To the school, the Gouldings represented the epitome of new money. They were a novice family in the private school system with pockets deep enough to develop hotels in Dubai. A failed relationship with someone so closely connected to the administration of the school would surely be catastrophic to Trinity’s future endowment. Wolf was smart enough to connect those



dots, but also so convinced of their eternal love that he didn't think it mattered. *Did Sarah know this too?* He knew she did. At least he hoped she did.

Certain of his chosen path, Wolf resisted the urge to break down. At least he almost did. He covered his face with a pillow and let out a howl that was a mix between a battle cry and a sob. Then, true to his upbringing, the young man swept his feelings under the rug and began to formulate a plan. The two mustn't be separated. The relationship was too young to endure such adversity. With both under so much heavy scrutiny, Wolf wondered if Sarah would be able to keep her promise to meet him in the old gym tomorrow afternoon. The only thing he could conclude was that if she couldn't, it wouldn't be for a lack of trying. For now, that was good enough. Wolf slept soundly, which was lucky, because he would need his strength.

The next morning the dining hall was more hostile than ever. The same sets of eyes that had watched Wolf run away from the boys' bathroom week after week now glared with personal hatred. Wolf had upset the natural order and he knew it. His eyes searched for Sarah, but they were distracted by the looming threat of being jumped by just about anyone, worst of all the Grizzlies, as the rugby boys liked to refer to themselves. Last night's strength was being tested at every opportunity. Sheepishly, Wolf grabbed two croissants and booked it to Chapel early. Morning Chapel service was tradition, but loathing the service was a celebrated tradition among the students. Going early voluntarily was social suicide. If sanctuary could be found anywhere, Wolf knew it was there.

Elliot Densmore instinctively followed his friend. Elliot was one of the more defiant students at Trinity, but his good looks, quick wit, and family connections kept him out of trouble. Elliot was better than Wolf at keeping up appearances, but spent much of his time at Trinity jaded and itching for a fight. Elliot was friends with Wolf because in him he found an intellectual equal. Even more intriguing was that Wolf always seemed to be on the brink of inciting a beating that he wouldn't be able to get out of on his own. Wolf didn't indulge that side of Elliot, although he certainly appreciated the backup.

The two sat silently in the back of the chapel. Elliot could see that his friend was in distress, but was never one to talk about his feelings. During his parent's divorce, Elliot was forced to attend weekly therapy sessions to "open up" about his feelings. The result was a further detachment from his feelings, an Adderall prescription, and a doodle pad filled with caricatures of an obese psychiatrist and the seemingly infinite ways the good doctor didn't fit into his pants. Usually it was Wolf that broke the silence, today it was Elliot's turn. He let his hand do the

talking. He gave a hard tug on the back of Wolf's hair, perhaps too hard, but a bucket of ice water wasn't available and something needed to be done to snap him out of his trance.

"Is it true?"

"Yes, it's true. My father has conspired with Ms. Harper to further ruin my life. As if that was even possible." Wolf felt an even sharper tug at the back of his head. "Jesus!"

"You haven't answered my question."

"Haven't I?"

"So what's the plan?"

"I don't know, Sarah is under heavy supervision and I've been threatened within an inch of my life. The headmaster..."

"Want me to pull the fire alarm? It would send everyone running and the two of you could slip away. Maybe finish what you started. What exactly did you start anyways?"

"Seriously?"

"Yes, I want to hear every juicy little detail. And yes, I'll pull the fire alarm for you. It's not even that big an offence, two weeks of landscaping duty at worst. Real amateur stuff." Elliot tingled with anticipation. If it wasn't for the crested blazer and the wing tipped loafers, his toothy grin would have been more than enough for most mothers to advise their children to keep a safe distance.

Elliot and Wolf began plotting. At the end of chapel, Elliot would deliver a message to Sarah to 'keep her appointment.' Then, at exactly 3:14pm, one minute before the end of fifth period, Elliot would pull the fire alarm in the girl's bathroom on the second floor. No Trinity

man dared penetrate such a sacred space, so suspicion would be evaded. Elliot even offered to start a contained fire, but Wolf managed to restrain his friend. If all went according to plan, the two would be reunited by 3:20. Wolf could deal with that. The intrigue actually excited him a little, but seeing Sarah again was not to be trivialized.

Elliot was ecstatic: finally, some excitement.

An hour later, at 10:58 a.m, Elliot bumped hard into Sarah, helped her compose herself, and shot Wolf a look. The Plan was in motion.

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Wednesdays were a particular point of pride for Trinity's academic coordinators. Third and fourth year students participated in practical learning, or Excelled Experiential Learning as the school liked to call it. For Wolf and thirty of his peers, this meant riding a coach across town and having science class conducted in an actual laboratory, taught by real scientists. Their destination was Cameco, a Fortune One Hundred company and the world's third largest plutonium refinery. This meant state of the art facilities, access to cutting edge research, PhD instruction, and a hands-on approach to understanding nuclear chemistry. For the students, the most stimulating part of Wednesdays was the time wasted in transit.

Driving south on Thomas street, the coach was able to move through the centre of the old town in a matter of minutes. At the base of the town, on Lake Ontario, sat Cameco. The facility was huge. If Port Hope had a skyline, Cameco was it. Spanning the entire waterfront, the facility dwarfed any of the heritage architecture dating as far back as 1764. Cameco was essentially a city state. It was surrounded by 12 foot fencing topped with barbed wire, and it had its own police department, fire department, and advanced security team. Contrary to the belief of the

Trinity English department faculty, Cameco was the intellectual hub of Port Hope, but more importantly, it was also the financial hub. At its centre sat four mirrored glass towers, with smaller buildings sprawling throughout the compound. The glass was tinted black and large exhaust vents sporadically ejected blazing gas in a display that was both magnificent and terrifying for anyone who bothered to look closely enough. But no one ever did. Whatever was going on in there was so powerful that it literally couldn't be contained, but no one seemed to ask any questions. For every one eyebrow that was raised in suspicion by a community member, the rest understood Cameco's role in revitalizing Port Hope's designated heritage districts. The Capital theatre became the Cameco theatre, the west beach was rebranded the Cameco Community Centre.

Soon, the entire town was bought and paid for.

Trinity was no different. Nothing special was actually learned in the Excelled Experiential Learning program, but on paper the program was regarded as innovative and a leader in the fields of math and science. Headmaster Treadwell had overseen this arrangement himself, something he was particularly proud of because he knew it would boost overseas enrollment. Driving through the security gates always took at least fifteen minutes. Wolf buried his head in a book, happy it would be fifteen fewer minutes until he could see Sarah again.

Finally, the bus was inside. Armed guards escorted the students into the lobby where Dr. Stephen Green was waiting for them. This was standard practice; Cameco was not somewhere in which you could wander off. Rumours from years ago told of a student who went exploring and was never seen again. If nothing else, the facility was worth the visit. Every student underwent a retinal scan, and the black tinted windows were actually the backs of organic holographic displays that projected company fluff throughout the lobby. Videos of "clean" chemical reactions

danced around the students in carefully choreographed bursts of indigo light that you could reach out and touch. They pulled it off though. Even Wolf was mesmerized by the technology this company had at its disposal.

Dr. Green was Cameco's face in the Port Hope community. He was old enough to inspire confidence and young enough to be regarded as relevant by Wolf and his science class. He wore a tweed blazer with designer jeans, had a PhD in chemical engineering and 2000 friends on Facebook. Although his education rooted him firmly in science, it was obvious his true gifts lay in public relations. Something was different today though. When Wolf made eye contact with Dr. Green there was a brief moment where the sadness in his eyes was matched by the doctor's own look of despair. Wolf was too distracted to think anything of it, and Dr. Green apologetically looked up at the security camera before pulling himself together.

The rest of the morning was business as usual. Lecture, question, hypothesis, begin experiment, and break for lunch. Ahi tuna rolls, seaweed salad, and a tempura medley. The cafeteria was trying so hard to be hip. Wolf rolled his eyes and passed on the taro root bubble tea. He was anxious to get back to school. Soon it was time to get on with The Plan. After lunch the class was back in the lab and had only an hour until they could leave. Wolf was just fastening the top button of his lab coat when the phone rang. For the second time that day, Dr. Green's face said more than it was supposed to.

"Class, we will have to postpone your studies until next week. I'm afraid, I mean, your presence has been requested back on campus. I think it would be best if you made your way back to the bus as quickly as possible."

Dr. Green felt sick as, 13 floors above them, a young scientist named Jonathan Kean was pleading with the board of directors that there was still time.

Meanwhile, the students were delighted. Wolf instinctively checked his phone to see if there was any news from campus, but there was never any service inside Cameco. The holograms were off in the lobby. Everyone was in a hurry. The 30 students climbed onto the bus in single file, oblivious to the chaos unfolding around them.

“OK kids, let’s go!” Wes the bus driver shouted. “I’m under strict orders to get you back five minutes ago, so move your asses!”

“Can he talk to us like that?” Wolf heard another one of the students asking. He didn’t want to say it, but he wondered the same thing himself. Something was wrong. Wes knew better than to speak informally. Minutes earlier, the bus driver received a phone call and a cold voice on the other line simply said “code Adam,” and hung up. The code was unimaginatively stolen from Wal-Mart, where the same alert indicates a missing child, but in this context, “code Adam” was reserved for the highest level of emergency. Wes’s mission was now to get the students back to campus as quickly as possible, without causing a scene, of course. His job depended on it, and he knew it.

The coach shifted into gear and approached the gate. Three black Range Rovers approached menacingly from the back and the roar of their engines momentarily shut everyone up and planted them in their seats. Before the security gate was fully raised, the convoy overtook the bus and crashed through. They were headed north in a hurry.

While it would have made more sense for the bus to follow the convoy, the cruel command instead ordered it back to school. The drive back to campus seemed more normal and downtown Port Hope was as exciting as it usually was on a Wednesday afternoon. There were two or three tables sitting in front of Jim's Pizza, a handful of baby boomers walking dogs in designer barn coats, and roughly double that many making their hump day pilgrimage to the liquor store. Port Hope sat atop the Ganaraska River, but the real life-blood of the community was California red, or New Zealand white, depending on your preference.

Wolf's concern was briefly abandoned as his mind drifted to more pressing matters; namely Sarah and his father. He was disgusted with himself for holding the two in the same thought, but couldn't manage to escape his father's words or the repeated wallops to the back of his head. He reached for his phone to check in with Elliot. Still no service. Other students were growing visibly restless. Had he not been so panic stricken himself, Wolf would have found it amusing that of everything strange that had happened that day, it was the interruption of social media that had everyone in an uproar. At least his name would be given a short break from the gossip mongers.

The wrought iron gates of Trinity were congested. There were more black cars, not unlike the endless line of chauffeurs who could be seen jockeying for position on parents' weekend, but it was just a Wednesday. Overhead, a helicopter began its descent. Wolf had only ever heard of the helipad being used twice. Once, when Prince Andrew visited in the '80s, and another time when a senior student's heart just up and stopped. His family cited a genetic defect, but long before Wolf arrived at Trinity, the Briggs name had become synonymous with recreational



cocaine abuse. This day there was no royal receiving line, or medical emergency, but the campus was still in upheaval from a frenzy of activity.

“What the shit?”

“Is that the Duncan’s helicopter? I heard his parents just bought one.”

“I heard they leased it.”

“Is it half day?”

“Does anyone have service?”

“Does anyone have a Luna Bar? I’m starving!” Finally, Wolf’s classmates were starting to ask the important questions.

“Hey, is that Amelia? Where is she going?” Susan, who was sitting in front of Wolf, tried to scream for her friend. Her driver had her by the arm and in the car before Amelia could hear her.

Wolf began to push his way off the bus. “What’s all this about, Treadwell?”

“Where’s everyone going?” He was blocked. No way through.

Wolf capitalized on the situation: “Sorry, invite only.”

Three words the students had been conditioned to accept. He was let though no questions asked. *God they are dumb*, Wolf reminded himself as he scooted down the stairs and across the main drive.

He made a beeline towards the old gymnasium. It was only 2 p.m, but Wolf’s instincts told him he wasn’t the only one with that idea. He only made it as far as the main arches before a

screeching honk stopped him dead in his tracks. The headmaster's beloved British Racing Green Jaguar XJ came to a slamming halt just behind him. His father was driving. His father never drove, he was only ever driven.

“Wolf you need to get in the car right now.”

“Dad! What's going on? Where is everybody going? I need to find . . .” He stopped himself before he said her name aloud, but assured himself he was still heading in Sarah's direction.

There was a look of terror in his father's eyes that Wolf had never seen before. “We need to leave right now. It's an emergency. There is no time for anything. I promise if there was I would explain, but we don't have a second to argue. I need you to come with me right now.”

“I think you know I can't do that.”

“Wolf, on your mother's life, I swear to God I'm not playing games with you. If I've ever been certain of anything, it would be that she would tell you to get in this car right this instant.” Michael was pleading with his son rather than demanding and Wolf could feel it. Never before had his father asked him to do something on behalf of his mother. It was a bargaining chip that Michael had waited five years to cash in; it had to be important.

“I need to find Sarah. And Elliot. And Nick.”

“Please Wolf, there's no time!” His father was hysterical. “You might have a hard time believing me, but if you don't get in this car right now everything we have been through will be for nothing. On your mother, I swear I have done everything in my power to help your friends, but you have to come with me right now.”

“No I can’t leave Sarah! Did you orchestrate this? Tell me what’s going on right now!”

“Wolf, this is much bigger than you or me. Sarah left five minutes ago.”

Michael was lying, but he knew it was the only way. “We need to go too!”

“Are you sure? On Mom? Sarah isn’t here?”

“She isn’t here. GET IN THE CAR RIGHT NOW!”

Wolf glanced around and quickly saw that students were falling into two groups: those leaving, and the ones getting left behind. Wolf didn’t want to get left behind. Reality set in and he climbed into the front seat. “For Mom,” he hissed in a hostile tone.

That was good enough for Michael; he floored it. On the outskirts of town, the Jaguar sped past an increasingly large number of military vehicles and police cars. They continued to speed north, past the hospital, past the fast food restaurants, and finally in the direction of Toronto, hopefully where Sarah was going too.

The onramp to the 401 was blocked by two Humvees.

“Shit!” Michael swore. He never swore.

A man in a hazmat suit carrying an assault rifle approached the car. “Sir, please pull forward and move to the decontamination and holding zone. We have been authorized to open fire on anyone who tries to move beyond those lines, so please think very carefully about what you are planning to do next.”

Not being able to see his eyes made Wolf think the gunman was capable of anything. Judging by the look in his father’s eyes, Michael was just as scared. They drove through the checkpoint and onto the other side of what looked to Wolf like a battle line. In the distance the

air raid siren from Cameco sounded. Someone finally called for the town's evacuation, but it was too late. The net had already been dropped.

Wolf stared hopelessly at his phone. Still nothing.

As the alarm sounded, any car that hadn't made it onto the highway was stopped and instructed at gunpoint to turn around. Anxious mothers and fathers honked and screamed and edged their cars forward until a single bullet thundered straight up into the air and the muffled screams of confusion were replaced by shrieks of terror and then silence. Four other gunshots were heard in the distance and Wolf knew that the other four roads out of town had just received a similar closing. The fear and confusion was so palpable, Wolf grew dizzy to the point of passing out. But Wolf knew a line had been drawn and they'd just made it to safety. As they drove to the decontamination zone, he watched the other cars forced to turn back. For a moment he forgot about everyone else and breathed a sigh of relief knowing that he and his father were okay. He now felt guilty for stalling. If he'd protested any longer, they might not have made it out. And then he felt even more guilty for abandoning his friends.

At once, every cellphone in the area jolted to life with a deafening emergency alert tone that sounded like an ambulance siren being held under water. The alert had been shrugged off many times before during tests of the emergency broadcast network, but this time the alert read: **\*\*\*This is not a test. Port Hope has been evacuated due to a potentially lethal gas leak. The town is placed under immediate quarantine and curfew. Please secure yourself indoors in a calm and orderly fashion. Distance yourself immediately from anyone displaying signs of hyper-aggression. Authorities and health services will be along shortly. Please remain calm. More information will follow.\*\*\***

In an act of desperation, a car tried to overtake the barricade and escape, but their tires were swiftly blown out and two very shocked old people wearing cardigans were hauled out of their Buick and thrown into the back of an unmarked van. In all of Wolf's years in Port Hope

he'd spied one of Cameco's heavily equipped military vehicles only once. Now a fleet of them were racing around keeping anyone, or anything, from getting out. Wolf wondered if the Cameco forces were also going to be monitored for acts of hyper-aggression, but everything they saw suggested they were above the rules. It was all happening so fast, but someone must have been preparing for such an event for quite some time.

"Dad, what's going on?"

"I honestly don't know," Michael said as he rolled his eyes upward and looked away from his son. He was lying again and Wolf could tell. His father's steely exterior had failed, he was either too upset or too scared to convincingly play dumb.

"You're lying I know you are. You swore on mom's life and you got us out five minutes before everything was locked down. And you weren't the only one. I watched cars race out of Cameco and it seemed half the school knew to run too. WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED? WHAT AREN'T YOU TELLING ME?"

"Wolf! LANGUAGE!" Michael barked, but he knew deep down this wasn't a parenting moment.

Bottom Line: Michael was in way over his head. He was once a man happy in work and happy in family. He was a passionate English teacher who believed in student success above all else. As a young man, he started out studying business at McGill University, but failed to make a go of it and dropped out. After starting over at a small school no one had ever heard of, he fell in love with English literature and stumbled on a formula of ass kissing and secret study groups that landed him grades good enough to go to Oxford. There he'd met a beautiful scientist named Lily and fell in love. Michael barely squeaked out his masters but had returned home, diploma and

bride in hand. His teaching career was short lived, but for that time he was adored for his commitment to his students above all else. Before he knew it, Michael had a son and was a Junior Dean. As the pressures of work piled on, the young administrator and his family were so gently woven into the fabric of Port Hope's underbelly, they didn't even notice. Trinity's ties to the town's power structure went deeper than Michael could have imagined and the higher he rose at the school, the more complicit he became; he knew too much. Michael was barely equipped to run a school, let alone navigate the radioactive waters of Port Hope, and eventually Cameco sank their fangs into the newly minted Headmaster. When Lily left them, Michael knew he would never be free, and now he was at a loss and his son was demanding answers.

“How did you know? What's going to happen to everyone else? Are they in danger? What do they mean hyper-aggressive? That's half the school on a quiet day! Where are we going now? What's going to happen next?”

His father relented. “Fine. Listen very carefully because what I'm going to tell you would cause serious damage in the wrong hands. Certain community leaders have always known that the experiments being carried out at Cameco could have potentially lethal consequences if an unstable toxin leaked into the air or water. The good news is that we were at a safe distance and got out before anything dangerous escaped from their lab. That is, if anything even got out. There are measures in place and this is one of them. Hopefully this is all just precaution.”

“But how did you know to run before everyone else did? They didn't even get a chance, the moment the evacuation alarm went off the town was sealed in.”

“This is highly confidential; you must understand that I'm only concerned about your safety. You must. You must understand that.”

“UNDERSTAND WHAT? WHAT AREN’T YOU TELLING ME?” Wolf’s patience had reached its end.

“There is a list of essential personnel. We’re on it. Anyone on that list gets a silent warning 20 minutes before the public evacuation is sounded. The mayor, doctors, anyone deemed essential for the continuity of the town is given advance warning to make it out safely. It’s not fair, it isn’t, but I’m not exactly in a position to change the system. I never really thought this could possibly happen, but I took comfort knowing if there ever was a crisis, I would have time to get to you.”

Wolf couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Or was it that you knew you would be OK? Are you even capable of thinking of anyone but yourself?”

“When will you ever accept that every sacrifice I make is for you?” Michael lied again. “And your so-called friends? You better believe they were given warning too. I control a list of essential families who also benefit from this little warning system. The Gouldings and the Densmores got the same warning we did, as well as other families crucial to the school’s survival. So I wish for once you’d just be thankful for your lot in life and let me think in silence.” Michael had said too much.

“What about Nick then? And his family? Where they given advanced notice?”

Everything was a matter of money.

What the headmaster did next he would much later come to deeply regret. He laughed.

“They definitely were not on the list.”

“If anything happens to them, I’ll fucking kill you.”



The stretch of highway that spanned the three exits of the town was blocked off and traffic passing through was routed north. That stretch of road, now known as the Decontamination Zone, was a parking lot for those with advanced warning, as well as a number of “non-essentials” who had been leaving town for various reasons at the right moment. Large military-grade vehicles were posted every twenty meters or so. Masked men with guns were herding the cars into orderly lines and instructing everyone to remain calm. Most people evacuating from Trinity had left through the Ontario Street exit and were now parked together in their own little bubble. Michael Treadwell took a deep breath, straightened his bowtie and exited the car to reassure the families without even a word to his son. Wolf looked on in disgust as parents and drivers got out of their cars and gave each other sly, knowing nods. And then, from the back of a Town Car, emerged a familiar face.

Jordana Brenzel had been Sarah’s best friend since the first day of the year. Jordana, equally beautiful, but in a blonde hair, blue eyes, red lips sort of way, had immediately perceived Sarah as a threat when she first stepped foot on campus. Instead of going to war, the cunning Jordana had quickly formed an alliance that resulted in an unplanned, but legitimate friendship. The two had more in common than appearances: both played dumb in public, but were capable of stringing a coherent thought together when it really mattered. Jordana was secretly first in the senior class (among non-Asian students), but didn’t want to estrange herself from the party crowd, so she overcompensated.

“Oh my God! Sweetie Hi! How are you? Jordana cried out. She strutted over to Wolf. As she walked, the sea of confused parents parted and she floated through without a care in the world. “Sweetie are you OK? This is just crazy, isn’t it?”

Wolf looked behind him because he was certain she must be talking to someone else. This was the most she'd said to him in three years of school together. "Jordana, did you just call me sweetie? Are you talking to me?" Even more shocking than this first contact was that the other pair of legs emerging from the back of the same car belonged to none other than Elliot Densmore. Elliot quickly scooted over to his friend and hugged him. Before either had a chance to say anything, Jordana explained everything:

"Sarah and I had a long talk last night and she told me you were now part of our family and not to be 'trifled with'." Jordana said, applying air quotes to the phrase. "Her words, not mine, obviously. But that's good enough for me. So now you're in. That makes you a sweetie. There are three types of people in this world: there are sweeties, there are sweetie-babes, and then there's everyone else. Yesterday you were firmly with everyone else, but now you're a sweetie. Elliot is a sweetie-babe, because, well, look at him, which is why I threw him in the back of my car when it looked like everyone else was getting left behind. But you know, not too long ago my parents warned me that the town was beefing up its evacuation drills and something like this might happen. It's almost theatrical don't you think? Like we're in a movie when we should be in a book, or just plain normal life. Anyways I'm positive this is all just precaution and everything will be fine soon."

"Has anyone seen Sarah?" Wolf asked with a very grim look on his face, matched by Elliot's own.

"She must be around here somewhere. God knows she likes to make an entrance. Chin up, sweeties. I've got a flask in the back of the car just for occasions such as this."

Jordana's elevated spirits were quickly shattered by a distant burst of gun fire. "Those were no warning shots," Wolf said, and the three looked at one-another while each tried coming to terms with the looming horror quickly becoming a reality. Children were crying, parents were screaming for answers, and many more were just standing perfectly still with their mouths gaping in total disbelief. Despite Cameco's now very present military force, a gun hadn't been fired within the town limits for as long as anyone could remember. At least not that anyone knew of anyway. The military revved their engines and instructed everyone to move back to the north side of the road. Tear-stricken families got back in their cars and decided it was time to leave. That's when an entirely new level of terror was dropped on to the already chaotic crowd. Word quickly spread that there was nowhere to go. The Decontamination Zone had also been sealed off and there was no escape. The Essentials were (almost) as trapped as everyone else.

The crowd formed into a mob that demanded answers. A frenzy of, "Do you know who I am?" and "Wait till my lawyer hears about this!!" proved surprisingly ineffective against the army of masked gunmen holding everyone in place. As the threats elevated and the waspy gasps of dismay grew louder, it ultimately became clear that no level of connections, and no club lapel pin, was going to open-up the barricade. Phones remained blocked and the Decontamination Zone was cut off from the outside world.

Eventually a truck with a megaphone issued a statement: "May we have your attention please. A toxic gas known as HCoH-2213467-CuPPZ4 has broken though the Cameco fail-safe and entered the airstream. The gas dissipated to a harmless level exactly 7 minutes after it entered Port Hope's breathable air and it is believed to have only been able to reach a 3km radius. Anyone not already affected by the gas can breathe safely, and it is assumed that only people outside and exposed to a concentrated level of gas could have been negatively affected.

Proper authorities were in the town and got most people inside to safety. The full extent of damage to those exposed to the gas is still unknown, but anyone infected will likely be of danger to themselves and others. For the ongoing safety of the public, the town has been sealed with a bio-net and outside communications have been severed. We have been given authority to use full force to neutralize anyone detected trying to esca.... trying to leave, excuse me. Please remain calm. Thank you and have a nice day.”

The voice on the other end of the megaphone failed to soothe concerns and the horrified mob demanded answers:

“How will we know if we’re infected?”

“What do you mean a danger to themselves and others?”

“Who’s in charge here?”

“Why can’t we leave?”

“Why won’t my Instagram work?”

As the shouting got louder and the questions became increasingly incoherent, the megaphone crackled back to life: “Symptoms have been said to include: heavy breathing, severe jaundice, dark bloodshot eyes, and extreme hunger, which may, in extraordinary cases, result in... cannibalism.” The megaphone starting squealing with deafening feedback and it sounded as if two people inside the truck were fighting over the microphone. The audio clicked back on and indecipherable hissing followed by “What the *fuck* Steve?” was briefly heard. Whatever was going on, someone, presumably named Steve, was in deep trouble. Another voice spoke: “Sorry about that folks, we had some, ummmmm, misinformation. Please disregard the last statement

and remain calm. Everything is fine. Thank you.” But it was too late. The C word couldn’t be unsaid.

“Zombies!” exclaimed William Conway.

“What do you mean zombies?”

“Bright yellow, red eyed, flesh eating, bona fide zombies! Right here in Port Hope! Goddammit I always said Port Hope was gonna be ground zero for the zombie apocalypse!” The man currently throwing gasoline on the fire was a third-generation landowner who, on more than one occasion, could be found pub crawling on Main Street spouting the exact same nonsense. He was certain he’d seen Cameco trucks dumping toxic waste onto his property, but the town consensus was that William had seen one too many episodes of the X-Files. This time there appeared to be a tinge of truth in his words that provoked the crowd to mass hysteria.

“Zombies!”

“Cannibals!”

“Good God, the dead have risen! And the reaping has begun!”

“Jesus Christ, Mary. No one is putting judgment day on the table.”

“Don’t take that tone with my wife.”

“Don’t YOU take THAT tone with MY husband.”

“Your husband? Wake up, Susan. He’s sleeping with half the ball-boys at the club!”

The crowd started turning on one another, and just as the inside of the town started ripping itself to pieces, a similar fate threatened the ultra-civilized crowd trapped in the Decontamination Zone. Couples who, for years, had happily shared tee-off times were suddenly

airing out all their grievances, instead of uniting against their captors or searching for answers. Jordana grabbed the hands of Wolf and Elliot and headed for her car. Safely inside, the now visibly rattled girl locked the doors and began fumbling for her flask. When she spoke, her perky voice dropped a full two octaves:

“Holy shit. This can’t actually be happening. Stuff like this doesn’t actually happen. I’m pretty sure it’s scientifically impossible. Zombies aren’t real. None of this is real.”

“They didn’t say zombies, they didn’t actually say that,” Wolf interjected. “We’re not actually talking about the undead. At least I don’t think we are. We’re talking about a small group of people, who hypothetically have been poisoned.”

“Or infected! What the hell were those gunshots before. I can feel that there’s more they aren’t telling us. Guys, I’m scared. I want to call my mom.”

“Listen, Jordana,” Wolf said, “Your parents are safe in Toronto. Elliot, so are yours. And we’re safe too.”

“Are we?” asked Elliot. The other two turned toward their mutual friend and realized that he was so pale, he’d turned a light shade of blue. “I just can’t believe any of this. If what they say is really just on the other side of the highway none of us are safe. It’s only a matter of time. Have either of you looked around? Where are the real police? Where are the ambulances? Why have our communications been cut-off? Our world is collapsing. We’re running out of time.”

“We need to find a way out,” stated Jordana. “Surely there’s a blind spot we can slip away through. I mean, did you hear whatever was going on in the truck with the megaphone? These people definitely aren’t as organized as they’d like us all to believe.”

“We can’t do that,” Elliot said desperately, while staring down at the floor.

At roughly the same time the media started poking around outside the barricade, Cameco trotted out a procession of food trucks in an attempt to subdue the (h)angry mob. Only three hours had passed since the first evacuation alerts were signaled, and on any other day, it would have been happy hour. White tents were erected: not the billowy high-top type you would find at a garden party, but rather the kind you see on the news popping up around Ebola outbreaks. The network of tents had low profiles and were a series of soundproof chambers, each which could be sealed off at any moment. Nevertheless, the inside appeared inviting. Industrial tables were tarted-up with white linen table cloths and the music of Wagner invited guests in. The food was plentiful, although served buffet style, and featured an assortment of braised meats such as lamb shank and osso bucco. Anyone who'd attended their fair share of catered events would have recognized that everything on the menu were things that could be made in advance and prepared from frozen. For the parents, and many of the older children, the food was secondary to the bar cart. Just about everyone could use a drink to take the edge off and that's exactly what they did. Men in Hazmat suits circulated with platters of red and white wine, champagne (really just prosecco), and vodka tonics. The drink choices were limited, but there was something for everyone. For those too upset to drink, the masked men provided elderflower cordial and sparkling water; the typical non-alcoholic offering found at Oxford and Cambridge balls, but this time secretly laced with Ativan. Further down were rest areas and even bathrooms with showers and lavender soap. For a while, a medicinal calm washed over the horde of outraged detainees.

Everyone who had been evacuated at exits further east or west were now herded into this central network of tents. Some families were reunited, but for most people, any hope that a missing parent or child had escaped another way was quickly evaporating. Michael Treadwell



was going from table to table glad-handing; her still hadn't checked in with his son. Wolf, Jordana, and Elliot sat by the entrance waiting for Sarah. Wolf stress-ate a small plate a vegetarian ragout, Jordana had a glass of bubbly, and Elliot ate nothing. Cameco was anxious to get everyone inside where they could be kept away from the media and out of earshot from whatever was happening in the town. A special information pavilion was said to be under construction and would be online shortly. Periodically, the music was interrupted by a calm voice that said more information would be available soon, and everything was safe and under control. Wolf found it suspicious that Elliot, usually one to have three helpings of dinner and wash it down with holy wine stolen from the chapel, was having no part of it.

“Elliot, just have something to eat. She'll be here soon, she got the same warning we did.”

“I didn't get the warning. And I don't think she did either,” Elliot said guiltily.

“What are you talking about? Of course she did. My father assured me she was on some disgusting list that ensured she was evacuated. I know my father is a liar, but he's always looked after students of preferred families. I wish he'd look after me like that...”

“My phone was dead because I spent all of second period on looking at local singles. I'm only here because Jordana grabbed me. Look guys, when everyone started bolting around campus, I watched her go into the old gym and close the door behind her. I'm so sorry, at the time I thought it was mission accomplished. I thought it was a good thing. I'm so sorry,” Elliot pleaded. “I thought everything was going according to plan...”

“Ms. Harper confiscated her phone so she wouldn't be in contact with you!” Jordana snapped at Wolf accusingly, as she smashed her champagne flute to the ground. Given that the

flute was made of plastic, it failed to achieve the desired effect. “Wolf, why would she be going back to the gym today? Did you arrange to meet her again?”

“Elliot are you kidding me? You’ve known this whole time she wasn’t coming?”

Elliot stammered to explain that it had all happened so fast. Only after he realized whatever was going on was more than just a drill did he suspect Sarah might be in real danger. Jordana was furious with both of them, but pointed her finger firmly at Wolf. “None of this would have happened if she had stayed away from you. I warned her you’d be trouble and now look. She’s stuck in there. This is all your fault.”

“It is all my fault,” Wolf said as his eyes grew heavy with tears. “She must be so scared.”

“We have to tell the headmaster,” Jordana declared. “He’ll figure this out. He’d probably go right in after her.”

“That liar!” Wolf shouted, tears now streaming down his face. “He promised me she’d gotten out! I tried to stay, I really did. He promised me she’d already left, that’s the only reason I went with him. You have to believe me, he lied to me. He won’t help us, he’s just going to cover this up.” Shocked by his tears, Jordana and Elliot pulled themselves together and comforted their friend. As they hugged him and rubbed his back, Wolf whispered, “I’ll fucking kill him.”

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Four kilometres, and another world away, Sarah was officially worried. Aside from her stunningly beautiful dark complexion and amazing handbag collection, one of Sarah’s best qualities was her ability to always believe things have a way of working out. That’s because for people like Sarah, they always do. The young beauty had known no real adversity, and anytime it

seemed like a crisis was looming, things corrected course. To date her biggest crises included being arrested for shoplifting (charges dropped with one phone call), running away from home (quickly bribed to come back), severe turbulence in a G5 (only for a second), and getting thrown out of a Justin Bieber concert for being too intoxicated.

Shortly after she had made her way to the gym, the evacuation alarm sounded, but she was certain it was just a drill. Aside from the inconvenience of not having her phone, Sarah experienced no sense of panic. In lieu of fight or flight instincts, the girl had secured the door behind her and resolved to wait. She chuckled to herself that Wolf was probably sprinting to her rescue at that very moment.

Over the next few hours, Sarah experienced many emotions. First she was bored, then hungry, then horny, and then frustrated. Burrowed away in the middle of the building, and far from windows, Sarah was not exposed to toxic gas, and out of earshot of the ensuing gunfire. More than anything, she was starting to get mad at Wolf and question the validity of their relationship. When she finally stomped to the door to peer out and scowl at Wolf, as he was by then surely approaching, nothing stared back. The campus, even the old part, was eerily empty. As she squinted her eyes, she thought she spied two small figures looking lost.

Before she could open the door fully, a mob was upon them. What she saw next sent her screaming back to the office.

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“We all know that gym is like a bomb shelter,” Elliot added reassuringly. “She would have been deep inside when the gas leaked, and no one knows she’s there. We can find a way to

rescue her. Or maybe this will all be over in a few hours. We have to stay calm and figure out our options.”

“Elliot’s right, Wolf. I’m sorry for saying this was your fault. You didn’t blow up the chemical plant. You need to stop crying and man up so we can figure this thing out.”

A fourth voice entered the conversation: “Man up? Geez, micro-aggression much?”

They looked up in disbelief to see a haggard Nick Gibson standing over them. He too was on the verge of tears, but he’d long ago trained himself to bury hard feelings deep down and distract himself with sarcasm. Jordana had a serious crush on Nick before she found out he was gay, and Nick to this day was infatuated with Elliot. Nevertheless, everyone was happy to see each other.

“Where did you come from?” Wolf asked. “Where are your parents?”

Nick suggested the four find somewhere more private to talk. The group tried to return to Jordana’s car, but were informed that everyone had to remain inside ‘as a matter of safety.’ Wolf felt the noose tightening around his neck, but they turned back and ventured deeper into the network of tents. Further down they found a dimly-lit meditation chamber, empty with the exception of one middle-aged woman rocking herself in the fetal position on a pink yoga mat in the corner. The four spoke quietly as zen sitar music played softly in the background. Nick explained that he’d just come on the last transport truck bringing people over from the far west end of the Decontamination Zone. This news didn’t make sense to Wolf because the public school and his home were both on the eastern outskirts of town. What was even more shocking was that Nick had just broken out of the quarantine zone.

“Do you remember a few years ago when I was looking for new male role models?” Nick asked. Wolf rolled his eyes. His friend was talking about the beginning of his sexual awakening, a phase through which Nick ended up meeting all sorts of alternative lifestyle types. “Anyways, I got involved with the Environmental Party and I ended up meeting that hippy nut job, Tom Lawson, who almost convinced me to run away from home and chain myself to trees in the B.C. rainforest. Well, I went to his farm once...” Wolf rolled his eyes again and Nick caught him. “No, nothing like that, his wife was there too, just listen. The old man must have about 50 acres on the west end of town. I was in so much trouble earlier and then I remembered, the old bastard had dug himself an underground tunnel. He was sure that one day the cops were going to come after his weed and mushroom crops and the crazy old bastard actually dug himself an escape tunnel!”

“Holy Shit! So... you were inside and you got out? What the hell’s going on in there?” Elliot asked.

“Nick, where are your parents?” Wolf asked again impatiently.

Nick got very quiet and finally broke down. Tears streamed down his face. As he sobbed, he dug his fingernails so deep into his best friend’s arm that it started to bleed. With a cracked voice, he said, “Wolf my mother’s dead, And my father’s run off, probably dead now too. It’s bad in there. Really, really, bad. When the alarm sounded I left school and I ran home. My mother was pacing in the kitchen smoking a cigarette and losing her mind because she couldn’t reach dad on the phone. I said we had to go and she insisted we wait. And then about 20 minutes later... Oh Wolf I can’t tell you. I can’t it’s too awful.”

He broke down in tears. Elliot stroked Nick's back and eventually that calmed him down.  
"It's OK Nick you're safe now. Just tell us what happened"

"And then my father showed up. He sped into the driveway so fast he almost crashed through the garage. He bolted out of the car and my mom ran outside to see him. He was screaming and swearing that everything downtown was completely fucked. Someone had just bit him. He kept getting louder and louder. Then his eyes turned red and he started growling. I yelled for my mom to come back inside but she wouldn't leave him. She kept shouting, 'Frank pull yourself together, we have to go.' And then he grabbed her by the hair and he bit her. He bit her so hard he ripped the side of her neck off and she bled out right there on the front lawn. He saw me watching through the front door and ran for me, but I bolted the door and he just stood there staring at me with his face covered in mom's blood and clawing at the door. I was screaming and he was screaming too. And then he just stopped and ran off. Finally, I got in his truck and raced to the other side of town. These people, people like my dad, they're all over downtown. I drove so fast I almost had to run one over. I got to old man Lawson's house and ran for the tunnel. I hid down there for about two hours, I think. then I made my way to the other side and found myself in the decontamination zone. I knew if I said anything they'd kill me, so I just kept my mouth shut and they brought me here."

Without anyone noticing, the woman on the yoga mat had been listening in on the story. When Nick finished speaking, her gentle rocking turned to violent convulsions and she cried out:  
"ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES! ZOMBIES!"

The commotion sent a guard running into the room; any talk of Zombies was to be immediately silenced. The woman sat up and started pointing at Nick muttering “Zombies, Zombies, Zombies...”

“She’s totally lost it,” Jordana parried. “We came in here looking for quiet and found her in this state already. But she’s getting A LOT worse. Can you please do something about this? It’s really stressing me out.” The guard took out an injection pen and stabbed the woman in her thigh with a strong sedative.

“Anyone else need one?” the man in the hazmat suit asked.

“We’re fine, sweetie. Thanks.”

“Jesus,” Elliot stammered. “That was too close. Do you think she’ll say something?”

“From the looks of it, she’ll be out for days. I hope she doesn’t shit herself,” Wolf added. “Nick, what about the police? Did you see them downtown? What else was going on in the streets?”

“All six of our police? If they were smart they’d have barricaded themselves deep in the station. But I don’t know. I didn’t see them. The streets were empty except for these people. There must have been 100 of them scattered over downtown. They were banging on doors and running around, very confused like. Some were in groups and some were just on their own. It actually looked like they were sticking with people they knew were also infected, like there was some sort of recognition. The seniors’ croquet club got infected. They were all stumbling up Walton St. with their little white shorts and croquet mallets, but they weren’t moving very fast.

And I saw bodies. Maybe ten or fifteen in various stages of dismemberment. But they hadn't been eaten."

"Kill them or turn them. Didn't you say your dad got bitten and then came home and lost it on your mom?" Wolf shot Elliot a glaring look at that question. "Nick, I'm sorry I didn't mean to be insensitive."

"If whatever this is, is a type of blood poisoning, it could in theory be passed from biting and scratching. But how could it happen so fast?" Jordana pondered "The molecular rate of change would have to accelerate exponentially. But that's impossible. Poison passed from one person to another would dissipate, not replicate. Nick, the only way what you're describing would be possible is if it were biological. A virus, a very aggressive virus that attacks the blood. That would explain the jaundice and the bloodshot eyes. And if the brain wasn't getting enough oxygen, it might explain the heavy breathing and aggressive behavior: fight or flight."

"Jordana, 'sweetie,' what the fuck are you talking about?" Elliot asked condescendingly.

"Shut the hell up. I'm pre-pre-med. I know things," she slammed back.

"So what are we talking about here? Zombies? Was that crazy woman right?"

"I don't think so; they aren't dead. However, if the brain is deprived of oxygen long enough, it dies. But if the body somehow produced enough adrenaline, I wonder if it could keep going without proper brain function. Brain dead."

"Like a vegetable? Like those people who slip into comas and just live forever on a respirator?"

"Those things were definitely NOT on respirators!"



“Hmmm, brain dead but still upright and driven by their most basic of emotions. Pure id. Not full zombies but maybe half zombies. Vegetable zombies!”

“Those things were definitely NOT vegetarian!” Nick interrupted. “Guys this isn’t a game. We need to figure this out.”

“I think for the sake of simplicity, we can understand whatever’s in there as a zombie. Their brains are dead and they aren’t coming back. If we get attacked, even if it’s someone we know, we have to take them down and keep a safe distance. From the sounds of it, they are highly contagious.” Wolf looked down and spied the claw marks Nick had left in his arm. He then looked back at his friend, and gulped.

“Nick, are you sure you didn’t come into contact with anyone or anything?” As Wolf asked, Jordana and Elliot scooched back a few feet.

“No I’m fine, I didn’t even go near my mom’s body. I ran straight to the car and came here.”

“Was there any blood in the car?”

“I don’t think so. Shit! Shit! I don’t know!”

“OK, just calm down. You said your dad got bit and went full zombie twenty minutes later? And how long ago was this? You said you hid in the tunnel for a couple hours? I think you’re fine, let me take a look at you.” Jordana used the torch on her phone to look in Nick’s eyes and examine his body for marks. “You look clear to me. But if you start to feel funny at all, you need to tell us immediately.”

“If he’s good enough for Dr. Brenzel, then he’s good enough for me,” Elliot laughed.

The group hid out in the relaxation chamber and contemplated the implications of everything Nick had told them while Jordana extrapolated. They all agreed that no virus anyone had heard of spread so quickly, and so violently. Jordana suspected that whatever got out was engineered by Cameco. Wolf was certain there was still so much more going on they didn't know about, and wondered if his father could be squeezed for more information. Elliot wondered how long something so powerful could be contained. And Nick concluded that it was only a matter of time before the zombies started breaking into homes and growing in numbers. The four agreed that time was running out, and they weren't going to be secure in the Decontamination Zone forever.

“What's worse is that Sarah is still trapped in the school. You need to prepare yourself for the possibility that it's already too late,” Nick warned.

“I need to make a plan to get to her,” Wolf declared. “This is my fault. I'm going to save her.”

“Oh yes! The big bad Wolf, with his weekly swirly appointment, is going to take on a town of zombies and save the girl?” Nick teased..

“It's so romantic. Don't you think?” said Jordana. “But it's total bullshit. If we do this we're all going. It's not like we're safe here.”

“Jordana, I can't ask any of you to come. It's suicide.”

“I'm definitely coming, so you can stop right there. She's my friend first. And who knows, I might just end up saving the world.”

“Or at least getting a cool selfie,” Nick quipped.

“Shut up! I can do both.”

“I’m always looking for a fight. I’m coming,” Elliot added. “And Nick, sorry to say, but you have to come. You’re the only person that can get us in undetected.”

“At this point, I’ve got nothing, and no one, left to lose. And it’s not like I’m going to stay here by myself with the yoga mat lady.”

Against their better judgment, the four made a pact to go in and rescue their friend. Technically Sarah was friends with only two of them, but each had their own reason for going. Nick was hungry for revenge, and Elliot craved adventure. However, immediately standing in their way was the reality of being trapped inside the tents. “We’re not allowed to leave. It’s not like we can just stroll out the front door,” Wolf reminded them.

“We need a distraction. Something big enough— like a fire— that will send everyone into a panic. And when everyone else is looking one way, we’ll go out the other.”

“But Elliot. There’s only one door and its sealed. Everyone is going to bed soon. I’m sure if we don’t go and blend in, someone will come looking for us too,” Wolf replied. “I hate to say it, but we aren’t ready. We need to take the night and gather up anything we can that will help us. I think we’d better try to sleep for a couple hours, too. We can’t tell anyone about this. To all those drunks out there, things are still relatively safe. I’m going to find my father and make him tell me anything else he knows. Elliot and Nick, you need to snoop around and look for anything that can create a diversion when the time is right. Jordana, take a lap at the bar and listen for any information that might help us. Knowing this crowd, someone will be speaking out of turn. At midnight, we find all the other Trinity kids and sleep near them, like normal. Remember, you can’t let anyone suspect we’re making a plan. Blend in, act casual.”

“If anyone asks what we were doing in here for so long you can just tell them we were having a make out party,” Jordana suggested with a wink. “Seriously, though. Those prudes, they won’t ask any more questions.” With that kernel of wisdom, the group headed back and began their reconnaissance work.

Wolf found his father sitting at a table alone in the corner of the dining-room, a manic smile stretched across his face. Wolf sat beside him and looked into his eyes, but nothing looked back. “Dad?” Wolf asked quietly. “Dad? Hello? DAD!”

Michael Treadwell’s glassy eyes sharpened just a little. “Oh, hello there, son. How have you been keeping?” he asked while raising his left hand slowly and stroking his son’s face with the back of it. Wolf recoiled and gave his father a strong shake that seemed to bring him around.

“Jesus Christ, Dad. What’s happened to you? You’re wasted. What did you have to drink?”

“Wrong question son. I did have some drinks, but right now I’m so high on uppers that everything is just sublime. Isn’t this music beautiful?” Michael reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a bottle of pills in every colour. “This is my proprietary blend. Here son, have some, and watch the end of the world with me.”

“Dad! You don’t get to just numb your way out of this one. Nick’s parents are dead. And Sarah is still stuck inside. The town is trapped and being terrorized by...”

“By zombies?” Michael asked with a snicker. “I know.”

“Do you remember what I told you? When this is over I’m going to hold you responsible.”

“Don’t worry, son. You won’t have to. None of us are making it out of here alive. Look around you. They’re just fattening us all up. We’re livestock. “

“Dad what are you talking about?”

Michael’s eyes clouded over and Wolf lost eye contact with his father. “When your mother found out they were experimenting on humans they took her. They’ve been blackmailing me ever since. They still have her locked up somewhere. Don’t you see? I’m just the patsy. One of their many cogs.”

Wolf couldn’t believe his ears. Blood rushed to his head and he wrapped his hands around his father’s neck. “When are you ever going to stop lying? I watched her die. I saw her get hit by that car. I spread her ashes.”

“Did you?”

“When are you going to sober up and take some responsibility. You are a pathetic sycophant of a man. Always so desperate for everyone’s approval. And now people are dying, and we’re trapped in here. All for what? What did they pay you?” Wolf’s hands were so tight around his father’s neck that Michael couldn’t breathe.

“Believe me or not, We’re all dead tomorrow anyways,” Michael gasped, before passing out and settling into a peaceful sleep. Wolf took a step back to calm himself. He’d come to confront his father about his monstrous acts and blackmail him for information. Wolf was ready to fight dirty, but he wasn’t at all prepared to listen to anything from the drugged out lunatic now slumbering in front of him. Wolf was more confused than ever, but still certain his father needed to pay for everything he did. As he leaned in to confiscate his father’s pills, Wolf whispered, “I’m not finished with you yet.”

At eleven, Wolf, Jordana, Nick, and Elliot met up in the emptying dining hall to report their findings. Wolf was convinced his father was simply too pathetic to accept his role in the catastrophe and was spurring bullshit. At the bar, Jordana heard the usual gossip mongering. None of it was particularly interesting, but she did note that many people were pairing off just in case this was their last night on earth. Overall the mood was anxious, angry, confused, intoxicated, and a little bit horny. Elliot and Nick walked the entire series of chambers and found there was only one way in and out, and two armed guards were always stationed there. They tried puncturing the tents with no luck, and almost got sealed into a room when their tampering triggered an alarm. Elliot diffused the situation by telling the guards he and Nick had come into the room to be alone, as per Jordana's suggestion. Later, they came across a hushed meeting of the Trinity PTA. Not everyone had received advanced warning, but with fourteen members in attendance, they had just enough for quorum and had decided to go ahead with the meeting.

The members of the Trinity Parent-Teacher Association were a small-time, power-hungry, alarmist hodgepodge of argyle and elbow patches, but they had a reputation for getting things done. In the last year alone, the Trinity PTA had banned gluten from the dining hall, voted unanimously to remove Harry Potter from the library, thwarted gender-neutral bathrooms, and ran off an ambitious young art teacher who thought figure drawing classes should feature live models. For the most part, however, the PTA bickered about bake sales and executive positions. This year, in a massive upset, a mousy doctor's wife named Roberta Matthewson had toppled the incumbent by campaigning on a platform of stricter rules and a more selective application process for new students. Her son, Matthew Matthewson, was literally the least popular student in his freshman year, and Roberta hoped her new position would help make things better.

Matthew was a sweet enough boy, but even Wolf had been known to get in on some of the ridicule, because with a name like Matthew Matthewson, it was just too funny not to. Roberta's 'Build A Wall' campaign was surprisingly well-timed and she'd been bossing around the PTA since last September. Tonight, Roberta was practically frothing at the mouth because her son hadn't made it out.

"From the sounds of that meeting," Elliot said, "the PTA is ready to take a flame-thrower to this place. Roberta is fucking hysterical that her little Matthew is stuck back there. Most of the parents are in the same boat. They don't know what's happening to their children and they can't reach them. Just imagine they knew what we know; this place would literally explode."

"It's figuratively, not literally," Jordana corrected with an eye roll.

"I think this time it's literally," Elliot argued. "Listen, Roberta Matthewson told the PTA she had a gun and if she wasn't given some answers soon, she was going to make an example of someone. The PTA seemed pretty amped up, to tell you the truth. They're ready to start a war. Like Independence Day or something."

"You mean the Revolutionary War?"

"No, the movie. Like some real science-fiction, one for all and all for one kind of shit."

"I think you're mixing up your references."

"It doesn't matter," Elliot insisted. "Don't you see? The PTA, that's our distraction. We wait for them to go nuclear and we make a run for it. Can't you just feel the tension building? This whole thing is going to explode. Once the mob sobers up and remembers that we're

basically being held hostage in here, they'll push back. It doesn't matter who fires first. The four of us will be small potatoes and we can run."

"Elliot's right," Wolf added. "This thing can't be contained. I just hope Sarah can make it through the night and we can get out of here at the first sign of trouble. We should all eat something and try to rest. We need to be ready."

"I couldn't possibly eat anything at a time like this," Jordana complained. "But at least at this rate, I'll be back in a double zero in time for prom."

Her meager attempt at a joke angered Nick. "I don't think any of you are taking this seriously. We're talking about running away in the middle of a gunfight and back into a town that's been overrun by zombies. Fucking *zombies*! If we're doing this, we're going to do it properly. We eat. We sleep. We wait. And then, at the right time, we're gone. And there's a very good chance we're not coming back."

"But we're not safe here either," Wolf urged. "Nick's right. He knows what we're up against in there and we need to refuel and be ready. If we can get back to the gym, I've got my key and we should be safe inside."

"And then what?"

"I don't know, but here we're sitting ducks." His rationale was transparent. Wolf only had one reason to get back to the gym and he wasn't exactly thinking with his head. "At least in the gym we can barricade ourselves inside and hope this all blows over. Once this place erupts, it won't be safe for anyone."



As the masked guards with automatic rifles made their rounds, the chilling reality that they'd probably be safer with the zombies than in the Decontamination Zone sank in for the four youths. Everyone ate something before finding a place to sleep not too far from the main entrance. Eventually, the music stopped and the lights went dark, and all the townspeople settled into cots to sleep. Those who refused their host's hospitality were discreetly escorted to the back of the facility, restrained, and sedated. For the most part everyone went to sleep voluntarily, hoping that by tomorrow, everything would be better.

At 5:36 a.m, an electrical surge left Cameco and all its operations without power for seventeen seconds. Cameco would later claim this loss of power was a result of unprecedented stress on its state-of-the art grid. But it wasn't a coincidence that the outage happened at the exact moment one of their European scientists tried to charge his laptop without a proper wattage adapter for foreign electronics. Seventeen seconds later, the generators kicked in, and Cameco hoped no one had noticed. Within those seventeen seconds, however, the bio-net monitoring the secure perimeter was down. Even more terrifying, Cameco's cellular jamming technology had failed just long enough for smartphones to suddenly begin updating their news feeds. The familiar tones of "aurora," "rhumba," "chirp," and "classic," roused the weary detainees.

Despite Cameco's best efforts at a media blackout, shutting down a large chunk of the trans-Canada highway, and blocking off access to all of Port-Hope, had piqued curiosity. News trucks had been showing up since late afternoon and, unbeknownst to the good people of Port Hope, their escalating crisis was now the subject of international news. Early on, Cameco's very own Stephen Green hosted a convincing press conference from the north side of the Decontamination Zone, stating that warning of an external terrorist threat had put the town in lockdown. He assured the press that their facility remained secure and the elevated level of security was just a precaution. Further information was promised shortly. "Please stand by," he said. News helicopters were forbidden from flying overhead and the order was obeyed. The rhetoric of terrorist threats was so deeply internalized by the media that it seemed to pacify the nosy reporters. As hours passed and questions remained unanswered, though, the media grew restless. Sporadic gunshots heard in the distance, and ongoing jamming of communications were more than enough for the reporters to smell blood in the water. By late evening small drones

were dispatched in search of answers. The drones were quickly deemed illegal, as schematics might aid any on-looking terrorists, and shot down.

In a co-ordinated effort from eleven media outlets, and very much like something out of a popular science-fiction movie, all remaining drones were sent into Port Hope together at 8:15p.m. The hope was that at least a few drones would get through and retrieve some footage worthy of selling ad space to pharmaceutical companies for the eleven o'clock news. The news teams were expecting to capture aerial shots of a town on military lockdown and some video of very big men with very big guns jogging in formation, and such. Exactly one drone made it through and transmitted 47seconds of footage before succumbing to the fate of all the others and crash landing on the roof of a scummy British-style pub called the Winchester Arms. When the footage was rendered in the back of the news truck, two junior editors and a segment producer got the first public glimpse of the horror unfolding just a few kilometers away.

The drone zoomed south over the decontamination zone and then into Port Hope. The streets were littered with dead bodies. No authorities were anywhere to be found. In the dim light, the drone flew over the Trinity school grounds and focused in on two small boys in blue blazers surrounded by a group of older boys in tattered and blood stained rugby kits. The older boys carried the distinctive markings of those infected: ultra-yellow skin and murderous, glowing red eyes. The boys in the blazers were seen howling in terror before the pack of older boys engulfed them and ripped them to pieces. One of the junior editors was so disturbed, he projectile vomited all over his colleague.

The producer looking on in the background was elated.

“God Damn it! That’s the money shot!” he cheered. “We’re going to be rich! We’re all getting Pulitzers!” The footage was so juicy that CTV couldn’t wait until the eleven o’clock news to break the story. After a brief debate among station executives, at 10:33 p.m. CTV stations nationwide interrupted their regular scheduled airing of Celebrity Bachelor Dance-Off (!) and ran the story. By 10:49 p.m. the drone’s uncensored footage was the number one trending video in the world.

However, it wasn’t until the untimely power interruption that anyone inside the Decontamination Zone caught a glimpse of the shocking footage. With people desperate for news, the hummm of a dormant phone acted for most like an EpiPen full of adrenaline shot straight to the leg. The video spread like wildfire around the various sleeping chambers and soon the quiet tents were in a full state of upheaval. Children were screaming for their parents, parents for their children, and they all screamed that they needed to be let out. Delirium gripped the detainees who were equally worried about their loved ones on the inside, and for their own safety in the hands of their attendants. Wolf, Jordana, Nick, and Elliot awoke to the piercing scream of a mother who had just watched a video of her child being ripped limb from limb by a pack of deranged teenagers. Roberta Matthewson, who had drunk herself into a near coma the night before, now recognized the two victims in the video. One was a foreign student named Timo Jorgensen.

The other was her beloved Matthew.

“My Matthew! My son! My Matthew Matthewson!” Roberta howled.

Her cries grew increasingly incomprehensible. She cursed the gods, she cursed the prison she was currently housed in, and then she screamed out her son’s name in horror, over and over

again. Grief gripped the crowd. The mother's pain was unmistakable, and regardless of what anyone thought about Roberta, there was a brief-moment where the universal pain of a mother watching her child murdered brought the room to a hush. Genuine empathy, something as scarce as a unicorn in Port Hope, was felt by (almost) everyone.

“Why in hell would anyone name their child Matthew Matthewson?” someone asked.

“Old money. It's a family name.”

“Oh! Of the Newport Matthewsons?”.

“Precisely.”

“Good family.”

When the people in charge finally decided their charade could no longer continue, a siren blasted until everyone quieted and the tents were distastefully illuminated with red emergency lighting. “THIS IS AN EMERGENCY ANNOUCEMENT: A LETHAL AND HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS VIRUS HAS BROKEN OUT IN PORT HOPE. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZAITON, EVERYONE HERE HAS BEEN PLACED IN QUARANTINE UNTIL A THOROUGH EXAMINATION OF EACH INDIVIDUAL CAN TAKE PLACE. ANY FORM OF RESISTANCE OR VIOLENCE WILL BE ASSUMED SYMPTOMATIC OF THE VIRUS AND THOSE PERSONS WILL BE NEUTRALIZED. THIS IS NOT A DRILL. UNREST WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. THERE WILL BE NO SECOND CHANCES.”

Amidst the new state of lockdown the four unlikely friends huddled around Jordana's phone and watched with dread as the worst parts of Nick's story were violently confirmed. As

brutal and vivid as Nick's experience was, nothing could prepare the other three for what they were now watching on a 4-inch screen. In a world of online executions and looped footage of vans plowing into crowds, the teens had all seen their share of evil. But despite the depraved work happening deep in the confines of Cameco's compound, Port Hope had been, until now, a blissful place where the dangers of the world were too far away to keep anyone up at night. This video was different; the ravenous destruction was happening right in their backyard, and to people they knew. Granted, Wolf and his friends hadn't always thought enough of Matthew to protect him before. But now, as Wolf watched him being ripped apart, he was overcome with feelings of fear and guilt. A part of him felt responsible, but he didn't understand why. The brutality was so palpable that Wolf could practically taste the blood gushing out of little Matthew's severed arm socket. Briefly he wondered why he'd never considered being vegetarian until now. *How could anyone, even a zombie, do such a thing?*

Only with that last thought did Wolf pull his focus away and take notice of the once white rugby uniforms being sported by the pack of wild animals dismembering the boys: Hunter Hainey and his Grizzly Bears. The same bastards who had attacked Wolf in the bathroom every Tuesday for the last year had upgraded from petty assault to full on homicidal cannibalism. At the end of the recording, Hainey's blood red eyes glimpsed the drone's camera. For a moment he seemed to be peering right at Wolf, as if to say, "You're next."

"Did you see that video? That was Hunter! He's a zombie now!"

"He's definitely not a sweetie babe anymore."

Even in their new police state, the group sensed their opportunity to escape was imminent. But Wolf wasn't ready to leave. He needed to find his father. He needed answers and

he needed to rub the video in his face. *Look at your precious school now! Look what you've turned it into. Only you could be at the helm up such a tremendous fuck-up. You. Are. A.*

*Murderer...* Wolf was practicing in his head. He was psyching himself up for a showdown with his father where he would finally come out on top. He would finally get the last word. Abruptly, he stood up and announced to his friends: "Something my father said to me last night is off. I need to talk to him"

"Don't go too far, our chance to bolt is coming. Get ready."

Wolf found his father hiding under the same table where he'd passed out the night before. In the background, enraged parents were screaming for Treadwell, demanding answers. Wolf knew a such a call for leadership was exactly the thing to send his 'commanding' father into retreat. Under the white table cloth, the red emergency lights glowed a soft pink, and despite the sirens and wailing parents, Michael pretended he was meditating in a sensory deprivation tank.

"Dad! What the hell are you doing? Everyone's looking for you. It's all over."

"SHHHH!!! Shut up and get down here before someone sees you."

"Dad. Have you seen the video?" Wolf asked, thrusting his phone into his father's face.

His father had seen the video and was secretly resigned to the idea that his job would NOT be waiting for him when this ordeal was over. But if years of running a private school had taught Michael anything, it was to deny everything and never publicly admit fault. "That? It isn't real. It's just scare tactics to keep everyone in line. Either that or some left-wing social commentary. The strong feasting on the weak; pretty Swiftian if you ask me. I couldn't have dreamed up a better piece of fodder myself. To keep everyone in line and scapegoat me that is..."

“Not real? Wake the fuck up! Hunter Hainey has literally eaten the head of the PTA’s son. Can’t you hear her out there screaming?” Wolf remembered Roberta Matthewson had a gun. “She doesn’t think it’s made up.”

“Don’t be preposterous. That video isn’t real. Greenscreen bullshit churned out by the liberal media to sell life insurance.”

Wolf couldn’t believe his ears. Even now his father still wouldn’t accept reality. “What was all that stuff you said to me last night. About the end of the world? About us not being safe here?? About Mom?”

“We didn’t speak last night, Wolf. You’re hysterical. Can’t you see we’re in serious trouble here? Just shut the fuck up and fall in line.”

“But Dad, you told me...” Wolf’s plea was soundly interrupted by a brutal slap from his father across the face. Pulling himself together, Wolf took one last look at his father and said, “Do you remember what I said to you at the start of this? I wasn’t joking.”

Wolf returned to his friends with a stinging face, hardened, and resolute in his next move. To him, his father was a liar, and even worse, culpable in the deaths of innocent people. If that wasn’t enough, Michael had tried to use Wolf’s mother to manipulate him into complacency. Michael was right about one thing: the world was ending. Lines needed to be drawn immediately and there was no time for sentimentality. Wolf had seen the face of the evil stalking the Trinity campus and knew he had to get to Sarah before the beasts did. True to the plan, the group was ready to sneak away when the mob could no longer be contained.



“Guys, it’s happening now. Go stand casually by the door. Jordana, make like you want to go outside for a cigarette if anyone asks.” Jordana hadn’t smoked for weeks and she half resented the implication.

“What do you mean it’s happening?” Elliot asked. “Don’t do anything stupid.”

“It’s fine,” Wolf replied. “I know what I need to do.”

Wolf walked away from his friends and interrupted the prayer circle the Trinity PTA had formed. He walked up to the inconsolable Roberta and tapped her shoulder. “Mrs. Matthewson? I’m so sorry to have to tell you this, but just last night I heard my father telling a bunch of the old boys that for the sake of appearances, he had to include the head of the PTA on the evacuation list, but in absolutely no universe would a ‘brown-nosing runt like Matthew Matthewson’ warrant special treatment.” Wolf pointed at the table his father was hiding under.

The PTA group channeled the spirit of the Old Testament.

In a blind rage, PTA treasurer Timothy Ballaster stormed Michael’s refuge and flipped the table over. Headmaster Treadwell was finally to be called to account for his involvement.

Michael dusted himself off and straightened his tie. “Now I’m sure if we dialog about this, we can come to some sort of understanding. All we have is some grainy video. If all of you join me for a brandy, I assure you we can get to the bottom of this. Please let’s be civil. Let’s not lower ourselves to *their* level.”

If Michael had ever possessed an ounce of charm, he’d certainly lost it by now. All he could think about was how he would feel if that was Wolf on the video. But he didn’t know enough to appeal to the crowd on a human level. His smarmy training got the best of him. He

thought of Wolf and he thought of Lily. He wondered where she was right now. He prayed she could save him, but he knew that was impossible. The mob tightened around him.

“Please let’s not give into our primal instincts. Don’t you see?”

Roberta, seeing only fire and brimstone, approached Michael and unsheathed her pistol. As she took aim, Wolf ran for his friends and signaled to head for the door. Before Michael had a chance to talk himself out of his predicament, Roberta squeezed the trigger of her 9mm. The safety was on, but the sight of a gun sent the onlookers into upheaval. As Roberta corrected her position, Michael screamed out: “Wait!” Too late. Two pumps of the trigger later, Michael collapsed onto the floor as the bewildered guards tackled Roberta to the ground like a shoplifter on Black Friday. Chaos broke out. It wasn’t only Wolf and company waiting for an opportunity. Angry detainees pounced on the guards and the civil scene descended into a battle-royale.

With the guards under attack, the front door was momentarily unsupervised. Wolf took one last look at his father’s crumpled body, grabbed Jordana’s hand, who grabbed Elliot’s, who grabbed Nick’s, and in a scene fit for a vampire movie franchise, the four broke through the threshold and into the unknown. Breaking back into town would be easy, but surviving would be harder than any of them could ever imagine.

**END OF BOOK 1**