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Chapter 1:

[JC: After thirty years of hard work and training, I've finally become a Wizard... In other news, I think I got Covid again, lmao. Everything hurts and I feel like I'm dying... More than usual, lol. Then again, a lot of people are getting sick now days. Maybe I got Monkey Pox? Though I haven't really left the house or done anything. Maybe I got bit by a tick? Oh, I did leave the house the other day, but only went out back to feed the cat. I always wash my hands, all day, everyday, not that it matters. I haven't seen the neighbors in a while... They've been making a lot of noise though. Sounds like they're redecorating or something, who knows?]

[Bunny: Lmao, Jake, go to the doctor. You'll be fine. I promise.]

[JC: I don't wanna leave the house. It's dangerous AF outside lately. Heard a lot of gunshots, screams and helicopters. Maybe the world's ending. Figures.]

[Bunny: People always say the world's ending, but it never really does.]

[JC: At least Baltimore ain't important enough to get nuked, lol. I heard Russia invaded Poland now? Idk if I'll survive long enough for the Nuclear War.]

[Bunny: I'm not surprised. And you'll be fine. Don't be so pessimistic. You're stuck on sick brain right now. You'll stop being so depressed once you get better and jerk off a few times.]

[JC: Jerking off makes me more depressed.]

[Bunny: Then don't do it, lol.]

[JC: I'll die.]

[Bunny: You need to find a girlfriend. Or a hooker or something.]

[JC: I have a girlfriend. I named her Voracity...]

[Bunny: You named your fucking pocket pussy, lmfao!]

[JC: You named your favorite dildo Kyle.]

[Bunny: Nah, Kyle is my husbando.]

[JC: Then Vora is my Waifu, lol. Fuck, I tried to laugh and coughed for a whole minute straight. I can barely breathe.]

[Bunny: I gotta go... Jake, seriously, take care of yourself. It'll be okay. Everything will be fine. I promise. Everything will get better. This isn't the end of the world. Just... Another normal year in the hellscape we call Earth.]

[JC: Lol]

[You have disconnected...]

"Fuck my life... *Cough, cough~!* Did the internet go out? Shit! No! *Cough~!* Fuck! Goddamn it!"

In a raspy voice, the short and scrawny man stood up in the nearly pitch-black room. Only a little light from the bright full moon outside the window illuminated his bearded face. His eyes were bloodshot and his long hair seemed to be going bald on the right side... No, it wasn't just the hair on his head, all the hair on that side of his face was missing. His right arm was also hard to see in the darkness, while the rest of his skin was the same pale white color as his bloody t-shirt.

He walked over to the window and looked outside, gritting his sore and painful teeth. His vision was really blurry and he couldn't really see anything out there, but he could hear a lot of screaming, gunshots, even a few explosions in the distance. There were also helicopters circling around with searchlights shining down on the park behind the rows of townhouses across from his place. Of course, they might not be gunshots. It could also be cars backfiring or doors slamming, maybe someone was hammering? Maybe all of the above.

"What the hell am I supposed to do now?"

He was listless and exhausted, but he couldn't sleep. His ribs felt like they were broken. His bowls felt bloated and horrible. His waist was aching. Even his ass hurt from sitting too long, because he couldn't lay down. His legs were shaking and sore from standing too long... Basically, as he mentioned previously, everything hurt and he legitimately felt like he was dying.

However, what bothered him more than his own physical pain and discomfort was the fact that not only the internet, even the power went out. It was out everywhere. Not just his house. So there wasn't really much that he could do about it.

"Ow! Shit... Mmmn..." Jake coughed a few more times and a bloody canine tooth smacked into the window, bouncing off with a 'ting' and stained his originally white shirt with a little more red. He scratched the back of his neck on the left side and felt a bit of relief as a huge boil popped, spraying more blood, pus and filth on his disgusting shirt.

'Kill yourself.'

"Fuck." He shook his head and felt a little dizzy.

'Give up.'

"Ugh..."

'End it all.'

Jake ignored the voices in his head and walked over to his black office chair, sitting down in front of his relatively large and wide computer screen. Even though it was obviously too dark to see anything, he could still 'see' a haggard face reflected. There were black veins and capillaries bulging on the right side of his neck, his bald cheek and the side of his head. He reached up with his blackened right hand and rubbed those 'scales' along his scalp.

"Maybe I'm turning into a dragon? Hahaha~! *Cough-cough-cough~!*"

Well, he couldn't even fantasize about that bullshit. It was honestly amazing that he was even still alive. His whole right arm, neck, face and head looked like they might be necrotic. On the other side of his face, neck, chest and back, he had a bunch of boils, cysts and pimples. Even his groin was infested with all sorts of pustules that looked and smelled disgusting. Though he couldn't see or smell them at that moment.

"Bunny..." After coughing a bit more and spitting out another tooth, Jake looked out the window at the moon from his office chair... He reached out with his right hand and... Well, that was the last thing he could remember.

"Ugh... Mmmn..." Moaning and groaning, Jacob opened his tired eye... Yes, just one eye. He couldn't open the left eye anymore, because it was completely swollen shut by huge cysts. Above his eyelid, on his eyebrow, his cheek, almost every part of the left side of his body was covered in boils, blood, scabs, pus and cracked open wounds. The right side was very smooth and even slightly reflective in the light that came in from the window, early in the morning. As if it was covered in a hard black beetle shell.

The temperature was frigid, below freezing. But his body was scorching hot. He couldn't speak anymore. His mouth and face were so sore. His tongue was swollen, but he could still feel it. His mouth only had a few teeth left. Most were on his lap or on the floor, however, he might have swallowed a few of them already.

'Everything hurts and I wanna die...'

'Shut the fuck up. I'm not gonna die.'

'You know you're gonna die.'

'I think I shit myself.'

'I definitely pissed myself.'

'I think... Yep... I think my dick fell off.'

'Not like I ever used it in the first place.'

A bunch of chaotic thoughts ran through his head quickly, but it should be noted that his 'dick' didn't actually fall off. He just couldn't feel it anymore. There's a difference.

Chapter 2:

Jake opened his eyes again a few hours later, when the sun was shining directly on his face. Both eyes this time, because the swelling went down considerably. His body was covered in filth, but he was laying on the floor, half-frozen. The temperature in the room was above freezing because of the direct sunlight. It was a tile floor, so it wasn't particularly comfortable or warm. The right side of his body felt fine, but the left side was numb.

"Umm... Ugh... Uh-huh-huh..." He wanted to cry from the pain, the agony, the depression, but his eyes were too dry. Also, his nose, mouth and throat were incredibly sore. He didn't have those voices whispering in his head anymore. All he could hear were the real sounds of screaming and crying from the neighbors. There were also dogs barking and pigeons cooing or even crows cawing.

Dunk-dunk-dunk-dunk~! He looked over at those blood-red eyes of the hawk on his window sill. It already ripped open the screen and was pecking at the glass. It wanted to get inside, either for warmth or to eat his flesh.

"Hahaha~! Ugh..." He coughed again and spat out some phlegm on the floor, then he used the pitch-black right arm to push himself off the ground. He couldn't stand it anymore. His sense of smell and taste were starting to come back, which only made his suffering even more unbearable.

"Mmmn. Urp~ blech~!" He vomited out a bunch of blood, bile and... Well, when he saw those squirming back worms, he threw up again! There were also what looked like white maggots, but mostly just long black worms. He limped over to the bottom of his bed, pressing it with his numb left hand. He looked down and saw that his skin was deathly pale. Those boils and lumps were mostly on his armpit, groin, back, chest and neck, so his left hand and arm were still pretty much the same as before. Just a little skinnier than he remembered. He used to have a decent amount of muscle mass, even if he didn't work out very often.

'Shower... Food... Need food... Need to eat... Have to take a shower... I need to clean myself off.'

His thoughts were running wild, but he couldn't even talk to himself. He reached out and turned the golden knob, opening the black door with his obsidian hand. Obsidian is a good way to describe his flesh at that moment, because the hand, arm and shoulder really looked like they were covered in a black carapace. The neck, face and head were just in a state of necrosis in terms of appearance.

"Jacob!"

A deafening roar caused Jake to open his eyes and look around, realizing that he was in the bathroom, with the scalding hot shower water burning his face, chest, groin, basically only the left side of his body. Soap got in his eyes, but it was too dark to see anything anyway. This bathroom was on the second floor, between a small office his mother used and his parents' bedroom. The office didn't have a door. Just a desk, with several computer screens. He passed all that without even noticing or remembering.

"Mmmn..." He groaned in pain and discomfort, retching a bit, but eventually he was able to start using antibacterial soap to clean off his body thoroughly. It took nearly an hour. And by the time he was done, the water was freezing cold, but his body was so hot that he actually felt better in the cold. At least in the beginning. After a little while, he started shivering and if he still had any teeth left, they would've been chattering.

'Why? Why do I even bother?'

He looked down at his swollen groin. He didn't have an erection. It was just pustules and growths that pulsated along with his rapid heartbeat. He could hear his heart thumping in his head and his ears were ringing constantly. Jake looked down at his right hand and smiled.

'Live... Survive... Eat... Grow... Live... Breed.'

'Yeah... Breed... I can't die yet... At least, don't wanna die a virgin.'

'Food! Eat! Live! Breed! Food! Grow! Live! Eat!'

'Fuck! I'm legitimately going more insane than usual. Hallucinations are pretty normal when you're close to death though...'

His stomach groaned, along with his normal moans. Then he reached out with his 'insectoid' right hand and turned the knob in the shower. He reached up and grabbed one of the thick white towels on the rack behind the toilet and quickly dried himself off. However, it was quickly stained with a lot of blood. The sheer quantity of blood he lost from those boils and cysts was amazing. His cracked open skin in some places was also bleeding. Like his left hip and elbow.

He also lost a lot of hair. Both facial hair and the hair on his head. Even his eyebrows fell out. Some of his symptoms were very similar to radiation poisoning...

'At least I'm not glowing, right? No, it's more like chemotherapy. Bubonic plague?'

"Mmmn..." Groaning again, he tossed the bloody towel on the floor of the bathroom and walked back towards his room. The ground felt like it was shaking and the ceiling seemed to be caving in... He wobbled back and forth awkwardly, smelling the disgusting stench from his room and hesitating a bit. Eventually he shivered and made up his mind. Deftly avoiding the frozen puke with black worms and white maggots inside, he came over to a short/wide cabinet on the left side

of the room. Up against the wall. He looked at himself in the mirror and was slightly startled.

'Live! Live! Live!'

He heard a voice roaring in the back of his mind. It was deep and gravelly. But still reminiscent of his own. The face in the mirror wasn't as bad as he felt. At least, it was a lot better now that he took a shower and got rid of all that old gunk. The right side looked perfectly healthy. All those black veins and capillaries were gone. Aside from baldness, no eyebrows or eyelashes, not even a bit of facial hair, he actually looked fairly handsome. If it wasn't for the fact that he had no teeth when he smiled, it would've been a lot better... The left side of his face still had a few scars and small bumps, but the swelling was obviously receding.

It wasn't just his face either. His chest, back, neck, throat, even his groin. There were plenty of scars and scabs, but overall, he was 'recovering'. The only issue was that his body was clearly way hotter than it should have been. His heart was racing. His head was pounding. He felt horrible. His right arm and hand in particular... It felt like his bones were broken or fractured. Extremely itchy and sore, constantly throbbing under that chitinous 'skin'.

'Maybe I'm evolving?'

'Eat! Breed! Grow! Live! Breed!'

'Yeah, I'm really hungry.'

Jake smiled wryly as he took out a white t-shirt and put it on... Then took it off and threw it over onto the frozen piss, shit and blood covered office chair. He picked out another shirt and put it on, but when it was drenched in blood, he tossed it away as well. Finally, the third shirt was relatively fine. Only a small bit of blood leaked on it. Nothing like before.

Then he put on some black boxers, followed by gray sweatpants and then a black hoodie. Only then did he finally feel a bit warmer. Then he left the room and went downstairs, limping slowly the whole way. The blue-carpet on the stairs was connected to the carpet in the living room. There was a couch on the right side and a big screen TV on the left. Though it was all useless now. Those tropical plants near the window were all pretty much dead from the cold by now. They could usually survive the winter, but without any way to heat the house and in the coldest part of January... Well, his mother wasn't there anymore.

'If she comes back and complains about the plants or cat after looking at my fucked up appearance...'

He shook his head, wobbling over to the kitchen and stepped on the white tiles. Walking slowly to the refrigerator on his left. At least there was no need to worry about anything going bad. In fact, the temperature in the fridge and freezer was probably a bit higher than the room temperature in the house at that moment. He casually took out a bunch of lunch meat: Turkey,

bologna, salami, American cheese slices, ham, swiss cheese, et cetera. He put them on a plate and sprayed a bunch of yellow mustard on everything. Then started eating...

'Fuck... My teeth!'

Chapter 3:

Even without teeth, he could still use his gums for the softer stuff. The more difficult swiss cheese and salami were first mashed up by the carapace-covered fingers, then easily swallowed. He drank some orange juice and plenty of water. His mind was in a daze most of the time.

‘Need... Nutrients... Vitamins... Minerals...’

Jake looked over at a cabinet above the sink and took out a few vitamins at random. These belonged to his father. His own vitamins were in a cabinet in his room, but he didn’t want to go back in there if he didn’t have to... It was just too gross and he didn’t have the energy to clean up all that mess.

He just ate a few of each one. There were lots, D3, Fish Oil, Hair/Skin/Nails, Daily Multivitamins, Vitamin C Chewables, Gummy Multivitamins, ginkgo biloba... Even if they didn’t seem very useful, he didn’t think too much about it. However, he hesitated for a while about taking his thyroid medication.

‘What if my hyperthyroidism is the only thing keeping me alive right now? Or maybe it’s the reason I feel so shitty?’

In the end, he didn’t take it. Mainly because he only needed to take it five days a week and this was one of his ‘off days’ anyway. Or at least, it was before he passed out. He can’t remember what day it was and he really didn’t care all that much. He ate some more lunch meat and then found some chewy chocolate chip cookies. The whole pack of 30 cookies was gone within a few minutes... Then he started to feel nauseous again.

‘That was a mistake.’

Well, whether it was the lunch meat or the cookies, none of those things was particularly great. Plus the vitamins and the acidic orange juice. Even under normal circumstances he would’ve felt sick. He pulled out an uncomfortable wooden chair from the side of the kitchen table and sat down at the empty wooden table. In his vision, he could see across the table, across a small section with the washer, dryer and the bathroom door, there was the back door of the house.

He could see outside the window and the screen door window behind that. His backyard was covered in snow, with a few small evergreen trees and bushes in pots. There were other empty pots and some tables, stone benches, along with random decorations... Most of which couldn’t be seen from his position at all. In fact, he could barely see anything.

‘Gravy... Are you still out there?’ Jake was thinking about his cute gray-furred alleycat that lived

in his house half the time. He couldn't remember if the cat was in the house or outside. If he was outside, maybe the poor baby was frozen to death already. But if he was inside...

"Rao~!" There was a shrill cry coming from behind his back, on the right side. He looked over at the dark, creepy opening that led down into the basement. The stairs to the basement were basically directly below the stairs to the second floor.

"Maaa~!"

Normally Jake would go see what was wrong, afraid that the stupid cat might have taken a shit or pissed in the basement. They didn't have a litter box after all. He had to let the cat in and out of the house a few times a day. He usually didn't go out that often in the Winter or the hottest days of the Summer, but in the Spring and Autumn, Gravy rarely stayed in the house.

'Fuck, this is definitely like a scene in a horror movie. Did the cat mutate too? Do people in horror movies realize they're in horror movies?'

'Danger! Fight! Kill! Live!'

'Why fight? What's the point? Just let go...'

'Goddamn it...'

He ignored the voices in his head and kept sitting there, using his weird right hand to pick up a plastic cup filled with water, taking sips from time to time. Well, he was still in a daze. It's not that he didn't love his cat. He was just numb. Ever since his parents didn't come back home a few days ago, since he got sick suddenly, he wanted to give up so many times...

'Sleep, let go, why bother?'

'Live! Survive! Breed! Eat! Fight!'

"Raaa~!"

Two extremely contradictory voices kept whispering and screaming in his mind alternatively. Then there was that creepy cat meowing that kept getting closer every few seconds... It was coming up the stairs.

"Maaa~!"

He looked over to his right and saw a cute, fluffy gray cat. He looked about the same as before, except that his eyes were bloodshot and his ears were bleeding. Gravy was also salivating constantly. He looked like he had rabies.

'Great. I'm gonna get rabies next?'

'At this point, does it even matter?'

'Kill! Devour! Grow!'

"Maow!" Gravy jumped up onto the table in front of him and started eating the lunch meat, cheeses and even the chocolate chip cookies he hadn't finished yet.

'Gravy never jumps on the table in the house... He's definitely fucked up. At least he ain't attacking me, yet.'

Clearly the poor kitty cat's condition wasn't to the stage where he couldn't think rationally at all anymore. However, the fact that he ate chocolate chip cookies... It didn't take long before the cat ran to the door and started gagging. So Jake got up and opened the door for the cat. Letting him go outside into the snow, where he puked immediately and started sprinting out into the alley. Easily hopping over the fence that was nearly the same height as Jake's short ass, 1.6 meters.

"Mmmn..." Jake groaned and closed the white screen door, locked it, then closed the thick white wooden door, locking it twice. Aside from the bronze knob, there was also a part above that which needed to be locked by a key. The front of the house was even better. There was a door with two locks, then a small entryway, followed by a second door with two locks and a screen door with its own small lock.

'Well, if someone wanted to break in, they could still do it pretty easily.'

He chuckled softly and whimpered in pain again. There was a big glass window, covered by two sets of curtains and a bunch of dead plants, but it was still just a big glass window. Anyone could break it if they wanted. If someone used a crowbar, they could also break into the doors pretty quickly. However...

'Why am I worrying about that shit now?'

Jake looked over through the window to the left of the door, above the white front-loading dryer. He could see his tall, pale-skinned, middle-aged Slovakian neighbor standing outside in a blood-stained tank top. He was looking down at his grill and cooking some kind of meat. Jake couldn't see it from his angle, but it smelled pretty good. Maybe steak?

'I guess I know who won the fight.'

Chapter 4:

'Kill him! Eat him! Take his food! Take his home! Take his wife!'

Jake picked his nose with his sharp black right fingertip, then groaned as he accidentally broke a capillary. Looking down at his bloody fingertip that didn't even have 'nails', he couldn't help but groan again. Then he scratched his itchy left hairless eyebrow with his left hand...

"Mmmmn~!" He looked down and saw that his middle fingernail broke off. He looked at the other fingernails and saw that they were all loose as well.

'I heard that people undergoing chemo also lose their nails... My toes...'

It wasn't just his hand. His toenails also got loose and some of them were already missing. His body hair was also falling out, but he was wearing a hoodie and sweatpants, so it was hard to notice compared to his usual nearly-naked outfit of just a white t-shirt that barely covered his junk. Normally though, the house was heated pretty well with four or five small electric heaters. Now it felt more like an ice box. Outside was even colder though.

'The world is definitely fucked. I hope I can get Isekai-ed soon.'

'Just give in... You can do anything you want in your dreams.'

'Kill! Fight! Devour! Breed!'

Jake looked down at his right palm, then at the left. One was pale, pinkish, with some visible seemingly green veins under the surface. There was a '<' coming from the left, then a slightly curved line above that, coming from the right. At least from his perspective of looking down at his left hand. On the right palm, there was a similar and inverted pattern. However, now the flesh was replaced by a hard yet somewhat flexible shell. He gently caressed it and he could feel slightly ticklish.

'Surprisingly sensitive.'

He poked the lines in particular, because they felt even more sensitive than the rest of the carapace. Then he pushed a little too hard at the base of his palm.

"Aaah~!"

'What the fucking fuck?!'

His fingertip pierced inside the tiny slit and it felt incredibly painful, with blood spurting out and

splashing on his face. Not just blood. There were some other clear, slimy and sticky liquids involved. Aside from pain, he also felt a strange and incredibly intense sense of pleasure! Like popping a cyst that was bothering him for a long time, or that brief moment between ejaculation and severe depression...

'I wanna fuck it.'

'Breed!'

'I really shouldn't. It'll probably get infected...'

'You fucking idiot. You're still worried about getting an infection in your weird bug hand?!'

'The hole is too small.'

'It'll be kinda awkward in terms of positioning.'

'Breed!'

'My dick hurts really fucking bad right now.'

'I can finally lose my virginity to my hand by my cock ain't working. Ironic.'

'Fuck you. Wait, I mean, go fuck yourself.'

"Hahahaha~! *Cough-cough-cough~!*"

'Goddamn it, the coughing is back.'

Anyway, Jake ultimately didn't or more precisely, he couldn't fuck the sketchy hole in his hand. So he just walked over to the sink and started washing his face off, and of course, his hand. Then he started tasting soap and gagged. He tried to spit it out, but then realized that there was nothing in his mouth.

'So it's not a handussy, it's a second mouth?'

'Handussy? Seriously? You're so fucking stupid.'

'Poison!'

Jake quickly washed his second mouth out with cold water. He also rinsed his mouth out with some water as well. Then he... Well, he stuck the tip of his tongue inside the tiny hole in his palm. At the same time, he felt something slimy touching the tip of his tongue in return! He could feel both at the same time, which was even weirder.

'Fuck! There really is a second tongue! Holy shit! This is so creepy... And hot.'

He stuck out his tongue and at the same time, a long, slimy pink 'tongue' stuck out from the widening slit. However, when it widened, he could feel the bones in his right hand bending, cracking, as if they would shatter at any moment. No, for that matter, his whole arm has been incredibly painful for a while now. All the bones hurt, especially the hand bones.

'This is definitely some kinda weird alien parasite or virus. Right?'

Of course Jake wasn't some generic brainless protagonist in a Horror Movie who had zero imagination or reasoning skills. For the past few months, people have been talking about zombies, aliens, parasites, viruses and other shit on the internet. It didn't happen suddenly. At least, not that suddenly. But there were always other things covering up those stories.

For example, there was a mass shooting in an Elementary School. The shooter killed dozens of kids for no apparent reason, then blew his own brains out. He drove across three states to do it.

On the same day, China locked down Shanghai because of a Covid outbreak. Russia massacred another Ukrainian town full of helpless civilians. A flight went missing over the Pacific. A random guy in Florida was eaten by an alligator he tried to fuck. A woman in Florida got arrested for having sex with a dolphin and posting it online. An oil tanker in the Gulf of Mexico crashed into a cruise ship. A famous Rock Band from the 40's that was still somehow alive and performing regularly was having a concert in Baltimore. The Teacher's Union went on strike again. A cute kitten survived falling from a 7 story balcony. A baby in Canada was abducted a few years ago, but they finally found the child in New York City... Living in an abandoned subway, alone.

There were also plenty of UFO sightings, North Korea was testing a Nuke and accidentally blew up one of their own small villages, a famous comedian died of cancer. The UFO sightings and the nuke were both treated as jokes. More people cared about the 105 year old fucking comedian that finally died after getting 'Covid'!

Anyone on the internet who tried to talk about the suspicious shit that was happening would be banned from various social media platforms. One man was even arrested for 'Hate Speech' because he tried to tell people about his neighbor who happened to be gay, but also happened to literally kill and eat the poor bastard's dog! The official explanation is 'Rabies'.

There was another video of an old man on a subway who vomited out a bunch of white maggots and then tried to bite a pregnant woman. But slipped in his own puke and broke his skull open on a metal pole. It was New York though, so nobody really cared.

'People are fucking idiots.'

Chapter 5:

"It's actually pretty normal to imagine other voices in your head when you're super lonely, desperate and of course, bored."

'Eat! Kill! Breed!'

'Why bother cleaning this shit up? You're gonna die soon anyway. Just let go.'

'Don't listen to that weak bitch. Go out across the street and fuck that hot girl before she turns into some kinda slug monster.'

'Breed! Kill! Devour!'

"Okay, okay, shut the fuck up!"

Jake roared behind his white mask. He was mopping the floor with bleach water and the window open nearby. He looked outside and noticed that the door of that 'hot girl' neighbor was open. Screams, cries and roars could be heard from across the street, but he wasn't sure where they were coming from. It might not even be across the street. It could also be along his own side, but because of the acoustics, it would sound like it's coming from over there.

"Shit... Goddamn it."

'She's getting raped.'

"Somebody's getting raped. Probably a lot of people. Even more people are murdering each other. Welcome to Baltimore."

'This ain't some fucking superhero story.'

He could barely even breathe normally without coughing. His body was incredibly weak and he was busy cleaning up his own piss, shit and puke. He couldn't even save himself, so how could he worry about other people?

'Why do I feel so guilty?'

'Survivor's guilt. It's normal. You'll get over it.'

'Maybe somebody will come rape you next?'

'Maybe it'll be a hot female zombie?'

“Hahahaha~! Yeah right... Probably gonna be some big fat and ugly dude.”

‘Breed! Kill! Eat! Devour!’

He was already fantasizing about how to fight and kill some home invaders or zombies, but he looked back over at the window and ducked!

“Waak~!”

“Fuck me!”

It was an actual duck! It was the middle of the winter, so why the hell were there still ducks in the park? Jake didn’t have time to think about that, because the crazy duck was attacking him! It was still just a duck though. He used the wet mop and smacked it in the head, then he swung it like a bat. Sending the stunned duck out the window with a big hole in the screen from that damn hawk earlier.

“Shit...”

His mouth was still sore and he was missing all his teeth, but at least he could kinda-sorta talk to himself now. Though it didn’t really help much in his current situation. He quickly closed the window when he saw dozens of small birds dive bombing for no apparent reason!

‘Why?!’

‘Breed! Eat! Devour! Kill! Grow!’

‘Breed? Are you fucking kidding me?’

He looked down at his right hand and his palm opened up wider than before, with two long, slimy tongues wiggling around outside. It’s only been a few hours, but his hand and even his entire body had changed a lot. He was skinnier, his eyes were sunken, his muscle mass decreased significantly across his whole body, though it wasn’t very visible when he wore a hoodie and sweatpants. He could still ‘feel’ the difference though and see it when he lifted up his shirt in front of the mirror. The acne and cysts were all gone by now, but the scars still remained. His hair was still gone, but his chin, neck and scalp seemed to be getting darker. In other words, he had a so-called five o’clock shadow. His nails had all fallen out, but it wasn’t as sore as it used to be and new nails were growing in their place. It was all relatively slow though. At least, comparable to normal recovery. Nothing too exaggerated.

The biggest change was obviously the right arm. The bones stopped hurting, but he honestly couldn’t ‘feel’ those bones anymore. He could still use his arm and hand pretty normally, but it felt like there were also other ‘things’ inside. Sensitive organs. He pushed on his shoulder, bicep

and forearm before, but the shell was getting harder. It reminded him of a crab to a certain extent, at least in terms of having an exoskeleton. But a crab doesn't put any extra organs inside their claws or limbs.

'Then again, there are lots of weird animals out there. I'm not a fucking zoologist.'

'You're just a fucking Furry.'

'Not a Furry... I'm just desperate.'

'Insane.'

"All of you need to shut the fuck up. You're giving me a headache."

'You already have a headache.'

'I know, so stop making so much noise.'

'Eat! Kill-'

"Shut the fuck up!"

Jake shouted at his hand like a lunatic, but the only response he got was those two tongues returning back inside the pink slit. To be precise, the carapace on the outside was still pitch-black, but the flesh inside was pink. He was tempted to rub it or stick his fingers inside however... He was in the middle of cleaning up puke, shit and piss. Even if it was frozen, it was still a mess.

'I love you.'

"What the fuck is wrong with me?"

'What isn't wrong with me?'

He shook his head and felt dizzy again, getting back to work. The temperature issue was actually much more serious than he originally anticipated. Because... The pipes froze. Whether it was the sinks, the toilets or the showers, all the water in the house was no longer available. The water in those pipes froze and in some cases, burst directly. The basement was flooded and then frozen over. He didn't even bother dealing with that. As for the bleach water he had now, obviously he got the water beforehand.

In order to get rid of a lot of the filth in the quickest way, his method was simply to toss it out the window earlier. Then it was just a matter of cleaning up whatever he couldn't directly throw out the window. Like the good ole days... Of the Dark Ages.

Why did he even bother spending so much time cleaning when it clearly didn't matter? Well, he wanted to be able to sleep in his own bed. At least one last time. No matter what happened in the future, he couldn't deal with anything if his mind and body were totally exhausted.

Chapter 6:

Booom~!

“Aaaaaah~!”

“Noooo~! Nooo~! Nooo~! Plea~!”

“Aaaaaangh~!”

Booom-booom-boom~!

Dadadadadaada~!

Pop~! Pop~!

“Fuck you! Fuck you! Piece of shit! Die! Die Cunt! Die!”

“Aaaah!”

“Daddy~! Daddy~! Save me! Aaah~!”

“Get away from her! Somebody, do something!”

“Que Pasa~!”

‘Que Pasa?’ Jake opened his eyes and saw the dim light shining in through the two layers of curtains. He was still wearing the same hoodie and sweatpants, but even under a thick yellow blanket and a white sheet, he was freezing.

‘The temperature last night was colder than yesterday. Let’s not talk about zombies and aliens, I’m gonna freeze to death at this rate. How can people still make so much fucking noise in this weather?’

He walked over to the window and pulled the curtains open with his right hand. What came into his sight was a street covered in snow, with multiple cars flipped over or crashed into each other. Some of them were covered in holes. One had the door ripped off and... There was a broken katana blade sticking out of black minivan roof, which reflected a lot of light in his eyes.

Across the street, he could see and even smell a lot of smoke. It seemed like the row of buildings closer to Patterson Park were burning. In the distance, he could hear even more explosions, gunshots and screams. Some people were just yelling or shouting.

'Whenever it comes to apocalypse stories, the National Guard always gets involved, but realistically...'

"Hahaha~! Oh well." Jake smiled wryly, "It's too late. I mean, even if they were gonna nuke a city, it wouldn't be Baltimore. Might still bomb the place though. Then again, who's gonna do the bombing? I don't see jets or choppers anymore."

'Probably ran out of people to fly them.'

'Eat! Breed! Fight! Grow!'

"Of course you're back again." Jake looked down at his right palm. It wasn't just his hand, his entire arm seemed swollen. It was at least twice as large as his left arm. The slit opened without his control. The puffy pink flesh inside was pulsating and those two tongues seemed to be wrestling with each other, trying to be the first to emerge from the tempting abyss.

"Good morning to you too... Hahaha~!"

Compared to before, the 30 year old man looked a lot better than yesterday. He made sure to eat plenty of food and drink lots of water, even took some extra vitamins. But he was still getting skinnier, while his right arm was getting more muscular and larger. It was definitely not a good sign by normal medical standards. However, in terms of scifi horror... No wait, that's still a bad thing.

'Fuck it.'

'Breed! Breed! Breed!'

"Ummm... Okay." Jake looked down at his morning wood and snickered. However, he didn't stand in front of the window, where he could be potentially seen or even sniped. He closed the thinner black curtain and laid back down on the bed. Then he pulled his junk out of the waist of his sweatpants. The elastic of the boxers and sweatpants pressed against the bottom of his scrotum a bit too tightly. Making it a little painful and uncomfortable.

'Looks like... Definitely a lot better than yesterday.'

Compared to the nightmare fuel from the day before. His genitals were relatively normal looking. He still had a lot of horrible scars and some awkward bald spots, while other areas were already growing some short hairs. His whole body was in a similar state though. He was circumcised, like most Americans who were born before the 2000s, so he already had plenty of scar tissue around the most sensitive area of his penis. This made it less sensitive and more easily damaged, but... It's not like he ever experienced it any other way.

“Fuck, it feels like I’m sucking my own dick.”

Jake snickered as those two tongues wrapped around the tip, head and as he pressed down farther, his entire... Mediocore cock was engulfed into his wrist. Less than halfway up his forearm, though to be fair, his forearm was significantly longer and thicker than it used to be.

‘Ow! Ow! Fuck! Ow!’

Aside from pleasure, there was also a lot of pain. First of all, his dick was being compressed tightly. His two tongues were very delicate and sensitive, but they were also getting smashed. His wrist and palm felt like they were being ripped apart. Everything hurt, but it did feel really good.

‘Kinda like fucking myself in the ass raw. It’s gross and I really shouldn’t, but I definitely would if I had the ability.’

‘Breed! Breed! Breed!’

“Okay, okay, breed. I’m breeding, ain’t I? Calm down Vora.”

Yes, he named his mutated hand after his pocket pussy. Though it’s really not much of a surprise. Jake lifted his arm up a bit and then down again, over and over, until it didn’t hurt anymore and all he felt was pleasure. He even felt ‘alive’, more alive than he had for a very, very long time. Likely due to the sex hormones in his brain.

‘Shit, this feels so good! I’m gonna-ugh~!’

It was when he finally ejaculated that he enjoyed the sensation of tasting his own cumshot... Actually, it didn’t taste like anything special. And it definitely wasn’t the first time he tasted his own jizz. Everyone does it one way or another, either because of curiosity or accidentally. The real issue was that his whole arm was spasming violently, like it was having a horrible cramp, but it also felt really good at the same time.

‘Ovulating!’

“Ovulating?” Jake tried to remove his hand from his junk... But it was stuck. More precisely, his sharp and dangerous fingers were clenched down below his testicles, while his entire dick was tangled up in those two tongues and compressed tightly by the umm... ‘Walls’ of his hollow wrist and forearm. There was also an obscene amount of suction, to the point where it actually hurt. It felt like he was going to piss himself.

‘Fuck... Ow, goddamn it, this is why you don’t fuck mutated hand pussies!’

Chapter 7:

Eventually his hand relaxed and the 'swelling' reduced. Of course, he also had to feed Voracity a few more shots before it finally calmed down. Then he wiped his slimy palm off with a tissue, walked down the freezing cold and dark hall, pissed in the frozen toilet upstairs, then went down to the kitchen. After thinking about it for a while, he ended up eating some cookies. Speaking of which, his gums were still sore, but he could feel small and sharp protrusions.

'My teeth are growing back? I guess it's not that weird though. At least nothing compared to the handgina situation.'

"Still too hard to chew though... Fuck..."

Instead, he had to break the cookies up slowly as they dissolved in his saliva. He also drank a bottle of water that wasn't completely frozen yet. Ironically, the inside of the refrigerator was warmer than the kitchen. Normally, the sun on the roof would heat the house a bit, but because of the snow, that barely happened.

'Gotta do something to heat the house a little bit. Or at least just heat one room.'

'There's another option. You could just kill yourself.'

"Shut the fuck up! I ain't gonna kill myself!"

Jake could breathe again. He could speak. He could jerk off. He was in constant, agonizing pain and discomfort, but that was basically his 'normal' experience. Same with the crushing loneliness and helplessness.

'My parents are gone. My relatives are probably all dead. My friends... Well, Bunny, I hope she's fine out there somewhere. But I don't even know her real name, so it doesn't matter either way. It's just me and Voracity now. Even Gravy is probably frozen to death by-'

"Holy shit!" He looked at the window above the dryer and saw those two blood-red eyes glaring in the house at him!

"Maa~!" Those cute paws were on the glass and that adorable face was looking into the house. Even the size hadn't changed much, but Jake definitely felt a difference. Those claws scratched and scraped at the glass and his forehead smacked rhythmically!

'Fight! Kill! Devour! Breed!'

"Damn it!" Jake grimaced and rubbed his aching forehead. It felt like the house was shaking and

the glass really was rattling violently. Not just the windows, but also the glasses and dishes in his cabinets!

“Maaa~!” The cat’s voice was so loud and high-pitched that the window shattered directly! Allowing the ridiculously cold wind and snow to blow inside, along with Gravy! He ignored the big pieces of glass that stabbed into his back, neck and face, ran across the dryer, washer, then hopped down onto the step up into the kitchen from the laundry area. He darted under the kitchen table and went straight for Jake’s exposed, defenseless feet...

“Sorry.” The short and temporarily bald man sighed, then he jumped back, grabbed a wooden baseball bat next to the big white fridge/freezer. He swung the bat and the cat dodge quickly, hopping up on the divider between the living room and the kitchen. It was practically right below Jake’s left shoulder.

“Rao~!” Gravy ‘roared’ and reached out with his paws, trying to grab the man’s face, shoulder or neck. His bloody mouth was wide open, revealing those long and sharp canines...

Thump!

“Raa~!”

Well, even if he was dizzy, had a headache and hadn’t swung a bat since middle-school, the poor cat was still sent flying through the air. Those vicious teeth were shattered, broken, knocked out, a few of them were even embedded in the wooden bat! Even after flying halfway across the room, Gravy got up off the ground and limped over toward the kitchen again.

“Sorry... I’m sorry Baby, but... It’s your time.” Jake sighed and swung the bat again when the rabid kitty cat jumped up at his face. He missed. But the cat also missed. Flying into the kitchen, then smashing face-first into the corner of the wooden kitchen table... The whole face was ruined, his left eye was splattered on the floor, the right eye was dangling around. The cat wobbled around for a while, crying and vomiting out white thread-like worms everywhere.

“Fuck... God Dammit...” Jake gritted his uh gums and slammed the bat down three times, but even with its head completely smashed, the body was still twitching and trying to get back up again!

“Ew! Ew! Come on, just die already!”

‘Eat!’

“No eat! We are not eating this rabies cat! Fuck!”

Jake cursed repeatedly while slamming the bat down again and again. Breaking the legs, the tail, ribs, the guts splattered out and finally a few big white worms emerged. They squirmed

helplessly and seemed to die... But when he tried to hit them with the bat, they dodged! So he picked up a spray bottle full of rubbing alcohol and squirted the worms a few times. Finally they shriveled up and died, very slowly. It took nearly ten minutes and they still twitched from time to time, just like what was left of Gravy's body.

"Shit, this is just a cat... What about dogs or people?"

'Probably worse. Actually, this isn't too surprising. In reality, people generally don't die so easily.'

'Eat'

"Shush! I'll eat! But I'm not eating Gravy! Uh, well, I could eat actual gravy-wait, why am I explaining this to the voices in my head?!"

Jake sighed as he looked at the wreckage that used to be a cat. Now he was really alone.

"Coo~!"

"Fuck! Shit, shit! No!"

Of course, with the window missing and the wind blowing in, it also meant that a 'murder' of pigeons were able to fly inside! Maybe some of them just wanted to find a warm place to hide out, at least warmer than outside, but quite a few of them had scarlet eyes. They flew towards his face and were quickly swatted away by a few swings of his bloody bat. Unlike the cat, their bodies weren't nearly as durable. Their wings snapped and their internal organs ruptured, not to mention the ribs and other bones. Even if they didn't die instantly, at least they couldn't keep charging at him. Those other, more rational pigeons were scared and started flying into the living room, down into the basement or even upstairs!

"I give up."

Jake smashed the three crazy pigeons into worms, blood and feathers, before he put down the bat and opened the cabinets. He really was starving. His metabolism clearly increased dramatically due to the 'infection'.

'Meat! Meat! Meat!'

"Shush."

He ate all the lunch meat yesterday. However, he still had some other things available. Fortunately the cans weren't so cold that they exploded. He grabbed a can of sardines in mustard, then hesitated and picked a few more. He also grabbed a can of kidney beans. He would normally wash everything off and be super hygienic, especially since Covid, but the

current situation didn't allow it.

'Eat! Eat! Eat! Devour! Eat!'

"Fine, eat as much as you want."

Chapter 8:

“It actually tastes better this way... Wild.”

Jake chuckled to himself as he dropped one cold bean at a time into the gaping pink hole in his right palm. He also dropped some whole sardines. Those two skinny tentacle-like tongues reached out and wrapped around the soft, squishy headless fish in yellow mustard sauce. Then it was quickly sucked inside and smashed up. There weren't any lungs in his arm, at least from what he could tell. So there was no need to worry about choking.

“Like... How does it digest? Where's the stomach at? Here?”

With his other thumb, he pressed on his forearm, near the elbow, where the food seemed to disappear. However, there was no real 'stomach' from what he could tell. At least not like a human stomach.

'Maybe more like a snake?'

'Eat! Eat!'

“You're kinda adorable.”

Jake smiled gently at his mutated, carapace covered hand that had slimy worm-like tongues stretching out of the palm... Then he used a spoon and kept feeding it more kidney beans. Occasionally, the palm would 'burp' and groan, but it didn't hurt and it wasn't as complicated as his normal digestive system. It didn't even seem to produce any waste. At least not solid waste. And nothing visible.

“I guess we'll see what happens later. How much can you eat before you're satisfied, Vora?”

'Meat! Meat! Meat!'

“Okay, I'll give you more meat, hehe~!”

The depression and anxiety from earlier seemed to disappear the more he 'communicated' with his new pet. It was even better than a cat or a dog.

'Well, you can still fuck a dog. Uh, wait, I mean, you shouldn't, but you can.'

“What the fuck is wrong with me?”

'What isn't wrong with you?'

The five o'clock shadow on his face has already gotten a lot thicker. Same with his scalp, though it was covered by a hood. He breathed out a sigh of frosty air and continued pacing around in his room upstairs while feeding his palm. He looked outside the window and watched the black smoke rising into the sky. The white snow falling from the clouds. The totaled cars on the small street. The creepy blood-red eyes in the windows of the houses across the street.

No power, but a lot of people had oil to burn, generators, some people even had solar panels. Not everyone was infected for that matter. There were still some lucky bastards that avoided getting sick, either because they had resistance, immunity or just hadn't contacted whatever it was that spread the 'plague'.

"It's probably a lot worse in the south. If it wasn't so fucking cold..."

'Then I'd probably be dead by now.'

Whether it was the extremely high fever from before. Or just the fact that the 'zombies' couldn't survive as easily in the cold, he really might have died if it wasn't so frigid. But even so, the cold was still a huge threat to his survival at this stage.

Jake didn't just feed Vora, he also ate some beans with his actual mouth. After all, he couldn't be sure whether the nutrients obtained by his arm would be transferred into the rest of his body. It might just be a one-sided situation, where his arm was consuming the fats and even the muscles in the rest of his body. So he ate a bunch of cookies, beans and chocolate bars. He wanted to eat some granola/nut/berry bars, but his dental situation wouldn't allow it. His hand also didn't seem interested. It cared more about meats, cheeses, basically anything with a lot of protein. It would settle for beans though, if there were no other options.

Aside from dark red kidney beans, he also had... Light red kidney beans. Well, there were also cans of corn, some beef stew, sirloin burger soup, along with other soups.

'Soup! Soup! Soup! Meat! Cheese!'

"How much are you gonna eat?"

Jake sighed as he watched the sun go down. He's been to the bathroom to piss a few times and even went downstairs to take a shit in that toilet. It was explosive diarrhea with plenty of squirmy black and white worms... Anyway, it was a very unpleasant experience. Made more unpleasant by the fact that he couldn't take a shower afterwards. So he had to waste some really cold alcohol wipes to clean his ass off in place of a shower. He really didn't want to get anymore cysts, boils or other nonsense if he could avoid it.

'Breed!'

“Not like I have anything better to do...”

Well, aside from eating, Voracity was usually pretty horny. Like he said though. He really has nothing better to do... No power, no computer, no internet, even his phone was out of batteries. He tried to draw with his right hand, but those tongues kept licking the plastic pencil and messing him up. As for drawing with the left hand? He can barely draw with the right. The left was totally useless.

‘Ovulate! Conceive! Reproduce!’

“Yeah, yeah. Go ahead and make some babies for all I care.”

Jake rolled his dark-brown eyes and sighed dramatically. This was the tenth time he ‘inseminated’ his palm since the first few times in the morning. He looked down at his junk and smiled wryly. It hurt, a lot. He was even bleeding a bit in a few places. The hand obviously didn’t have teeth and the entrance had become very soft, unlike the rest of his arm. However, the pressure and acid were still a problem. Not necessarily stomach acid, but more like saliva.

‘Danger! Fight! Kill! Live!’

‘Danger?’

Psh~!

“Fuck!” Jake cursed as a hole appeared in his window! It was a circular hole... Then another, finally the whole window shattered into pieces. A gust of wind blue some snow into the room and knocked over a few candles. However, that was the least of his concerns at that moment!

‘Snipers?!’

‘No, it might just be strays.’

“Shit!”

He grumbled and crouched down low, opened his door and left the room. Closing the black door behind him. Whether it was targeted at him or not, he couldn’t just stay in the room when there were bullets whizzing around. In the end, he had to go to sleep in his parents’ bedroom at the end of the hall. He opened the white door that had been closed since this new pandemic started. Obviously there was nothing special inside. No corpses of his parents or anything weird. Just a cold room with a large king-sized bed, big enough for two people. Coincidentally, his mother changed the bedding before they left on their trip. So he didn’t need to worry about much. Except that the pillows weren’t as comfortable as his own pillows. The actual quality of the bed was much higher, but it was still weird not falling into a pit.

'A bit too flat... Ugh... But whatever. Shit, it's so cold in here. I hope those candles don't start a fire.'

Chapter 9:

The candles didn't start a fire. But when he opened his door the next day, he was greeted by a bunch of dead pigeons all over his floor. They were frozen into ice sculptures after being torn to shreds by a big, beefy hawk, which also froze to death during the night.

'Why do you bother? Everything ends. Everything decays. You cleaned the room, and the next day it became even filthier.'

'Meat! Eat them! Eat! Devour! Grow! Reproduce!'

"Shush, Depresso. Also, no way, I ain't gonna eat these random frozen rabies birds. Be good, Vora. Besides, even if I wanted to eat them, they're frozen solid."

'Fuck, my fingers.'

Jake looked at his left hand and clenched his fist a few times. Not just his hand, but his feet were also freezing. He had to put on socks yesterday. Now, it looks like he'll have to wear a glove. Otherwise, he might really lose some digits.

First, he went through his drawers and found some clean warm clothes. Plus undershirts and stuff like that. Then he put everything in a suitcase. His bed and bedding were covered in bird feathers, blood and snow, so he couldn't bring one of his favorite pillows. Then he went downstairs. The living room carpet was covered in snow, because that big window was smashed open and a breeze was blowing straight through from the back to the front. There were also some frozen birds, rats and other creatures. Obviously they tried to come inside to find warmth or food, but failed miserably.

Jake found a coat in the closet. The leather coat wasn't warm enough alone, so he had a t-shirt, hoodie and sweater underneath. His pants situation was similar. He wore jeans underneath and the baggier black sweatpants over top. He found his old black and white sneakers that he almost never wore, but they really weren't that great in this situation. Especially with such thick snow. So he put them in a bag and then put that bag inside his suitcase. Instead, he wore some thick black rubber boots.

'Are you really going to do this?'

'Migration. Claim New Territory. Survive.'

'What's the point? You'll just lose it again. Over and over. Just give up already. Sleep here, forever.'

“Fuck you. I don’t wanna die, okay? Especially not now. Vora needs me.”

‘Vora isn’t real.’

‘Meat! Devour! Breed!’

“You’re not real, but Vora is definitely real. So fuck off! I’m not gonna kill myself!”

Jake was arguing with his darker thoughts while he filled another suitcase with various supplies. Things like cans of food, bottles of spring water, it got really heavy, really fast. Fortunately, there was a black cart nearby. It was something his father would use to carry groceries back from the store when he went shopping down the street. He put the unfrozen bottles of water in a cooler first, along with other things he was afraid would freeze. Then placed those coolers in the cart, along with the other suitcases of clothes, et cetera.

He brought some kitchen knives, a meat cleaver, a few metal and wooden baseball bats. Even a very shitty katana he bought for 20 dollars at a Flea Market when he was a kid. As for money? What counts as currency in this situation? The most valuable things in a disaster or apocalypse are food, water and weapons.

He didn’t need toothpaste or a toothbrush, because he still didn’t really have teeth. He basically gave up on taking his thyroid medicine. But he still took his 5 spare bottles with him. Who knows? Maybe someone would need it? He wasn’t sure everyone was infected. He also took almost all the vitamin bottles in the house. After all, Vora likes vitamins. For her, they taste delicious. Even if they’re just the kind you’re supposed to swallow.

“Actually, I should probably bring some of these too...”

Jake picked up some small hammers of different shapes and sizes. There was also a yellow-rubber handled fire ax with a rusty steel head. Why hammers and an ax? Because in reality, they’re much more useful than swords and knives. They don’t break or chip as easily. Which is important.

Then he took rubbing alcohol, peroxide and even bleach. Along with alcohol wipes, hand sanitizer, basically everything he thought might be useful. Eventually, he had to get rid of some things to make room for other more important shit he found later. The whole packing process took so long that he needed to piss twice.

“Toilet paper? No, no, I’m not going to go live out in the wild for fuck’s sake. I’m just trying to find a house that’s in better shape nearby!”

The whole city was filled with various supplies. As long as a building had heat, it might even still have running water. At least for a little while longer. There are also a lot of revamped and newer houses nearby. Not like his own house, that had countless problems and was basically falling

apart even before the apocalypse.

“The biggest issue is other survivors.”

Jake frowned, scratching his itchy chin. His hair was already a few millimeters long. His eyebrows and eyelashes were also almost back to normal. Because of his rapid metabolism and also the consumption of a bit too many hair/skin/nails pills, his literal hair, skin and nails were growing back at a rapid pace. Even his teeth were growing and coming in more quickly. But that might take a bit longer.

“Peter and Stacy... Er, well, just Peter now.”

‘If he’s still alive, it’ll be dangerous.’

‘Kill him! Eat him! Grow stronger!’

“Stop, this ain’t a fucking video game or webnovel. You can’t just kill and eat monsters to grow stronger.”

He snickered to himself and opened his back door. He pulled the cart with his pitch-black right hand and held a crafting hammer by the wooden handle with his left hand, which was covered by a black leather glove.

‘Am I stronger than before? Or is that just my imagination? I’ve been sick for a while...’

He didn’t just grow a weird alien arm out of nowhere. Although the final change was rapid and scary. The initial infection was probably around the time before his parents left. After all, he didn’t really leave the house at all. The last time was when he went to the doctor in September. Now it’s January. This new Pandemic might have started back then, but it didn’t start in the US.

‘Some people speculated that it was a Russian Bioweapon. Or something that escaped from a lab in Ukraine during the war. Or even something from Chernobyl. Though it’s more likely something created by the Chinese, since they suddenly had a big resurgence of ‘Covid’ back then. Of course, it could also be created and released by the US or any other country.’

‘No, no, for that matter, it’s more likely that this bullshit was some kinda alien invasion. Right?’

‘Yes, alien invasion is more likely than a fucking bioweapon created by irresponsible countries...’

“Besides, they always say aliens, aliens, for fuck’s sake, why is everything extraterrestrial? The Earth has enough fucked up and creepy shit on its own. It could be something found in Antarctica or Siberia. Maybe some kinda bullshit from the bottom of the ocean? Even subterranean super advanced civilizations from the ancient past could exist. It only took

humanity a few thousand years to reach our current level of technology. And most of that tech was developed in only a few hundred years and 'was' increasing at an exponential pace. Humanity has existed in its current evolutionary form for millions of years... Millions of fucking years! Who knows what they could've created in that long timespan?"

Chapter 10:

'I hate the cold, I hate the snow, I hate wearing clothes, I hate being dirty, fuck, fuck, fuck this shit!'

'Prey! Hunt! Eat! Devour! Breed!'

Jake looked around cautiously, because he couldn't see the so-called 'prey' anywhere. There were no birds in the sky. Anything in the snow was probably frozen to death by now. It likely came from one of the houses on either side of the alley he was walking down slowly.

'Danger!'

He immediately ducked when he heard Vora's warning and a moment later, a bullet whizzed above his head and smashed into the concrete wall on his left. He looked over to the right and immediately heard the gunshot echoing in the sky. There was a particularly fancy house near the end of the alley. It had smoking coming out of the chimney, the roof had a deck, along a brown staircase going up the side. There was a big white SUV parked in the backyard, which was turned into a small parking lot, unlike most of the other houses. There was also a back door on the second floor, which connected to the staircase.

Boom~! Boom~! Boom~!

The 'hunter' didn't stop attacking just because they missed the first shot. Instead, that only made them more anxious. They fired three more rounds, which mostly just hit the snow or concrete wall behind where Jake was rolling around in the alley.

"Fuck you! Asshole!" Jake roared and threw his small crafting hammer toward the window on the second floor where the gunshots were coming from. Amazingly enough, he did manage to hit the window, or the top half of the window, shattering it. And probably startling the sniper enough that they stopped shooting.

However, he didn't do something crazy like trying to break into their house, because he didn't know if they had booby traps set up. No, for that matter, they could just be more accurate when he got closer. So he grabbed his cart and quickly scuttled down the alley. Escaping before they fired any more shots at him.

Of course, they might also have gotten hurt by the broken glass or maybe they had to reload their rifle? Either way, Jake didn't stick around to find out. Reaching the end of the alley, he looked back and forth. There was a road in front of him, which could take him to the East on the right or the West on the left. On the other hand, he could keep going straight across the street and reach another alleyway.

This wasn't a video game. Even if the roads were blocked by snow or crashed cars, he could still get around them for the most part. The alley was empty. He could see the other end easily enough.

'Prey! Ahead!'

'Aww, you're learning! How cute!'

"Should I go towards the potentially dangerous 'prey' or take a different route?"

Although he said that, his feet didn't stop moving. It was too damn cold. Standing still obviously felt much colder than walking. Plus, the wind was blowing from the East to the West, so he wanted to get back in between the buildings again. This next alley was nearly twice as long as the one on his street. And at the end of the block, across the street to the right, there was actually an Elementary School...

'No wait... Elementary School?'

'Prey! Breed! Kill! Devour!'

"Goddamn it, Vora, bad. Bad girl!"

'Meat!'

"Kids are not 'meat'... Wait, no, schools have been shut down for a few months now. And no one would send their kids to school in an Apocalypse anyway. This ain't a fucking zombie movie where the kids are still meandering around in an Elementary School a few years after the world ended."

'Besides that, the school probably has a shitty heating system in the first place. No, they definitely have backup generators though. The kind that are too big to steal.'

As he walked up the alley, he noticed that there were a lot more cars parked in the backyards of these houses than on his street. Nearly half the people didn't have 'yards', just a parking spot. However, there were also a lot of empty spots. After all, plenty of people tried to escape from the city before the lockdown. It was also Christmas recently, so people went out to their relatives for the holidays and never came back.

'Maybe I should just steal a car and try to go south?'

"I don't know how to drive. Well, I know, but I can't remember. It's been too long. And I get car sick... Well, it's not as bad if I'm the one driving..."

'Prey!'

Vora snapped him out of his thoughts. That shiny black hand pointed towards a yard on his left. Jake looked over and saw the black smoke rising from the chimney. In the yard was an old woman who looked familiar. She had pale white skin with a bunch of age spots and wrinkles. She wore a thick red winter coat and had mittens on, smiling at him with her crooked yellow teeth. The hair on her head was white, balding and scraggly. The moment he looked over, the old lady waved.

"Jacob? I haven't seen you in ages! Haha~!"

'Danger! Danger! Run! Escape!'

"Yeah, it's been a while... Miss Maria!" Jake felt his heart racing and his head was pounding, but he still smiled at the old woman.

'Fuck! How is she still alive?! Weren't they dying from cancer like twenty years ago?! Is Bo still alive too?!'

'Vampires! They're definitely fucking vampires! Grandmom always said they were creepy old monsters or witches or some shit...'

"It's so cold out. Why don't you come inside and warm yourself up?" Maria smiled gently and walked over through the pathway in the snow.

'Even when the world is ending, they still bothered to shovel the snow and put down salt! Holy hell! They're definitely demons or aliens!'

"Ah, no thanks, I'm just... Just passing through. You should go inside. You don't wanna get sick. The hospitals are all shut down now."

"Don't worry about me. I'm so old. If I die, it's my time." Maria chuckled and came closer, bringing with her a terrifying and ominous aura.

'Run! Run! Move! Run! Escape!'

Well, Jake couldn't see anything, but Vora was clearly horrified. However, the old woman really didn't do anything special. She just sighed and suggested, "You shouldn't go that way. Little Tommy has been acting a little crazy since he got sick. He's holed up in the Elementary School now with a bunch of friends. I'm afraid they might be up to no good."

"Ah, hahaha~! Thanks, I'll be careful..." Jake kept walking and dragging his cart toward the end of the alley. Even after walking to the fenced-in playground near the end, he could still hear Vora screaming.

Chapter 11:

'Escape! Run! Run! Faster! Danger! Run!'

'Shush! It's fine. Everything will be fine. Don't let her smell your fear!'

He would normally talk to himself out loud, but he was worried that it might draw attention. Well, more attention than the sound of his boots smashing the snow, the squeaky wheels of his cart moving or his heavy breathing. Of course, there were also plenty of other loud, ambient noises. Gunshots were endless. Not necessarily the same area though. There were also some ambulances, fire trucks and car alarms that never seemed to stop. Not to mention dogs barking, cats meowing, birds cawing, explosions, screams, roars, cries, wind howling, it all meshed together into a nightmarish symphony of chaos and despair!

"Phew~!" He breathed a sigh of relief when he reached the end of the alley and turned a corner to the right. That terrifying 'stare' disappeared. He was afraid to look back the entire time. Afraid that if he looked back, he'd find Maria standing right behind him.

"I'm definitely overthinking this shit."

'Danger! Run! Run! Escape! Danger! Look!'

"Goddamn it! What the fuck!?!"

Jake looked at the direction where Voracity was pointing. From his position now, he was basically halfway up a hill. So Patterson Park could be seen pretty clearly. Along this particular street, he could only see the northern edge of the smaller part of the park, where people would play soccer in the summer or just walk their dogs, jog around the outskirts, et cetera. However, beyond that was the larger park, which had lots of trees, plenty of 'wildlife' and was also a great place for illicit activities when it wasn't a frozen hellscape. From her perspective, he could see a tennis court, some bare trees, an empty swimming pool filled with snow, some buildings... And a big beautiful white swirly thing reaching down from the clouds.

"Shit, shit, shit!"

The most desperate thing was that the wind was really strong, the snow was thick, he was carrying life-saving important supplies that couldn't be abandoned and that tornado looked like it might be coming his way! As soon as it formed, it cut straight through the bigger park, then went along the road and ripped out pieces of various buildings. Peoples decks were torn off or blown off by the strong winds. Pieces of glass and wood were flying everywhere.

Of course, he didn't stand there and admire the view. He ran towards the school! It was only

across a short crosswalk, which was covered in slippery ice, then a little to the right of the fenced-in area where they put their trash. He ran over a little farther while dragging the cart, reached the black double doors and noticed that they were suspiciously wide open. He didn't have time to think about that though, because the tornado was coming and even if it didn't hit him directly, he would still be bombarded by debris.

Going inside, he immediately closed the two doors and locked them tightly. Well, they basically locked on their own once you closed them. At the entrance to the 4-Story Elementary School, there was a metal detector and an area where people could place their things, get searched or whatever. After all, it's Baltimore City.

The ground rumbled, the door rattled and the whole building shook violently! He could hear windows shattering upstairs and the roaring winds that were only right outside the door behind him. Jake breathed a sigh of relief a minute later when the tornado seemed to leave. Plus the winds also died down a lot. It was dark and relatively quiet now. So he could hear the sound of the generators groaning in the basement, echoing in the halls.

'Prey... Danger... Prey... Eat?'

'Good girl. You're learning. But how do you know about prey or danger?'

'Sense.'

'Sense? Well, you can probably see, hear, smell and feel everything I can, right? Just like I can still use my hand... Uh, thinking about it more reasonably, you're probably just a second personality of mine and I'm definitely going insane. More insane than before.'

'Danger!'

Unlike Jake, who was easily distracted and relatively careless, Voracity was able to use his senses to the utmost. So 'she' forced Jake to dodge and roll across the dirty ground, avoiding a ceiling tile that fell down. Of course, it might not have been that dangerous. Just a ceiling tile, but in the dark, in that situation, the first instinct is to avoid.

'Thanks!'

Jake smiled wryly as he stood up, then looked around cautiously. He had flashlights of course. He'd be an idiot to leave home without some sort of lighting device. However, in this situation, he was afraid to draw attention to himself.

'Prey... Dangerous... Enemy... Territory.'

'Territory? Wait... So there are others like you?'

He didn't receive a response, but he didn't need one. He could smell a strange musky scent in the air. Aside from the other random smells, which combined together reminded him of a public bathroom, there was something else hidden. He sniffed his palm up close and narrowed his eyes... Well, he still couldn't see much in the dark hallway.

'It doesn't smell like you though.'

'Enemy... Different. Many. Dangerous.'

Jake sniffed the air and concentrated his hearing to the best of his ability...

'How the fuck can you tell all this shit?'

'Sense... Focus...'

He followed the advice of his alien parasite and closed his eyes. He also reached into his cart and pulled out a water bottle to refresh himself a bit. Then he ended up pouring half of it into his right palm. Vora needed water as well, but as long as his body was hydrated, she didn't seem to be 'thirsty'. She also couldn't drink as much water as Jake. After all, no matter how much bigger his arm got, there wasn't such a huge and elaborate digestive tract to store all that liquid.

'I do smell something. It's like... Uh, women?'

Jake was a virgin, but it's not like he's never had female friends or been around women before. That'd be ridiculous. However, the scent he smelled brought him back to a distant memory from his teenage years... Well, it was just an overweight female classmate in High School that had really strong body odor.

'Menstruation? Wait, how much fucking menstruation does it take for me to smell it from so far away and over all those other horrible scents?!'

'Prey! Hunt! Eat! Breed! Spawn!'

If it was a video game, obviously the correct choice would be to go explore the secrets of the creepy Elementary School... In reality though, Jake just wanted to leave as quickly as possible. He was looking for a new house to keep from freezing to death.

'Seriously? Are you fucking kidding me?!'

When he tried to open the door, he could see outside the crack that was opened... There was a whole roof pressed up against the door. Parts of a deck, pieces of a jungle gym, a metal fence, but the main thing was that roof.

'Is someone targeting me? Did Maria conjure a fucking tornado to lead me here?'

'Danger!'

Chapter 12:

Everyone likes to think they're special. And the truth is... They're right. Everyone 'is' special. They all have their own special mental disorders. Their own special diseases. Their bodies are unique in various ways. Every single person is a macro-organism filled with countless tiny micro-organisms that are all doing their own thing in their own way.

Jacob didn't have many friends and basically nobody cared enough to be his enemy. However, he was actually fairly popular on the internet. Very few people knew what he looked like or knew anything about him. But there were a lot of fans of his work... At the very least, people paid him to draw or paint things.

'Of course, most of those things were Gay Furry Porn, but that's beside the point. I was still pretty fucking popular, alright?'

'Well, the straight audience for Furry Porn is smaller.'

'Exactly. So I had to do what I had to do... I'm not gay. Not that there's anything wrong with that.'

'You lost your virginity to an alien parasite that infected your right hand.'

'We still don't know whether this Pandemic is related to 'so-called' Aliens or not, okay?'

'Focus! Danger! Prey! Hunt! Survive!'

'Sorry...'

His brain was a little scrambled because of fear and anxiety. He was also freezing cold, but sweating and feeling like he needed to take off his clothes. Probably not a good sign. Jake shook his head and sighed.

'If I can smell her, then she can probably smell me, right?'

“*Cough~! Cough-cough~! Choo~!* Fuck my life!”

Jake pulled out the ax and covered his clean white mask. There was so much dust in the air that he couldn't help coughing and sneezing! Fortunately, while the masks didn't do much to stop tiny things like viruses in the air, at least they could block dust to a certain extent.

Cough~!

Aaaachoo~!

Cough-cough-cough~!

“Shh~!”

‘Shit, there’s more than one!’

This time Jake didn’t need Vora’s help, because he could easily hear those coughs, sneezes and other noises. Along with clattering and footsteps. He held the ax in his left hand and grabbed a metal hammer in the right. Not some dual-wielding nonsense though.

‘There you are!’

He threw the hammer in the dark hallway and it made a loud ‘thunk’ when the rubber handle hit flesh.

“Agh! Ah, my toe!”

“Shoot!”

“Shoot where?! *Cough-cough* I can’t see shit!”

Jake grabbed a random kitchen knife and threw it in the direction of the man who spoke last. He couldn’t really see anything, because it was dark as hell and their skin was also much darker than his pale ass. However, he was wearing a black hoodie, had a black glove on his left hand, black rubber boots, black sweatpants... Except for his face and the white mask over his nose/mouth, there really wasn’t much to see. The kitchen knife that flipped through the air was very reflective though and out of reflect, the tall man aimed and shot in the direction of its path!

Boom~!

“Aaaah~! Aaaah! Tommy, you asshole! Aaah, my leg!”

“My eye! Fuck! Aaah! Motherfucker!”

Boom! Boom~!

Jake grabbed another knife and rolled across the ground, avoiding the random gunshots and debris falling from the ceiling. From the silhouette, he figured it looked like a shotgun or rifle of some sort, but it was too dark to tell and he wasn’t an expert. The noise was deafening though. He almost couldn’t hear the woman screaming or the other few women coughing violently.

“Aah! You bitch!”

Then 'Tommy' fell down with a tall and wide woman on top of his back. Jake could hear that familiar 'crunching' noise and the tearing of flesh, cracking of bones. The gun rolled across the ground and was picked up by a skinny figure that also seemed somewhat feminine, but she didn't aim at Jake. Instead, she aimed at the giant woman and the dying man underneath, firing twice.

"Meat!" A guttural roar shook a few ceiling tiles loose and hurt Jake's ears even worse than the gunshots. He almost didn't hear the 'clicking' noises that indicated that the woman ran out of ammunition. In a panic, she used the butt of the gun to attack that bulging figure that had a few big chunks missing.

"No! No! Please! Aah!"

"Fuck! *Cough!* Run! Get help!" A raspy feminine voice came from a shorter figure, who pushed the smallest and quietest figure out of the way. Jake just hid in the corner instead of getting involved. After all, he could barely see anything and that smallest person looked like a literal child. He noticed that the raspy woman pulled out a pistol and started shooting a few rounds in his direction, before firing the rest of the clip into the head of that huge 'zombie'.

'By normal zombie logic, headshots should be able to easily and instantly kill anything. But unfortunately...'

Sure enough, even with most of her head completely destroyed, the blubbery woman pounced on the skinny girl. She tried to bite down on her throat, but she didn't have enough teeth left. In the end, a big, fat 'snake' sized worm erupted from a hole in her head and went straight into that open, screaming mouth. Then the fat woman lost her strength and collapsed on top of the skinny girl... That wasn't the end of the matter though. Because 'Tommy' got up off the ground and wobbled a bit. Then he breathed heavily and lunged on top of the pile of juicy, bloody meat. The skinny girl also started biting and chewing, devouring as much flesh and drinking all the blood that she could.

"Shit... Shit! Goddamn it! Why?! It's your fault! Da fuck are you?!" Instead of dealing with the zombies, the last remaining raspy-voiced woman started shooting randomly in Jake's direction. Even nearly hitting his shoulder once with a ricochet.

'Just a dude, trying not to die.'

Jake sighed and even started feeling guilty. But then again, he didn't know these people. He didn't know who they were or what they'd done before or after the world ended. Just that one of them was Tommy. And all of them were willing to shoot him without knowing anything about him either.

'Hunt! Eat! Devour! Breed! Kill! Kill! Kill!'

'And they probably have these voices in their heads too, huh? Even if they aren't mindless or irrational zombies... They, no, 'we', we're all fucking sick, right?'

Chapter 13:

You can't 'sneak' in rubber snow shoes on a tile floor. So Jake didn't try. He didn't think about it. He just acted on instinct. The moment he heard that familiar 'click-click-click' and the fumbling with another magazine, he charged over, ramming the 'shorter' woman in the chest with his shoulder. She was shorter, but she was still a few centimeters taller than his ridiculously short ass. Not only taller. Also heavier and sturdier. She still lost her balance though, tumbling across the floor that was covered with blood and debris.

"Sorry... I can't let you hurt Vora." Jake sighed as he jumped over and swung down his fire ax toward her face. Actually, it wasn't a fire ax. It was more like an old wood-cutting ax or hewing ax. Either way, it cut through her face, skull, into the brain and even digging down into the tile underneath. There was a lot of resistance of course, but the human head isn't that difficult to destroy when you have the proper tools and no reservations.

"Meat!" That roar came from behind his back, as a nearly 2 meter tall, skinny woman reached out toward his neck. However, Voracity reacted before him. Those hard and sharp fingers dug deep into that woman's abdomen. She was actually wearing a thin long-sleeved shirt, but that wasn't any more difficult to penetrate than her soft flesh and weak muscles. Jake turned around and used his gloved left hand to grab one of the dangerous 'claws' that was reaching toward his face, while the other one grabbed his hood, tearing it slightly.

Inside her chest cavity, Vora wasn't bothering with her 'heart' or other important organs. Instead, she focused on that slimy, slippery giant worm-like creature! It tried to escape, but there were tiny sharp barbs that emerged from those fingertips and even the palm. Otherwise with the nature of the shell-like material, he wouldn't be able to grasp a lot of things properly.

"Don't! Fuck! Don't eat it! Ew! Stop! Don't lick!"

Jake gagged and complained as he punched the woman in the throat, chest and face a few times, pulling his arm out of her abdomen, splattering blood and other nasty fluids everywhere. The meter long worm kept squirming violently and spewing out acidic mucus everywhere. A lot of it got on Jake's face and in his eyes!

"No! No! Shit! Vora! Stop!"

However, what he was more concerned about was the fact that his hand was crushing up that disgusting worm and those powerful tongues were pulling it inside! There was also a powerful suction involved as the base of his forearm bulged violently and painfully! Soon the entire worm was 'devoured' down into Vora's stomach area, but it wasn't dead yet. He could feel it tossing and turning inside of his arm, fighting violently to escape and spewing out all kinds of nasty-tasting juices.

“Oh my God! Vora! Spit it out! Please! Aagh! Shit! Fuck!”

However, Vora didn't listen to his persuasion. More importantly, even after having the giant parasite ripped from her abdomen, that tall and skinny woman wasn't dead yet! She glared at him with bloodshot eyes that were barely visible in the darkness. Then jumped up off the ground and bit down on his shoulder, but her teeth got stuck in his hoodie and leather jacket.

He clenched his strong and large right fist, punching her in the ribs several times. Then he used his left hand in the leather glove, shoved it into her open mouth and slammed her head down onto the ground.

“Oww! Fuck!”

It turned out to be a pretty bad decision. Because a piece of rusty rebar debris jutting out of the ground went straight through the back of her skull and stabbed into his palm. The leather did block some of the damage and it's not like his whole hand was penetrated, but it was still a pretty deep injury to his palm. By rusty metal, through a clearly 'zombified' brain and all that blood...

“Thank God this ain't some stupid ass zombie movie.”

Jake breathed out a sigh of relief when he pulled his hand back. The woman was still squirming and flailing her limbs around. But so much damage to the brain and spine, it didn't matter how resilient she was... She couldn't get up again. And he didn't have the luxury of putting her out of her misery.

Boom~!

“Shit!” Jake cursed as he felt something hot on his left calf. He couldn't barely 'feel' the injury, but judging from the sound and the flash of light in the distance, he could guess what happened pretty easily.

'Kill! Kill! Kill! Eat! Devour!'

“Kill! Eat! Devour! Breed! Wait, what the fuck!”

He shook his head and rolled across the bloody ground, trying to make it harder for the 'sniper' in the distance to hit him. Tommy also stopped eating the fat lady and started charging towards the dangerous enemy with the pistol in the distance. After reloading, the person fired ten more shots in quick succession, hitting the man in the chest, legs, even the face, but it didn't slow down his charge much.

“Aaah! No! Daddy! Please! Aah!”

And then she was pressed onto the ground by the beefy, giant man. The back of her skull was quickly cracked open on the tile and then he bit down onto her throat. However, he hesitated and growled, then looked back in Jake's direction.

His throat was seriously damaged earlier, so he couldn't speak or roar. He just grabbed the gun his 'daughter' dropped and rushed over toward Jake! He didn't shoot right away, but had enough rationality to wait until he was close enough to actually hit the short man.

"Fuck me! Why can't these 'zombies' be stupider?!"

Jake picked up the ax that he left behind earlier. His right arm was still bulging and the creature inside was squirming around less than before. His left hand was cut open and bleeding. It burned from the various juices, dirt and small pieces of metal or stone that got inside of his flesh. His left calf also started hurting pretty badly when he put pressure on it or stretched the muscle a bit more than normal.

'Live! Live! Live! Live!'

Vora's voice was deep and deafening, louder than his heartbeat that was pounding in his ears or the sound of footsteps. Then he saw the silhouette aim the gun at his face and he felt like his heart was going to explode. This was different from the slow, helpless, depressing and agonizing death in his room, all alone. His adrenaline made him feel excited and terrified.

'I won't die! I can't die! I have to protect Vora!'

Bang!

It felt like he was punched in the head really hard, his face burned, his eyes were blinded by the flash, his ears were deafened, his mind was dazed... But he still swung that ax upwards. The blade went in through the man's chin, chopping it in half to the sides, then reached the pallet of his mouth. That bone couldn't slow the blade down much. Even though he instinctively moved his head back to avoid it, his reactions were too slow. The edge of the ax dug deep into his head through the top of his mouth, severing his brain in half, but more importantly, killing the big, fat, juicy worm that was using his gray matter as a mattress.

"Aaaaaah! Fuck you! Die! Asshole! Die!"

Jake roared as he knocked the gun out of the man's hand, pulled the ax out of his torn open head and started swinging it violently. Ribs, legs, chest, neck, finally leaving it embedded in his slightly chubby torso. The smell of piss and shit was overwhelming everything else at that moment. Whether it was the fat woman, the skinny one, the short one, the tall man or that little girl... Even if their bodies were still twitching or moving, they could be considered effectively 'killed'. At the very least, their bowels and bladders no longer functioned. Some of them, like the

man and skinny woman, had their bowels torn apart and splayed out of their abdomens, so the stench was even worse.

“Fuck! Fuck! Shit! Fuck! Aaaagh, goddamn it!”

Chapter 14:

'Meat! Devour! Grow! Stronger! Heal! Eat! Meat! Live!'

'Live... Must live... Can't die now. Can't give up.'

"I won't give up... I'll live, I'll survive. Don't worry, Vora. It's just a flesh wound. Or two... Or three."

Jake was obviously in horrible, agonizing pain. Which wasn't really anything new or unusual. This was the state of his life. The theme of his life. The story of his life. He was used to being injured or sick. It wasn't enough to break him or make him give up. Killing these people in order to survive?

'Why did they have to have a kid?'

He found a light switch and turned it on. In the whole hallway, most of the lights were actually broken, so it was still pretty dim. When he looked at the 'crime scene' again, he saw the little girl's bloodshot eyes glaring at him. She was holding a shotgun and aiming in his direction.

"Don't move." She didn't pull the trigger immediately. Instead, she threatened, "If you move, I'll shoot."

Brown eyes with a hint of bloody red, light brown skin, a bald head like the others. And like Jake himself, she had some new black hair growing back. She had visible bruises on her face, arms, and the skinny legs under her short skirt. Saying she's a 'little girl' is a bit misleading. She was female, with small breasts, only about 150 cm tall, but in terms of appearance...

"How old are you?" Jake asked curiously, "I thought you were just a kid, but you're at least fourteen, right?"

"Old enough." The girl's voice was really childish and cute, but her expression was cold and ruthless. Almost emotionless. She glared at him and commanded, "Get on the ground. Take off your clothes."

"You're gonna rape me? Seriously?" Jake didn't want to get hit at close range by a shotgun, and his clothes were absolutely disgusting at the moment, so he didn't resist or hesitate. First he took off his glove, then unzipped his hoodie, throwing them away. After that was the leather jacket, which was also covered in various 'juices'. Finally, he had a sweater, a t-shirt, rubber boots, socks, sweatpants, jeans, he paused a bit, but eventually took off his boxers as well.

Without his clothes, his scrawny body was completely visible. Of course, because he was so

skinny, his abdominal muscles did look a lot more defined for once. Which was kind of nice. On the other hand, his left arm and legs were really bony. His left calf was bleeding slowly from the graze earlier. Thankfully the bullet didn't hit the bone or get stuck in the muscle, but it was still extremely painful.

"You broke my pets. So you'll have to replace them. But first we need to remove that 'thing'." When she approached closer and pointed the barrel at his shoulder, Jake reached out with his left hand.

Boom!

"Stop!" She pulled the trigger and shouted, but she missed. The buckshot only barely grazed his right shoulder and left a few small scratches along the shiny black shell. Jake kicked her in the chest while holding onto the barrel, then he quickly aimed the gun at her while she was on the ground.

'Kill her! Eat her!'

"I'm surprised you don't want me to 'breed' her, hahah~! Are you jealous, Vora?"

'Kill her! Eat her!'

"Your worm ain't a fucking person! Crazy bastard!" The young woman glared at him, "It's eating you! It's gonna take over your body and mind!"

"Vora ain't a 'worm'. She looks more like a cute little crab, right?" The naked man snickered and looked down at his carapace-covered arm with love...

"Disgusting. People like you are the reason why the world ended!"

Jake shook his head and looked at the girl who was getting up off the ground, "The world ending had nothing to do with me. I just stayed at him, minded my own fucking business. The same thing I've been doing for most of my life. Is it just me or is it really hot all of a sudden?"

"You have a fever. Or hypothermia. Probably both." She looked over at her 'pets' who were dead or dying, "If you aren't going to fuck me, then get the fuck out."

"Who were they to you?" Jake picked up the two pistols on the ground, along with a few magazines. Some were empty, while others still had a few rounds left. He also found some shells for the shotgun in the girl's pockets. She didn't react to him sticking his filthy, blood-soaked, injured left hand in her pocket.

"Mister Tommy was a teacher here. I went to school here as a kid. Miss Jannet was the school nurse. Danicka was a junkie. Danny had a kid that went to this school before. Tommy thought I

was his daughter, Jannet remembered me as a student, Danicka thought I was her sister, Danny also thought I was her daughter. The worms fuck with your brain.”

“I’m Jacob, or Jake.” The scrawny naked man put the guns and ammo into his cart, then took out some bottled water and soap. He didn’t care about wasting precious spring water, because it really wasn’t that precious. At least not yet. First he washed off his hands carefully. Then he washed off his face, hair, arms, chest, crotch, ass, thighs, finally reaching his lower legs. He ‘hissed’ in pain as he scrubbed off the injured left calf. Then he used peroxide to wash out his left palm and calf.

“Kelsey. You’re a virgin, hahaha~! How old are you, in your twenties? Fucking loser.”

“You’re trying to manipulate me.” Jake rolled his eyes at the girl who still had barely any expression on her face or in her blood-shot eyes, “I’m not a virgin anymore. I have Vora now... And I’m thirty, hahaha~! I thought that I’d die alone, but I’m not alone now.”

“No, you’re still alone. You’re just alone and batshit now.” She reached into his cart and started taking some food at random, plus a few bottles of water.

“Maybe, but at least I’ve got a reason to keep living. What about you?” Jake wrapped his leg and hand with some simple bandages. Then he started putting on new clothes. Fortunately he brought enough to go through them when necessary. He knew that something like this would happen sooner or later. So he was prepared to have to throw away a lot of ruined clothing. His rubber boots were still fine though.

“I don’t need a reason to live. I just do it. I’m gonna live forever.” The short girl smirked and looked over at the scrawny man that was drying himself off with a cold towel, then putting on a fresh set of clothes.

“These worms are changing us. Making us stronger. As long as we don’t go completely insane or give up...”

“I seriously don’t think Vora is a worm. She might be some kinda parasite, sure, but not a worm.” Jake sighed, “Where’s the nearest exit?”

“There are lots of exits, but I don’t know what ones aren’t blocked now. What happened earlier? It felt like an earthquake.”

“Tornado.” Jake responded casually, “Big ass tornado fucked the whole area up. I came in here to hide and you guys tried to kill me, so I fought back.”

“Whatever makes you feel better.” Kelsey grabbed the 9mm pistol, along with a full magazine, “I’m taking this. You can have the other two. Come on, this school ain’t empty. I don’t know if those ‘zombies’ froze to death yet. The rats and mice are proly still alive. I’ll find a new place

too, but I gotta pack my shit first. I'll wait till you're gone."

"I've literally never used a gun before in my life." Jake snickered and pulled the cart with his sore left hand. The right hand was holding the other pistol. It was also a 9mm, but the shape was different. A bit more boxy. It was a sidearm that was very popular among police officers. And gangsters for that matter.

"But I used to play with plastic bb-guns as a kid. Almost lost an eye-"

"I don't give a shit. I don't wanna know about your shitty life. Just hurry up and get the fuck out."

Chapter 15:

“Okay then.” Jake watched her turn a corner. While he kept going straight. But he was always careful to make sure she didn’t suddenly decide to shoot him in the back. However, halfway through the building, he reached an area that was collapsed, with flickering lights and some sparking wires dangling from the ceiling.

“Of course...”

‘This building is definitely on fire. Or maybe it’s just a place nearby and the smoke is drifting in from somewhere?’

‘Tired... Sleep... Heal.’

“We can’t sleep yet, Vora. We need to find a safe place first. And I’m not tired at all. I just woke up an hour ago for fuck’s sake.”

He was definitely injured and sore all over. Not just from the gunshot and palm. He also pulled a lot of muscles walking in the snow, pulling the heavy cart, running from the tornado, fighting with those ‘zombies’... He just recently survived a near-death illness. What he needs now is to rest and eat plenty of nutritious food.

‘Danger!’

“Grrr~!”

“Woof~!”

“Arf! Arf!”

“Shitballs.” Jake turned around and noticed that he was cornered by an entire pack of assorted doggies. Everything from Poodles to Rottweilers, even a huge Saint Bernard. He aimed the gun back and forth between them, but didn’t fire.

‘Is the safety on? Nope. Okay. Is there a bullet in the chamber? Uh, nope. Gotta fix that.’

Well, he understood the general use of a firearm, but he never actually held or used one before. So he was a little nervous. Also, there were six dogs and they weren’t that far away. He slowly backed up against the corner, pulling his black metal cart in front of his body...

Bang-bang-bang~!

He fired three rounds through the head and chest of the German Shepherd with blood-red eyes. Then he shot another round into the open mouth of the Rottweiler that was mid-air, trying to jump up and bite his face. His left elbow, covered by a brown leather jacket, knocked the dog away. Then he pistol-whipped the poodle that came afterwards. He stomped down on the Chihuahua that sneaked under the cart. Then shot another round into the back of a Black Lab.

'Fuck! They're really hard to kill!'

Even the German Shepherd was still alive and trying to lunge at him from the side. So he put the gun back into the cart and grabbed the metal bat instead. Swinging it from time to time. Aside from the Dachshund that was totally useless and the Chihuahua that was stomped on a few times, the others were still jumping at him and barking for another five minutes. Eventually, the Black Lab limped away and escaped with the Dachshund, while the others were either unconscious or dead and twitching.

"Damn it... Why is it so hard to stay clean in the Apocalypse?!"

Bang~!

"Fuck you Kelsey!"

"Just die already!" The short girl was hiding at the end of the hall, firing a few rounds from behind a corner. She knew he had a gun and ammo, so she didn't stick her head out. Just her pistol and her hand.

Bang! Jake used the shotgun for the first time and scattered some buckshot, which actually almost hit. Especially with so many ricocheting projectiles.

'Kill Her! Kill Ker! Devour! Grow!'

"Did you send these dogs after me?!"

"No shit, Dumbass!"

Bang-bang!

"Your aim sucks! Why don't you poke your head out for me?! Hahaha~!" Jake was aiming at her hand, but he didn't pull the trigger, because he didn't want to waste ammo. He was also hiding behind his cart, which was full of coolers of half-frozen food, actually frozen water bottles, clothing suitcases, et cetera. There were also other metal objects like his sword, bat, and hammers... In other words, it was a decent 'shield' against the 9mm rounds. Especially since she wasn't aiming properly.

"Why didn't you shoot me when I was fighting with the dogs earlier?!"

“Was waiting for you to let your guard down!” She didn’t keep shooting, because she only had so many bullets. Also, it was obvious that she wasn’t going to be able to hit him in this situation. However, she was still waiting. As long as he made some noise by moving his cart...

“The school’s on fire! Are you gonna stay here and burn with me?” Jake shouted while drinking a bottle of water slowly. He also chewed some cookies. He needed a ton of calories. Even though Vora was still digesting that big parasite and not very hungry, his skinny body was a clear indication that his metabolism was way too high for his own good.

“It’s just a fire nearby! It’s not in the school!”

“Hopefully!” He shouted back, “Don’t you need to piss or shit?! Don’t you have anything better to do?!”

“This is a Battle Royale! An old bastard like you wouldn’t understand!”

“Fuck off! I’m only thirty!” Jake glared at the corner in the distance, “The first official BR games came out in like 2015, but there were books, movies, mangas and anime about it forever ago! When I was your age... Well, I never really liked the genre, so I didn’t give a fuck back then or now!”

“Shut the fuck up! You killed most of my pets! I ain’t gonna let you leave here alive!”

“So you’ll let me leave here dead?! Hahaha~!”

“Shut up!”

“Fuck off!”

“Die!”

“Yeeeeeeeeeeep~!” Jake started making horrible high-pitched noises that even hurt his own ears, not to mention how annoying they were to the girl in the distance.

“Stop! Stop! Shit! Aaaaaaaah~!” Then she started doing the same... Well, bullets were precious. Screaming and shouting were basically free. If they could hurt the other person physically and mentally with stupid noises, then it was a pretty good deal.

“Woof~! Woof~!”

“Awooooo~!”

“Raaaaaah~!”

Chapter 16:

“What the fuck was that?!” Jake stopped making noise because the whole building shook violently with that last weird roar. Some ceiling tiles fell down, along with lights shattering and the power went out. In other words, the generators downstairs were shut off or destroyed!

“Shit! Next time I see you, I’m gonna kill you!” Kelsey shouted angrily and then he heard a lot of loud footsteps, seemingly leaving.

‘I bet she’s still there, waiting for me to let my guard down...’

‘Gone... Danger... Getting closer... Escape! Run! Run! Danger! Enemy!’

This was the third time that Voracity seemed so afraid. The first was a creepy old lady. The second was a tornado. Jake didn’t want to stick around and find out what the ‘enemy’ was this time if he could avoid it. So he took the cart with his left hand and held a pistol in the right. The shotgun was put back inside the upright cart.

His rubber boots made a lot of noise and so did the wheels, but he didn’t care. Because there were plenty of other noises out there. Jake walked quickly down the dark hallways, almost tripping or slipping more than once. He also passed a few classrooms where he could hear banging on the door, screaming, moaning, crying...

‘Is it real or in my head, Vora?’

‘Coming! Run! Faster!’

Jake’s heart was racing, but it’s basically been racing on and off for the past two hours. He felt like he was going to have a damn heart attack before he actually got killed by anything. So he tried to calm himself down. Unfortunately, he could calm himself down, but Vora was a nervous wreck.

“Roaaaaaah~!” That roar shook the whole school again! Dust and debris fell from the ceiling again. He had a mask on again, in order to avoid breathing in all that dust.

‘My fucking head...’

Jake’s scalp was still bleeding a bit from earlier when he was nearly shot in the face. His forehead also had some burns, which were pretty annoying. Even the scratches on the carapace on his shoulder were kind of itchy.

“Rooo~!”

“Arooo~!”

'Dafuck kinda animal is that, anyway?'

As he got closer to the nearest exit, the louder those 'roars' and 'growls' became. Considering that even a little kitty cat was able to use some kind of horrible sonic attack to shatter glass, he figured it might be a big dog like that Saint Bernard earlier. But it didn't sound quite right... It sounded very familiar. Like something he heard in a video game he played not long ago.

'No! No! Stop! Run! Stop!'

The closer he got to the door, the more Vora screamed in his mind. Finally, she took control of his body and made him turn around, leave the cart behind and rush into a nearby classroom! Following her advice, he also closed the door, locked it, then piled a bunch of desks and chairs in the way. He didn't stop there though. This classroom was close to the exit, so it obviously had windows. Which were shattered and broken for the most part. Letting the frigid air blow through, along with the smell of smoke from outside.

Boom~!

The door shook and cracked! Then it broke off the hinges directly and knocked most of those tables/chairs out of the way with ease!

"Rooah~!"

"Bullshit!" Jake cursed as he saw that huge bloodsoaked 'dog'. Both eyes were missing and there were a few horrible gunshot wounds on the head, snout, shoulders... However, that body was so wide that it couldn't even fit inside the doorway!

"Why the fucking fuck are there polar bears in Baltimore City?"

"Rooaaah!" Another low growl came from outside the window where Jake was about to escape. There was good news and bad news. Below the window was about a 2.8 meter drop to a concrete area that was below the street level. So the 3 meter tall Polar Bear could only shove its big, cute, fluffy white face into the broken window with its paws on the edges. The bad news is that he lost most of his supplies when Vora escaped, so now he had no water, food and didn't even have his shotgun anymore. Just a 9mm pistol with less than ten rounds.

Boom~!

"Rooaaah!" The blind bear rammed its shoulders into the door frame, causing cracks in the concrete wall!

"Calm down, Vora! Calm down! Don't always act on pure instinct! Otherwise, what's the difference between us and them?!"

Of course, bears are actually pretty smart under normal circumstances. But just like humans, these two Polar Bears were infected, likely hallucinating or having other mental issues. Hell, the one that was trying to break open the metal door frame and concrete wall was seriously injuring itself just to attack Jake! The other one was trying to use its short legs and powerful arms to jump up inside the window, even as the sharp glass was tearing its paws and neck apart!

Instead of running away or hiding like Vora wanted, he got closer instead. When the big bear's head was right in front of his face after ramming the wall once more, he reached out with his right hand, grabbed that gnarled snout and almost shoved the barrel of the 9mm into the hole that was already visible in its forehead. Then he pulled the trigger three times in a row. That big head jerked around and tried to send him flying, but he moved along with it.

'Fuck, fuck, fuck!'

Bang-bang-bang-bang~!

He fired four more times into the hole, completely scrambling what was left of the big bear's brain. Although it didn't die instantly like a generic movie zombie, it still went limp and whimpered helplessly. The central nervous system was damaged. That huge, chubby white body became a burden.

"Fuck!" Jake cursed again as he moved his face away. A huge blood-red worm emerged from the big hole in the bear's skull. Out of instinct, he reached out and grabbed it with his right hand. But it was way bigger than the last one! At least twice as long and three times as thick! The bigger problem is that it wasn't alone!

"Ow! Aah! Shit! Shit! Aaah!" His face was sprayed with acidic mucus, again. Thankfully, it wasn't strong enough to completely burn his flesh off in a few seconds. At most, it was just extremely irritating and potentially blinding if it got in his eyes.

"Roooaah!" The other bear had eyes and wasn't a brain-dead 'zombie', so it saw what happened to its mate and became enraged. Well, more than before. It kicked off the ground and used even more strength, struggling to pull itself inside the shattered window. The window sill cracked and the red bricks on the outside of the building were falling off. However, the bear faced the same situation as the one before. It was really just too 'thick' to fit through the window frame.

'Eat! Devour! Too Full! Can't Eat! Danger! Danger! Enemy!'

Poor Vora seemed totally confused and upset. She was holding a juicy, delicious worm, but she couldn't eat it...

"Don't worry about that! Just kill it now and you can eat it later!"

Although Jake really didn't want to 'eat' a giant blood-red parasite, he already did it once, so he wasn't completely opposed to doing it again. Assuming it wasn't too dangerous or disgusting. However, the two worms were really strong and violent! One of them was wrapping around his left leg, while the other was squirming in his right hand and smacking him in the chest, neck and face. Spraying slime everywhere.

'Store... Store for later...'

Vora seemed to be thinking... It took a while.

Chapter 17:

'Storage.'

"Aaaah~! Mmmmn~! Aaah~!"

Jake was in horrible, agonizing pain, which wasn't too surprising. After all, his face, scalp, left hand and leg were all pretty badly 'damaged'. However, Vora decided to take his advice and 'store' the massive worm for later. Obviously, even though the carapace-covered right arm was already way too large for the rest of his body. That wasn't the limit apparently.

The shell stretched and even cracked a bit, especially around the forearm. Becoming at least three or four times larger than the upper arm. Then that juicy worm was quickly sucked inside. Unlike the previous one, because this worm was bigger, it was crushed and mulched up much more in the process of being devoured. This was actually a good thing, because it couldn't squirm around and fight back inside of the 'stomach' area. Of course, it still felt like Jake's arm was going to explode from the pressure. A bunch of red juices that looked like chunky blood were spewed out of his palm, because in the end, the whole 2 meter long worm still couldn't fit.

The other parasite was still latched onto his dark-blue jeans, squeezing pretty tightly. It was like a boa constrictor, but not quite so strong or intelligent. Jake pulled a small steak knife out of his pocket with his left hand and started to slowly cut apart the thick worm meat. It squirmed and struggled, but in the end, it was still divided into a bunch of pieces and unable to do much.

Then he threw those pieces at the angry bear and most of them just bounced off its snout or head, falling on the snowy concrete behind it. When the bear was distracted by the delicious meat, Jake crawled over the chubby twitching body of its mate and reached his cart. Which thankfully, wasn't destroyed by the giant Polar Bear.

Jake didn't have time to worry about anything else. He used his sore leather-glove covered left hand to pull the cart and started limping down the hallway. His heart was racing and his right hand was really slippery with all the weird juices. No, his whole body was filthy again.

'Please, please, Kelsey, you crazy bitch, please don't be ambushing me! Please, you fucking asshole bear! Just keep eating your worm meat and forget about me!'

When he reached the exit, he looked over at the bear that was eating on the ground first and then scanned around quickly. Fortunately he didn't see anyone else. Just a lot of flipped over cars, debris, pieces of glass, decks, even the roof of the school was basically off on the left side. At least part of it was there, the other half just collapsed downward, along with half the four-story building.

Across the street was a raging inferno, with lots of black smoke rising up into the sky. Jake took off his mask and tossed it on the ground. Mainly because it was covered in worm juice. He turned to the right, then started pulling his cart down the sidewalk at a steady pace. Sometimes he would go out into the street in order to avoid random debris, like metal trash cans, lights, street signs, car doors, and frozen corpses. A lot of snow was missing or displaced by the tornado, but there was still plenty of snow and ice on the ground.

Bang!

'Shit!' Jake didn't know who was shooting or where, or whether he was even the target, but all he could do was crouch behind a flipped over bus. Waiting impatiently for something else to happen, while trying not to draw attention to himself. He also took the chance to wipe his face off with a towel before the burning worm juice could freeze. He brought quite a few towels and rags. Some were cleaner than others though. And in his current situation, he didn't bother wasting the 'clean' ones.

"Shut up! Shut up! Shut da fuck up! Aaaah! Get outta ma head! Get out! Aaaagh!"

Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang~!

"Rooooaaah~!"

Although Jake still couldn't see where that screaming crazy man was shooting from, he looked over and saw that one of the bullets actually managed to hit the Polar Bear's ass in the distance. It was about to enter the school to find its companion, but the pain caused it to change its mind. Instead, it started running down the icy, debris covered road at a rapid pace.

Bang-bang!

A few more bullets hit the bear with surprising accuracy. But it wasn't long until the bear was out of Jake's sight. The bus he hid behind was at the southern corner of the block, basically out into the intersection. He was originally going to just keep going south until he hit Eastern Avenue a few blocks south. Which was basically a major commercial street in the neighborhood. It also ran through most of the city. Hell, if he went west, he'd end up at the Aquarium in the Inner Harbor. If he went to the East far enough, there was a big Eastern Mall. Not Eastern as in Asian, but Eastern because it was in the East of the City. Obviously.

"Aaaah~! No! No! Shut up!"

"Rooaaah!"

Bang-bang-bang-bang~!

After the gunshots were finished and the man didn't make noise anymore, Jake peeked out from

behind the front of the overturned bus. Across the intersection, the bear was digging into the guts of a particularly tall and fat dark-skinned man. He was originally wearing a thick yellow coat, but it was torn to shreds. His head was laying on the ground a few meters away from his twitching and writhing body.

“Phew~!” Jake breathed out a sigh of relief. With the bear distracted and the crazy guy ‘dead’, he slowly and cautiously made a right turn along the sidewalk. Hiding behind the various cars and overturned debris. He was less worried about the bear and more concerned about being sniped from somewhere he couldn’t see.

It was relatively bright out, but the sky was still white. Like it might snow again at any moment. The wind was very weak though. That storm was probably gone. Jake hissed in pain as he looked over at his right forearm, which was throbbing and covered in bloody red cracks. His whole arm couldn’t fit in his leather jacket anymore, which wasn’t nearly as elastic as the sweater and hoodie sleeves. So he cut it off with a knife while he was taking a short break, about two blocks to the West of that overturned bus.

‘Well... I basically ended up where I started earlier.’

Jake looked to the left and saw that familiar street, where he lived for the past twelve years... Though he spent most of that time in the basement. Only after Covid started, when he got super sick for the first time in 2020, did he end up moving up to the second floor. However, after the tornado, the whole street was just as fucked as everywhere else.

Two more blocks and he would be near the eastern middle edge of the smaller part of Patterson Park. He could already see it from his current position. The snow was mostly blown away and even the dirt was dug up by the tornado that passed nearby.

‘What the fuck am I doing again?’

‘Shelter... Warmth... Rest... Heal...’

‘Yeah, I need to find a place to settle down for a while... Or I’m gonna seriously freeze to death. It’s a lot warmer today than yesterday though.’

The actual temperature was definitely above freezing now. Plus the cold wind was gone. The sun was kind of shining, though it was mostly blocked by thick white clouds. At least it was better than staying in the house like before.

‘I don’t need much. I’ll settle for a functional fireplace...’

As he walked down the middle of the street, avoiding the debris and vehicles, he ended up passing his house. He stopped for a moment, looked back at it... Then he continued onward.

'I can't go back there anymore.'

The building completely collapsed. The houses next to it weren't much better either. And the ones across the street that he always looked at out the window... Now they were on fire. His safe and comfortable world was gone forever.

'As long as I have you, Vora, everything will be fine.'

Chapter 18:

Boom~!

“Mmmn~! Fuck...”

Jake groaned in pain as he pulled the trigger of his black shotgun again. Blasting a large hole out of a big, beefy, headless man’s chest. The first shot obviously took most of his head off, but it just wasn’t enough. He looked at what was left of the twitching corpse, before sighing dramatically.

‘I won’t die. I won’t turn into a fucking zombie. Right, Vora?’

‘Live... Must live... Survive.’

In front of him was a very familiar Italian Restaurant, famous for its pizza. His father used to get his mother pizzas and salads from this place from time to time. On the other hand, Jake preferred the pizza and salad from the Greek place down Eastern Avenue... To the East. Of course, none of that really matters now. There was also a really nice sushi place right next to the Italian place.

“So much broken glass...”

The front of the Italian place was mostly big glass windows. Even the door was the same. So there really wasn’t anything stopping him from going inside. Unlike the sushi place, which was locked up tight, with a heavy duty metal door. Walking into the restaurant, he struggled to lift up the cart and carry it over the mess. The tires were scratched up enough as it is, so he had to be more careful.

‘Full... Need rest... Sleep... Heal... Grow... Breed.’

Vora whispered into his mind with a raspy but somewhat feminine voice. Jake smirked when he noticed that change.

“Is she becoming sexier or am I just going insane faster? Uh, well, I’ve drawn weirder shit... Much, much weirder shit. This is all still very tame, compared to some of those Hentai and Comics I’ve seen.”

‘A relationship should go both ways... Umm, I mean, it should be reciprocal. Those assholes are probably too afraid of these changes. So they fight with their parasites constantly. Or they just give in completely, because it’s easier. Balance... Balance is the most important. Right? Uh, probably.’

“It’s like... Ugh... Ow... Like how we’re filled with all sorts of microorganisms all the time. A lot of them might be harmful, but if you get rid of all of them, you’d be even more fucked. A lot of our cravings and instincts are driven by what the microbes in our bodies ‘need’, which might not even be good for us at all... So we also have to be careful... I have to be careful. You need to be careful too, Vora. We’re in this together.”

‘Cold... Need warmth... Wasteful.’

Well, Voracity was still more focused on physical health than mental health. Obviously she didn’t understand that Jake was talking to himself in order to keep himself awake and sane. His head was injured, he lost quite a bit of blood from his leg, plus the burns on his face and other assorted injuries. He was exhausted from walking, running, fighting, et cetera.

“Okay, okay... I think I know what to do...”

He pulled his cart into the back of the restaurant and closed the door behind him. Everything back here in the kitchen area was still relatively intact and clean. That was very important. He looked around and smirked, heading over to the back door. Then he took off his bloody jacket, hoodie, sweater, t-shirt, basically everything. Even the boots were finally thrown away. They honestly didn’t even fit his feet in the first place.

After tossing everything in the dumpster and closing it up again, he went back inside. Locked the door. Then barricaded it with some heavy appliances like a big freezer. He did the same to the other door. He was legitimately afraid that the Polar Bear might come hunting him down. Though he also had to worry about a whole host of other potential enemies and threats.

Finally, he headed up some stairs to the second floor, where there was an actual living area for the owners. A lot of the things were obviously missing though. Probably not stolen, more like they packed up and left. He ignored all that and carried a big jug of water he found downstairs, over to the small bathroom. He got in the relatively clean tub and started taking a ‘shower’. He used as little water as possible and way more soap than probably necessary.

‘I definitely have hypothermia, right?’

He was shivering and felt ‘cold’, but he still felt ‘hot’ sometimes. It alternated frequently. Of course, hot flashes were a pretty obvious symptom of Graves Disease, which he had. At least, he had it before being infected by Voracity and whatever else was inside his skinny body.

It took about an hour to completely get rid of all the filth. Then he started up a fire. They had a fireplace upstairs and a wood stove for cooking pizza in the kitchen. There was also a coal grill. He didn’t know about the grill or the fireplace originally, but it made things much better than he expected. At least, they had plenty of wood and coal to burn, so he didn’t need to improvise.

“Ow... Ow... Owww... Fuck... Pffffmmmn...”

Then he sat next to the fireplace, still naked, using some medical supplies he found in the bathroom to ‘treat’ his injuries. Of course, he originally thought about something unrealistic like suturing his own wounds. He quickly gave up on that and just cleaned them with peroxide, alcohol and eventually bandaging them. For the head, he just used some large adhesive bandages, rather than wasting a bunch of white gauze by wrapping his head up.

His face though, there really wasn’t that much he could do... His forehead, nose, cheeks, chin and neck were all injured to varying extents. It looked red and swollen for the most part. His forehead was the worst, because it was originally burned by a muzzle flash, then acid, then more acid. Before that, he still had a lot of scars from when he was covered in boils and cysts the other day.

He tried to use some burn-relief balm, but it just made him feel itchy, slimy and gross. He pulled some nasty small red worms out of the wound in his left leg, then used more peroxide and alcohol, before wrapping it up. Hoping for the best. His left palm was also pretty gnarly looking.

“I wonder if I can still get tetanus? How does that work anyway? Well, whatever.”

There was a big soft gray felt sofa in the living room, near the fireplace, which he moved closer and was going to use as a bed. He wore a long black ‘t-shirt’ which was practically a dress. No boxers, nothing else. Then he laid down and tried to sleep...

“I’m not tired, Vora. Talk to me.”

‘Sleep...’

“I can’t...”

‘Sleep!’

“I-”

Well, it turns out that he actually ‘can’ sleep. Especially when Voracity directly took control over his body and forced him into a state of unconsciousness. However, he still needed to wake up a couple hours later to stoke the fire and add some more wood. He also pissed for a while, feeling bloated and gassy, but not quite to the point where he could take a shit yet. So he went back to the sofa and sat down.

Feeling a bit restless and extremely thirsty, he went downstairs and found some sports in the storage area. There were literally dozens of boxes of different popular drinks. Which was nice. Everything from canned iced tea and coffee to bottled iced tea and coffee... Okay, they also had fruit juices and stuff like that.

A few hours later, Jake woke up shivering and cringing. With a bladder that was about to burst and bowels that weren't much better. Of course he also had an erection, but there wasn't much he could do about that at the moment. Both his hands were practically crippled. Even whipping his ass and other simple things was a painful chore.

'I won't die... I have to live. We have to survive. Right, Vora?'

'Live... Survive... Grow.'

Chapter 19:

"I'm not supposed to be here..."

Jake looked around at the familiar and unfamiliar environment anxiously. The short, hairy, bearded man with long, wavy black hair was sitting at a desk, in a classroom, with a weird combination of other 'kids' all around him. The teacher standing at the front of the class was a 3 meter tall Polar Bear with no eyes. The other students were his friends and classmates over the years when he went to school. Sometimes they would change from a child to an adult, or even transform into some sort of tentacle monster.

"Fuck you! Just die!" He looked over and saw a familiar face. Those cold brown eyes tinted red and a black barrel in his face. She shot him in the face and chest a bunch of times, but all that came out were plastic BBs that just stung a bit.

"I can't die! Vora needs me! Vora, where are you?!"

Jake started panicking as he knocked the gun out of Kelsey's hand, grabbed her with his big, sharp claws and threw her across the room like a ragdoll. Then he roared and started tearing all the other panicking students/tentacles to pieces. Finally he wrestled with the giant Polar Bear teacher and pressed her to the ground, violently ravaging her furry ass-

"Wait, wait, what the fuck? Where am I?"

Jake shivered in the cold as he looked through the glass at the two Polar Bears mating in the enclosure. He looked up and saw a blurry face smiling down at him, holding his hand like he was a small child. Then he saw a short woman, but her face was also blurred.

"It's called sex, Jacob. When a male and a female wanna have kids, they gotta mate." He heard his mother's familiar voice, but he couldn't see her face... He couldn't see the faces of anyone. Just those two bears who were glaring over at him with glowing red eyes. They seemed to be showing off. Switching from doggy-style to missionary and even using some more complicated positions... At least, for Polar Bears, they were relatively complicated.

Then Jake felt his pale right hand being pulled in a different direction. He looked over and saw a fluffy brown rabbit girl with glowing pink eyes. She wasn't a human woman with rabbit ears, but an actual humanoid rabbit. A so-called 'Furry'. One that he drew many times and in many ways.

"Bunny?"

"Hehe~!"

She giggled and didn't say anything, just pulled him along through the Zoo. This was a place he went to as a kid. The Baltimore Zoo. Where they did have Polar Bears, Lions, Tigers, Giraffes and a bunch of other random assorted animals. Many of them probably died from the cold weather and lack of care already, but the ones that survived probably went downtown to the southeast. Traveling through the whole city was difficult for an average human, but for a Polar Bear, it was nothing. Whether it was the humans or the random meat that was left behind in people's houses, the hungry bears likely scavenged quite a lot of food before coming to the school...

"Everything's gonna be fine, Jake. I promise. Just, don't give up. Keep fighting. You'll make it. I believe in you."

As he followed behind her sexy furry ass, with a fluffy pink ball-like tail, he didn't seem to notice that she was leading him down into a murky green creek. When her touch disappeared, he finally noticed that he was underwater. Surrounded by glowing yellow eyes.

'Bunny! No, Vora, where are you?! Vora! Help!'

He struggled to swim, but it felt like slimy snakes were wrapping around his legs and pulling him down deeper. He reached out with his left hand toward the dimming light above. Thousands of tiny crabs were crawling all over his skin and ripping apart his flesh. By the time he reached the bottom, he was covered in a thick black carapace. He crawled on the dark, murky ocean floor with two strong back legs, five pairs of pincers and two smaller arms curled up against his chest. He could see with two big compound eyes on his large black shell, but he also had several other eyes that made his vision even more confusing.

'Eat... Sleep... Breed... Reproduce... Grow... Evolve... Survive.'

Jake whispered to himself as he nibbled on some random dead fish meat he found. He was effectively a giant horseshoe crab. His long spike-like tail was suddenly grabbed by something and his whole body was yanked up out of the water from the depths of the ocean!

Then he found himself sitting in his room again. Staring at the computer screen which was displaying a painting. There was a gigantic, beautiful winged serpent, a Quetzalcoatl of sorts, wrestling with a massive black centipede in the sky. He looked out the window and saw three hot-pink serpentine eyes staring down at him like big Moons in the dark night.

Cough-cough~!

The bearded man started coughing violently and then began vomiting out hundreds of tiny brown cockroaches. His arms puffed up with boils, which burst and transformed into white flies that flew out the window, turning into a huge blizzard that covered the sky with clouds. Eventually he felt weightless and realized that he was floating in the dark void.

“Fuck...” Jake opened his eyes and breathed heavily, coughing into his right palm a few times. Before his face was licked by slimy pink tongues.

“Vora... Good morning.”

Looking down at that familiar blackened carapace-covered hand, he smiled brightly. His other teeth were only just sharp, pointy nubs at the moment, but his four canines were actually starting to look a little long and sharp. As for the burns on his face, they were already healed a few days ago. Only the wound on his head, left palm and left calf were still pretty sore. They were healing though.

‘Meat! Meat! Meat!’

“Don’t worry, I’ll cook you something soon. I gotta piss first.”

Jake snickered and stood up off the couch. He was wearing the same long black t-shirt/dress/tunic thing he wore a few days ago. It was a bit extravagant to wash clothes in his current situation. Even washing off his own body was done carefully and selectively. His shirt used to be down to his knees, but now... It reached his lower thighs.

“Am I really growing taller?”

He looked at his face in the bathroom mirror. The adhesive bandage was no longer on his forehead, because it was unnecessary. His scalp was also covered in thick but short black hair. Just like his beard. Jake looked down at his left arm and flexed his bicep in the mirror, next to his head. It wasn’t just a matter of getting taller, his skinny frame was also getting a lot thicker and more muscular. At least, it was much closer to where he was before he got sick and withered away.

‘How many calories do I need to eat every day though?’

Aside from that big, thick, juicy worm that Vora devoured, there was another one she ate right before that. The amount of ‘nutrients’ contained in those two worms should have been enough to feed him for a month. Over the past few days, his right forearm didn’t shrink as it digested that meat. Instead, it grew even larger. Not just the forearm, the hand, upper arm and shoulder all expanded. Making him feel even more lopsided than before.

‘Vora is spreading...’

He smiled and gently caressed the blackened shell that could be seen growing on the right side of his neck. Jake pulled the neckline down and looked at his collar bone, right chest and even down toward the lower ribs. It was a very thin carapace, but it was getting there. His back was the same. Especially the shoulder blade. It was still very smooth though. There weren’t any dangerous spikes or barbs. At least not yet.

'Vora is probably afraid to hurt me.'

'Hungry! Eat meat! Grow stronger! Survive!'

Chapter 20:

Jake stopped checking himself out in the mirror and went downstairs to the kitchen. It was much colder down here, but still well above freezing. So he was focusing on eating all the stuff that needed to be frozen in the first few days. Now he had a bunch of non-frozen things left. Stuff that could be refrigerated was his next target.

“Should I try to make a pizza?”

He was a little worried, not that he would fail and waste some ingredients, but that the smell would attract hungry, crazy survivors. Then he threw away that concern and started trying to make a pizza for the first time in twenty years. The last time he made a pizza from scratch was when his Italian grandmother was still alive and not too far gone from dementia.

‘Meat! Meat! Mmmn, cheese...’

“Don’t eat it yet, Vora. I’m trying to cook for us.”

Jake chuckled as the two tongues in his right palm kept sticking out to taste everything. It was kind of adorable. Of course, it wasn’t so cute when he was trying to piss or wipe his ass. Or just washing his hands with soap. Fortunately, Vora has ‘learned’ not to do those kinds of self-destructive behaviors by now. Especially when it comes to harmful chemicals or things that generally don’t taste very good.

Once he finished putting a bit more sauce and cheese on the dough, he placed the whole thing on a flat ‘shovel’ like instrument that was made of silver metal. Then he shoved it into what was effectively a stone fireplace, with the wood burning at the far side. He let the pizza sit there on the metal for a while and moved it around occasionally, trying to make sure it was heated evenly.

Although he never made a pizza like that before, he’s had some experience already with cooking other random things. For example, frying fish, baking potatoes, heating up a bowl of soup. It’s all about the same.

“Hmmm, this... Ain’t that bad.”

In the end, he felt like something was wrong, but really didn’t understand where he screwed up. It still looked like a perfectly normal cheese pizza in the end. He used tomato sauce for spaghetti, which had sugar, salt and other spices, so it should have been fine.

“Maybe I was supposed to use olive oil? But where do I put it? At what step?”

In the internet age, when you have a problem, just look it up online. Unfortunately, he didn't even have electricity now, much less the internet.

"Well, it still tasted better than the pizza these guys usually serve. I don't know why my mother used to like this place so much... *Sniffle* Ugh... Fuck."

Jake continued eating the pizza while sniffing and coughing. He held the long, hot slice of pizza up to his mouth and struggled to chew with only four long canines, plus a bunch of tiny tips of growing teeth. Vora just crushed her pizza up with her fingers and sucked everything into the gaping pink slit, using those long tongues to crush and taste everything.

'Food... Good... Eat... Happy.'

"Sorry, Vora, I know, I should be happy. I'm alive, I have plenty of food to eat and a beautiful wife to accompany me, hahaha~! I'll be fine, we'll be fine. Everything is great. *Sniffle* Don't worry, I can feel your love flooding my brain."

He really did feel a lot better by the time the two of them finished eating. Then, of course, Vora showed her 'love' in the most obvious way she knew how. Jake laid on the couch and watched the flickering flames. With his throbbing cock being gently massaged by those two powerful tongues within that thick carapace-covered wrist.

'Sorry, I can't help thinking about other girls.'

'Irrelevant.'

"It's not irrelevant..." Jake sighed as he enjoyed the amazing sensations, "It's just... I'm an artist. Ya know? I can't help thinking about my own creations sometimes. Bunny... Well, obviously the sexy rabbit-girl is only my imagination. And besides, Bunny is married and I have no idea what she looks like in reality. At least Bunny makes sense though. Why am I thinking about that crazy bitch Kelsey? Maybe she got eaten by a bear... Or maybe she's hiding nearby, waiting for me to let my guard down?"

'Breed. Reproduce. Grow. Survive. Eat. Sleep. Continue life.'

"I guess I'm just overthinking, like always." He smiled wryly and then closed his eyes, enjoying himself to the fullest without feeling too much guilt or shame about his thoughts. But he still couldn't help but imagine 'Vora'.

'It's a shame these people don't have any art supplies in their house. I'd love to draw you.'

Even if he couldn't draw his imagination out, he could still 'see' her... Well, in his mind, Vora ended up being something like a giant scorpion-girl. With the lower body of a huge scorpion and the upper body of a sexy humanoid woman. Those small breasts were covered by black

carapace, just like the rest of her body. Only her mouth was soft, with pink lips and no teeth. Unfortunately, she didn't have any eyes or hair. As if she was wearing a black helmet covering the top half of her head. Even the nose was missing.

"No, that's not right. Hmmm, Vora wouldn't be so inefficient."

The image of Voracity was scrambled again and again, but he just couldn't imagine the 'perfect' version of his anthropomorphised mutated right hand. In the end, he just opened his eyes and watched what was actually happening instead. Moving his arm up and down slowly at first, then more rapidly, until he finally pressed down all the way again.

His mind went blank for a moment and it felt like there was a flash of light.

"Wait, what the fuck?!" He looked up at the ceiling and noticed that the light flickered on! Then it stayed on, and it wasn't just in the living room either. He got up and looked out the window and saw across the alley behind the restaurant. Directly behind the store, there was a T-shaped alley, where residential buildings or basically townhouses, were located on both sides. Then there was a big church at the end of the street on the left side.

At least half of them had their lights turned on now! Especially the stone church, which also had a belltower at the top that started ringing loudly...

Woooooo~!

Then he looked to the southwest and squinted. He could hear a horn from a train or a boat, he wasn't really sure. There were also some other familiar sounds again. Obviously gunshots, lots of gunshots. It'd been pretty quiet for a while, but now all of a sudden the noises were everywhere in the city. Especially in the downtown area to the Southwest. Essentially, near the Inner Harbor. Only a kilometer or two away.

Boom~!

Chuf-chuf-chuf~!

"Helicopters?"

Jake looked over at the fireball rising into the sky a few blocks to the south. His window shook and the whole building rumbled like an earthquake! He also saw those searchlights shining down on the city from above, so he quickly found the lightswitch and turned the lights off everywhere he could. He even had to go out into the storefront to turn off the lights.

'Danger! Hunters! Hide!'

"I know, Sweetie. Don't worry. I won't let them hurt you."

Chapter 21:

“This is an emergency announcement to all those who are still within the Baltimore City, Baltimore County Quarantine Zone. Please remain at home or in a shelter that you consider safe. This is not the end of the world, it’s just another pandemic. This parasitic infection can be treated with antiparasitic medications if you have access to them. A vaccine has also been developed and produced for anyone who still hasn’t contracted the parasitic infection yet. It’s very important to remain calm and keep yourselves safe. Baltimore City is currently under a curfew. Anyone found outside will be arrested. Stay home, call for help. This pandemic will be over soon.”

Boom~!

Batatatata~!

Weeeeeee~!

“Aaaaaah~! Aaaaaah~!”

“Roaaaaah~!”

“No~! No! Get off me! Aaah!”

Jake turned the knob on the radio a few times, but all the channels were basically the same thing. There were TVs, but they didn’t work without the internet, which wasn’t available at the moment. So all he could work with was an old black radio he took from home and somehow managed to preserve along the way. Of course, all those other noises were just the normal sounds from across the city in the middle of the night.

‘Run? Hide? Run? Hide? Danger... Danger!’

“Okay, Baby, you gotta stop worrying so much. There’s nothing we can do except wait.”

He used his trembling left hand to hold his spasming right. Vora could see, hear and smell everything that he could, but she couldn’t comprehend the situation very well. No, even the average non-infected human would panic when they were trapped in a war zone.

“Even if antiparasitic drugs work, that’s definitely only for the very early stages. If they catch us, we’ll either be killed directly or captured for research. Shit... We can’t just stay here and wait, but we also can’t run around outside like idiots. They’ve got drones, planes and helicopters. They’re probably gonna move through the city with armored vehicles too... It’ll take them forever to search all the houses. But they might have a way to speed things up. Infrared cameras and

shit like that.”

‘Speaking of heat... Since the power is back on, is the plumbing working too?’

He went over to the sink in the bathroom and turned the knob on the left side. The water actually did come out! And it wasn’t brown or murky. Just normal tap water. He felt the temperature, which was ice cold at first, but then scalding hot soon afterwards. It’s been a couple hours since the power came back on, so the hot water heater in the basement had time to start working properly.

‘Yes! Hehe~!’

‘Danger!’

“I know there’s danger, but this might be our last chance to have a hot shower. Ever. So I’m gonna take it.”

‘Pointless.’

“It’s not pointless. It’ll let me relax and calm down a bit. Maybe it’ll help you too?”

He took off his dirty shirt and tossed it aside. Then he got into the bathtub and turned the knobs. On the left was the hot water, which he turned all the way up, while the right knob was only turned up a little bit. Of course, this shower wasn’t as old and decrepit as the one in his house. The knobs didn’t seem like they’d break or fall off. And the faucet for the tub down below, didn’t constantly waste a lot of water while the showerhead was running. The pressure was also a lot harder and slightly painful as a result. Especially against his sore scalp.

‘Warmth...’

“Yeah, warmth... We should go to Florida. Just live out in the fucking swamp. Just the two of us. Where it’s always nice and warm.”

‘Prey?’

“Endless prey. All kinds of scary animals that could kill us, hahah~!”

‘Hunt them! Eat them!’

“Yeah... We could hunt, fish, whatever. The only problem is that Florida is a thousand miles away. We barely made it four blocks in a circle and almost died a bunch of times already.”

‘Live... Grow... Breed... Evolve... Survive.’

Booom~!

The whole building shook violently again. The lights on the ceiling of the bathroom flickered as well, but didn't go out. There weren't any windows in the bathroom, so Jake couldn't see what was happening outside, but he could hear it pretty clearly. The current situation was that his 'house' could be shelled, hit by a missile or just strafed by heavy machine guns at any moment. Even a few random bullets fired up at an angle from a few kilometers away could end up going through the roof and hitting him in the shower.

"See, relaxing. Totally relaxing. I'm so fucking relaxed."

'Danger. Must hide... Escape... Dig! Down! Escape down!'

"Escape to where? The sewers? Well, it's not impossible, but it's also extremely dangerous. And disgusting."

Jake frowned, even if it wasn't the typical idea of a waste sewer, the storm drains or storm sewers for avoiding flooding can basically be accessed by moving a manhole. The problem is that it's still very dirty and dangerous. Especially now that there are mutant rats and maybe even other people that had the same idea. The temperature is higher than before and some of the snow melted, but it wasn't enough to flood the drains.

"A big issue is that I have a hard enough time navigating the city aboveground. Underground, we'd get lost pretty easily."

'On the other hand, there's literally a manhole right across the street. More than one. They're basically everywhere... There might even be one on this side of the street. I can't remember.'

"Fuck me... Why does it seem like every time I clean myself off, I get dirty a few minutes later?"

'Run! Run! Run! Escape! Hide! Run!'

Voracity forced him to leave the shower without even turning the water off, because noises started coming from the roof. It sounded like rain or hail, but it was actually pieces of debris from an explosion nearby.

Jake ran over to his suitcase full of clothes and breathed a long sigh. He put on a white t-shirt, black boxers, gray hoodie and black sweatpants. Then he wore some white socks and put on his black/white sneakers that felt a little tighter than he remembered. After all, he's started a second 'growth spurt' now. It probably won't be long before he can't fit in any of his old clothes anyway. Especially if he transforms into some sort of crustacean.

"Not much left... But I can find more later."

He checked the magazine of his black pistol and slid it back into the rubbery grip. Then he put the safety on and shoved the gun in his right pants pocket. The left pocket was filled with some food. The hoodie was filled with some bottled water. Before he left, he made sure to eat one last meal. Basically stuffing both Vora and his own stomach. He held the pump-action shotgun in his hands, which only had a few buckshot shells left and also grabbed a brown slightly rusty crowbar.

“No matter how we escape, we can’t bring too much with us.”

‘Escape! Live! Survive!’

“Yeah... We’re gonna make it. I promise.”

Chapter 22:

“Haah-haaah-haaah~!”

Jake was pushing his body to the limit as he ran down Eastern Avenue! Not necessarily the sidewalk or the street, because there were cars and debris everywhere. Downed street lights, signs, pieces of buildings, craters... He ran around various obstacles and tried to avoid touching anything. Because there were pieces of sharp metal, rotten corpses, squirming piles of red worms, big brown cockroaches the size of rats, giant rats the size of dogs, along with plenty of ‘zombies’.

‘Fuck, fuck, fuck, shit!’

‘Run! Run! Run!’

Vora was also terrified. This wasn’t a game. He couldn’t just fight and kill his way through thousands of zombies or suddenly learn parkour. No, even if he could use parkour, the rooftops weren’t strong enough to withstand his 80 kg body running and jumping on them. Plus, he’d be a bigger target on the rooftops than on the streets, mixed in with all the other chaotic nightmare fuel.

“Roaaah!”

“Shit! Aaagh~!”

“No~! No~! Nooo~!”

As he passed a phone store, he looked over and saw a man being torn apart by a big beefy Polar Bear on the sidewalk. The bear looked up at him with those small red eyes and blood drenching most of its white fur, but it ignored everything else and continued devouring his screaming meal. The woman who was screaming ‘no’ was actually over two meters tall, covered in thick muscles and completely naked. There were big, thick, juicy red worms squirming half-way out of her two biggest holes, while a third one emerged from her mouth. Then she started chasing after Jake with blood leaking from her crimson eyes. He could see a bunch of horrible scars all over her body.

Bang!

“Raaah~!”

Badadadada~!

“Die, die, die!”

In front of Jake, a man with a submachine gun started shooting in his direction. A few of the bullets almost hit him, but he was quickly drowned in giant brown cockroaches. Jake jumped up and landed on the other side, while the crazy worm-girl behind him tripped and started getting torn apart by roaches as well.

However, losing one naked worm-girl wasn't enough to make him happy. Because Jake saw a big barbed wire fence blocking off the whole road at the intersection ahead! He quickly climbed into the back of a bus, swung his crowbar and smashed open a woman's face as she tried to bite him. Then he used the barrel of the shotgun as a bat, swatting away a dog-sized rat. Which crashed through the half-broken window on the side and landed on the face of a lucky zombie, who had an easy meal.

Jake quickly reached the front exit of the bus and climbed out of the broken doors, then started running again on the other side of the fence! The bus actually crashed through a jewelry store on the corner, which was collapsed, so it became a shortcut to the other side.

He looked up and saw a helicopter in the sky behind the library across the street. A moment later, the whole building exploded and he felt a lot of heat, along with pieces of debris flying across his body. Fortunately it was on his right side and Vora was the one that got hit by a few sharp pieces of glass and metal. Although it hurt, they didn't even flinch. Because if they stopped, it'd be over.

Boom~!

Jake felt like his heart was going to explode as a shop on his left suddenly burst into flames next! There was no obvious reason for the explosion, but considering the circumstances, it might just be gas or an oil tank. A lot of people have big tanks of oil for heating in their houses, though it's usually in the basement and relatively well protected. Fires were basically everywhere and he was breathing in a ton of smoke the whole time.

'Breathe! Breathe! Breathe!'

“*Cough~! Cough~!* Hah~! Hah~! Hah~!”

He ignored the discomfort and the pain, running up the roof of a car, then onto a van that was rammed into the back of it, finally landing on a piece of concrete that was lifted up into the air. His weight caused it to shift and he almost fell, but somehow managed to maintain his forward momentum with Vora's help. He quickly avoided a crowd of at least fifty people who were gathered together on the street, running in his direction. All of them had blood-red eyes, foaming or bleeding mouths, some had squirming crimson worms sticking out of holes in their flesh.

“Mommy~! Mommy, help~! Help me, Mommy~!”

As he passed by an alley, he saw a pale-skinned little girl straddling on top of a middle-aged dark-skinned woman's chest and using a hammer to smash her skull open. Then she bent down and slurped up the blood, brains and little worms inside with an ecstatic expression on her chubby face.

'Shit! I almost made the mistake of giving a fuck!'

'Run! Run! Run!'

'I get it! I know! Fuck! I can't run any faster! This is a marathon, not a sprint!'

Jake passed the drug store, which was in ruins, then kept following the road that curved to the left. Reached an underpass and dodged a car that suddenly fell down from above! On the other side, he was attacked by a cat, which made him lose his crowbar!

Bang!

Boom! Boom! Boom!

"Mmmmn~! Fuck!"

Jake groaned in pain as he fired three rounds from the shotgun in a row. The woman who was shooting down at him from the next overpass was wailing in pain and agony. But the good thing is that she dropped her gun down over the side, so she couldn't shoot him in the back unless she had another gun, plus some new hands. He tossed the shotgun away and started running even more seriously!

Voracity was covered in scratches and bleeding the same red blood as the rest of Jake's body. They were all hooked up to the same circulatory system after all. The sleeves of the hoodie and shit on the right side were tattered. But at least it wasn't burning.

The third overpass had a train riding over it and making a bunch of noise. There was a big concrete divider between the two sides, which he had to climb over, because the next overpass collapsed on the left side. The road curved a bit to the right, then evened out. In this area, he saw a bunch of cars and zombies, but it wasn't quite as chaotic as before. At the very least, this area wasn't being bombarded by missiles and artillery. There also weren't many helicopters hovering overhead.

After crossing an overpass, this time he was the one above the underpass, he saw a snow-covered lawn on the left side. Behind it was a large clinic, which was related to one of the most famous hospitals in the world: Toms Watkins. In particular, there was Toms Watkins University, a big tan and red building with a lot of glass windows, literally right next to the clinic. There were some huge parking lots scattered around. Behind the college was a comprehensive medical

center, with a hospital attached. But farther to the East were even more buildings, like a place specifically for burns, a place for heart stuff, et cetera.

“Fuck.”

Chapter 23:

From what Jake knew, the Parasitic Pandemic started in other countries first, but when it came into the United States, two places were hit the fastest and the worst. Manhattan and Baltimore. New York is because, well, it's New York. But Baltimore is primarily due to the fact that they have Toms Watkins.

Those first patients were actually sent over to Toms Watkins from New York City... Of course, there's more than one Toms Watkins in Baltimore. The one that was hit most severely was to the Northwest of Patterson Park. This University Campus area wasn't as bad, but it was still one of the first heavily quarantined areas. Even now, Jake could see the barbed wire fences, the armored personnel vehicles and even a few tanks. However, there were also crashed helicopters, big craters and thousands of corpses or pieces of meat buried under the snow.

Of course, now that things have warmed up a bit, the zombies, rats, birds and other creatures started digging through killing fields. Making this area particularly 'lively'. The good news is that most of those bloodthirsty worm-infested creatures were too busy to notice the panting, exhausted man, who was on the verge of passing out or vomiting, or both. He did just eat a giant meal before he started running... Probably not the best choice he ever made.

On his right side was Greek Town. Though it included the area on the other side of the overpass he just crossed. There were a lot of restaurants along the street. Beyond that were lots of very expensive townhouses, mostly due to their proximity to the hospital. Now they were in ruins or infested with 'zombies'.

It turns out that those infected humans and animals didn't get frozen to death after all. Once the temperature rose high enough, they defrosted and were revived. Of course, their brains were extremely damaged and basically all of those creatures seemed more like real zombies in terms of behavior.

"If it only infected humans, then I'd understand a quarantine... But since it also affects birds and all sorts of other animals, it's completely impossible to block this... So what the fuck are those assholes doing?"

Jake frowned, looking back at the downtown area. He actually ran more than two kilometers earlier... He was honestly amazed. And also incredibly sore, completely exhausted and felt like he was going to die. But it was still pretty impressive. Especially since it wasn't just a simple run, but a life or death battle the whole way.

He didn't sit down to rest, but just kept walking slowly along the right sidewalk, staying away from the left side of the street as much as possible. He saw a large pond area that was still frozen over from before. Then there was a big building, the police department. It was mostly red

brick, with a bunch of white stone on the face, behind some big pillars. Which were red brick on the bottom and white stone at the time.

'Kinda looks like prison bars if you think about it. I wonder if that was intentional?'

The fire department was after that. On the other hand, his side of the street had some popular fast food places. Some of which still looked relatively intact. However, he didn't want to stay in this area for long. So he couldn't stop. He had to keep himself moving.

'Dundalk.' He saw the sign and turned toward the right at an angle. If everything before now was the 'city', then Dundalk was basically the suburbs. Individual houses, separated by yards and fences. There are also a lot of big cemeteries.

'Fortunately this ain't a magical apocalypse.'

Instead of running, he just kept to the side of the road. There were a lot of cars, trucks and vans that were stuck in traffic before the end. Most of them had the doors open or the windows broken. Whether it was entering or leaving the city, the people who escaped early, did it months ago. Those who were dumb enough to try to escape after shit hit the fan weren't so lucky. Stuck in traffic, it was normal to have road rage even without a parasite in your brain telling you to kill and eat everyone else.

A lot of people had guns too. So there were many bullet holes, some vehicles looked like they were torched, while others crashed into buildings or other cars on the sides of the road. Not that much different from the inner city in a lot of ways. Many buildings had also burned down or been destroyed by explosions. He noticed the head of a passenger jet just laying across the road ahead, with pieces of wings and the tail spread across a huge area, including the big 2-way overpass ahead. He was really nervous when walking under it, because it seriously looked like it might collapse at any moment. Especially with the ground shaking from all the explosions in the distance.

Another hundred meters and he saw a relatively intact small grocery store on the right. He pulled out his pistol from his pocket and switched off the safety, then he pulled the slide back and loaded a round in the chamber. He already lost everything else in his pockets. Basically all his supplies were gone. So he needed to go 'shopping'. Of course, he could also theoretically find these things inside a random house. Which might be safer...

'But I'm here now and Vora is hungry again.'

'Meat!'

'Yeah, meat, hehe~!'

Jake walked across the parking lot carefully. There weren't any cars or cover, so he felt a little

nervous walking over toward the broken glass double-doors. The storefront was gray with a yellow awning, though that awning was still covered in white snow and ice. Even if it was much warmer now, it wasn't hot enough to melt all the snow in a few days. And the temperatures at night were still below freezing.

There was no power in this part of town, so the inside of the store was still extremely cold. Of course, meat wouldn't be kept out in the open anyway, so even if the power was on and there was any kind of heat, it might still be good. Just kept in fridges and freezers. All the display areas where they show lunch meat had broken glass everywhere. There were bullet holes and claw marks all over the place. The shelves were knocked over. Sealed, packaged items like potato chips and beef jerky were still everywhere though. The problem with jerky is that Jake barely has any functional teeth at the moment and Vora has none.

He ignored the junk scattered on the floor and headed to the storage room in the back. However, he looked down behind the cash register and raised an eyebrow. There was a lot of blood, worms and maggots on the floor. Along with bones and some brown fingers. A bunch of small cockroaches scattered around when he walked closer.

"Nice." He reached underneath the counter and pulled out a silver revolver. It was a .357 magnum, a fairly large and heavy gun, which fit pretty well in Voracity's oversized hand. More importantly, he found a whole damn box of .357 magnum hollow point rounds. A total of about 50, though a few were already missing. The gun was also pretty dirty, with some spent casings inside the cylinder.

Reality wasn't a video game. A firearm's power primarily relies on the ammunition, while the accuracy of said firearm is more contingent on the length of the barrel and other factors in the gun itself. If a gun has no bullets, then it's not as useful or valuable as a long, pointy stick. Jake also looked around in the back where they sliced the deli meat and cut up other pieces of meat, because he wanted some new knives. Although it might not be very realistic to use them as throwing weapons, there are always situations where a knife is very important.

"Grrr~!"

"Of course."

'Prey!'

"Yeah... Prey."

Jake was in a lot of pain and exhausted, but his adrenaline was still pumping pretty steadily. He put the box of ammo in his left sweatpant pocket, then held a gun in each hand as he kicked open the wooden door leading to the back of the shop. It was already slightly opened with the handle broken off.

“Raao!”

“What the fuck is that?!”

Chapter 24:

“Roaaaoh~!”

Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang-bang~!

Orange fur on the back, black stripes, white fur on parts of the fluffy face and the underbelly... Blood red eyes. It was a huge Bengal Tiger. Jake didn't hesitate for a moment to unload all six bullets from the revolver and five bullets from the 9mm into that poor kitty-cat's pretty face. A lot of the raw meat in the back of the shop had already been devoured by this big girl. Which made it look morbidly obese, with huge red worms squirming around out of its mouth, nostrils, ears, anus and vagina.

What was a bit more disturbing was the fact that it had clearly given birth! There were dozens of 'cute' tiger cubs scattered around the room, with scarlet eyes and orange/black fur. The white areas were mostly dyed red from blood though.

“Mew~!”

“Rao~!”

“Mao~!”

“Roaaah~!”

“Nope-nope-nope~! Fuck this shit!”

Jake turned around and ran away! Those cute 'kittens' were chasing after him though and even that big fat mommy tigress with half its face torn apart was also unsteadily giving chase. He obviously couldn't outrun a full-grown, fully healthy tiger. But the little newborn kittens were different.

'Stop! Fight! Kill! Devour! Reproduce! Evolve!'

“I can't do it! I can't kill babies! Even if they're baby zombie tigers!”

'Irrelevant!'

“I have rules, okay?! Everyone has to have a bottom line! I can't kill kids! Especially not cute kittens!”

'Prey! Eat! Devour! Grow! Survive!'

“Yes, yes, they’re prey, but I just can’t do it! *Cough~! Cough~!* Haah-haah-haah-fuck me~!”

‘My legs~! My ribs~! Shit~!’

He jumped on the hood of a sports car, then onto a van, running across the street and reaching the residential area of the suburbs. The relatively large red brick houses directly on the street side area were a bit too damaged, so he ignored them. Those tigers were surprisingly persistent. They chased him for at least four blocks before they ran into a small group of formerly human zombies. In fact, Jake recognized one of them as a female ‘Streamer’ named...

‘Laquisha Goldybottom?’

He looked at the sexy naked Asian girl with huge breasts and an even larger ass. But was a little disturbed when he noticed that she was pregnant. Not only was she pregnant, but she was with ten other naked women who were also on the verge of giving birth or carrying around their newborn babies. Their bodies were frost-bitten in some areas and their skin was blueish. They immediately started using their zombie babies as projectiles to attack the larger tigress, while they pounced on the small tiger cubs themselves. Ripping, tearing, biting and devouring.

‘Laquisha definitely wasn’t pregnant a few weeks ago. In other words... Does this parasite make creatures reproduce more quickly and easily?’

‘Breed! Grow! Conquer!’

‘Yes, yes, let’s conquer Dundalk.’

Jake wanted to laugh, but he was struggling to breathe as he ran. There were nice houses on both sides of the street. They had their own individual yards and were usually surrounded by fences. Some of them even had pools in the backyard, while others had trees, gardens, et cetera. Though it was still winter, so most of that was covered up and he couldn’t see it from the street anyway. He was just remembering things he saw on the satellite maps he looked at in the past.

Although he almost never left the house in recent years, there was a time, long, long ago, when he was much more active. He’s been to Dundalk before. He even had some friends here. That Streamer girl was someone he went to High School with... Not necessarily a friend, but he knew her name was actually Samantha Goldbloom. She used to get picked on a lot, so the two of them had that in common. When she was a Freshman, they made fun of her for being a virgin, fat, having acne, et cetera. The next year, they made fun of her for being a slut, being anorexic, stealing boyfriends and having a three-way. Of course, she also got famous on a Streaming Site because she was a big anti-bullying advocate and also, she was extremely attractive. She also did Cam Shows and made a fortune on another popular site for ‘Simps’.

'People are assholes.'

'Meat!'

'People aren't food.'

'Food! Eat! Grow! Breed! Evolve! Survive!'

"You're so cute."

Jake snickered to himself and took a right turn, walking down the snowy sidewalk. The streets in this area were basically empty. Only a few cars, vans or trucks were still parked on the side of the road. As if the world hadn't ended.

'I have a good feeling about... That one.'

'Prey...'

"Can you be more specific?"

'Weak Meat.'

"Yes, Meat, very descriptive."

He sighed dramatically and opened the gate of the white picket fence. Then he closed and locked it behind him. It was a small red brick house, with a slanted black roof. The yard was relatively small as well, with not much snow left on the dead grass. Most of it was already melted. There were some tall evergreen trees on the sides of the house and even more of them in the backyard.

Jake looked up at the tree on his left and frowned, "Is that the 'Meat'?"

'Yes... More Prey... Inside.'

There were dozens of fluffy brown and gray squirrels chattering on the tree. Along with lots of little finches. The brown squirrels had blood-red eyes, while the gray squirrels had pitch-black or yellowish eyes. The two groups were fighting, killing and eating each other. The finches were also separated into several groups and fighting a war.

'Black and red...'

'Danger!'

As Jake was about to walk up the white steps to reach the black front door, he suddenly ducked

down. Then he laid down directly on the concrete patio. It was the middle of the night and there weren't any lights on in the houses nearby. However, a big spotlight suddenly swept over the area from the sky! Accompanied by the typical loud 'whirring' of helicopter blades...

Chapter 25:

Jake hid his revolver under his chest, since it was reflective and might attract attention. He was overthinking things though, because the search light only passed by and didn't stay in one place for very long. The helicopter was also way too high in the air to see him properly. Even if they saw him, it was just some random zombie or corpse. There were dozens of much more interesting things for them to investigate. There were also lots of smaller drones flying around.

Those small drones were black and difficult to see in the darkness. They could zoom around and investigate all sorts of things from a fairly close distance, without making much sound. He still noticed them though. Several drones hovered and circled around the 'battlefield' between the naked pregnant women and the tiger cubs, plus the rabid babies that were clawing and biting on the back of that roaring fat tigress. The tigress had its eyes and most of its face destroyed, so there were big red worms squirming around inside. Spraying acidic mucus at the light-blue skinned babies on its back. But there wasn't much of an influence.

Eventually it rolled around and crushed some of them under its weight. Flattening them or bursting the infants like balloons. Of course, those balloons were filled with a mixture of blood and tiny red worms. Those tiger cubs weren't doing much better than the babies though. Against the naked women, they were easily crushed and torn apart at first. Eventually the big tigress came over and used her claws to disembowel 'Laquisha', causing the fetus in her belly to be ripped to shreds. Getting devoured by some of the surviving tiger cubs, since the mother no longer had a functional mouth to eat anything with... It was basically just a few pieces of flesh and bone dangling around.

The women who still had babies left, decided to take their offspring and flee. While the tiger cubs who survived, were eating the crippled or dying women, the babies, even their own brethren. It was very vicious and brutal, but Jake was too busy freezing his cheek off on the ground to care about any of them.

'Come on! Fuck off already! Why are you still here?!'

The helicopter was already gone, but those drones didn't leave. They just flew around and observed everything quietly. Jake had a hard time even seeing them. The ground was mostly white, the sky was filled with white clouds, except for the brilliant red colors that stood out, those football sized black drones were also a bit visible because of the contrast.

Nearly half an hour later, the tigers went back to their lair and the naked freezing zombie girls were long gone, but at least one drone didn't leave. It was slowly scanning the ground, not with some visible lasers. Just observing the behavior of those worms in the cold environment. Some of them dug into the snow. Some died. Some squirmed around, looking for new hosts. There were mostly red ones, but also a few skinnier black thread-like worms that were mixed in... That

was just what could be seen with the naked eye. On a microscopic level, there were likely all sorts of other strange viruses, bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms that might take part in the 'Mutagenic Plague'.

'No-no-no-no! Fuck! Go away!'

'Danger! Danger! Run! Escape!'

There were no visible weapons on that drone, but it represented a clear and present threat. Because who knows whether a cruise missile would be launched towards wherever it was facing? It could also summon a helicopter or even ground forces, potentially. No matter what, Jake didn't want to be noticed. Unfortunately, the war of the squirrels drew the attention of several other drones.

Boom~!

Badadadada~!

Badadada~!

Pop~!

Jake's heart started racing again because he heard gunshots getting closer! Then he saw a group of people in black body armor, with sleek helmets covering their heads. They moved together in a small group of five. Two had assault rifles, one was using a shotgun, two had submachine guns with suppressors that made them 'slightly' quieter, while the final person was significantly taller and bulkier than the others. Holding a riot shield in their left hand and a huge light machine gun in the other... The group of five likely had night vision or infra-red sensors in their helmets, because they didn't use flashlights or any special scopes. But they were able to see and eliminate any zombies or other larger creatures that approached them.

'Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!'

'Run! Run! Run!'

Vora almost couldn't control herself and wanted to escape immediately. However, Jake held her back with all his mental strength. At the moment, he was just like a random 'corpse' on the ground. With blood and gore on his body. Even some worms squirming around on the back of his hoodie. There were burn marks, little holes from debris, he was just laying there on his stomach, with his head facing the street. Afraid to move or even breathe.

"This the target?" A soft feminine voice was picked up in his ears and he noticed that the group was staring right at him for a few seconds.

"Nope." A deep, masculine voice came from one of the shorter 'soldiers'.

"Should we eliminate it?" The tallest one spoke in a raspy, slightly feminine tone, but with a relatively deep voice.

"Don't waste ammo." The short man shook his head, "Keep moving."

"Always so soft-hearted." One of the taller women with an assault rifle giggled and aimed her rifle at Jake's head! She was standing in front of the white gate and it really only took a moment for a rifle bullet to travel that distance if she pulled the trigger...

Dah!

Jake winced and cringed in pain, but he still didn't move or make a sound. The bullet practically tore off his left ear and ripped apart the back of his hoodie.

"Hahahaha~! Not bad! Are you sure we shouldn't capture this guy?"

"He's not the target." The short man held the shotgun in one hand and grabbed the crazy woman's wrist, pulling her away. While a few of the others were either laughing or sighing. The five of them made a right turn at the end of the street, but Jake still didn't move. He waited until the gunshots and chatting were far enough away, before he pushed himself off the freezing cold ground.

"Mmmmn... Fucking asshole... Ugh..."

Jake groaned in pain and broke the window, easily sneaking into the front of the house. The place was a mess, but not because of the apocalypse. The people who lived here before were just slobs. There were big rats and roaches fighting to the death inside. But he ignored them. Searching for some bandages, alcohol, et cetera. He quickly cleaned off the mostly missing left ear and wrapped his head with gauze to a certain extent.

'Hide! Rest! Recover! Revenge!'

"There's nowhere to hide. There's no time to rest or recover. And we'll probably never see those bastards again, so forget about revenge. We need to escape. I was way too optimistic before."

Jake grimaced in pain and discomfort, he was extremely exhausted, dizzy, nauseous, his head was throbbing, his ears were still ringing and he felt like the muscles in his legs were torn apart. He rummaged through the filthy house and managed to find a .308 hunting rifle. It even had a fancy night-vision scope attached already. Although he couldn't find a pistol, he did see some 9mm FMJ rounds. These people probably had a lot more guns and ammo, but they probably took them along when they left. There were some cans of soup and jars of jam/sauce. However, most of the bags of cookies, potato chips or anything raw was already eaten by the mice, rats

and roaches.

“I originally thought that it’s too late. There’s no possible way they can contain this outbreak. They can stop humans, but they can’t stop birds, mice, roaches, all kinds of other creatures. Even the water is likely infected even worse than the land. How could they possibly stop this?”

‘Life, unstoppable.’

“Exactly, life is unstoppable, hahaha~! But even if they can’t stop it, it doesn't mean that they won’t try!”

‘How?’

“How else?” Jake shrugged, “Maybe they’ll come up with some perfect way to nuke the fuck out of Baltimore City and County. Not one singular large nuke, but make a bunch of smaller ones, spread out over a much larger area. They might not even use nukes. They might use chemicals or poisons. Like crop dusting. The only reason they haven’t done it yet is probably because they’re looking for something. Probably not some patient zero cliché or whatever, but there might be people with special mutations like us... Or maybe some scientists or other important assholes are still in the area. Who knows? The point is that we don’t have a lot of time.”

‘Escape! Live! Survive!’

“We will. Vora... We’re gonna make it.”

Chapter 26:

Bang!

Jake left the house and shot a hole through the drone that was hovering in the air, observing him. It wobbled and bit before falling down helplessly. He was afraid, terrified, in horrible pain and probably in shock, but he was also way calmer than before. Probably because he took a bunch of ibuprofen and drank enough caffeine to give himself a heart attack before he was infected by Voracity. Now drinking those energy drinks actually calmed him down instead of making him more hyper.

With a white mask over his mouth and nose, he also had a big white bandage around his head/ear, so there was no point trying to be stealthy anymore. At least not like before. He had a black backpack filled with cans of food, bottles of water and boxes of ammo. The hunting rifle was on a strap and hanging on his bulky right shoulder. The 9mm was in his left hand and the .357 was in his right. Although he looked like a crazy monster murder hobo, at least he felt a lot more confident than before.

“Hmmm, they came from this way.”

He walked down the road to the south a bit, then took a turn to the left. Walking down another small street, which had a few car crashes here and there, but it really wasn't that badly blocked. At least not like Dundalk Avenue, which was one of the main roads to get in and out of the city. As he was walking along, he quickly came across an area that had huge graveyards on both sides of the road. Of course, from his perspective, it was just a tall red brick wall on the left and a short chain link fence on the right.

Eventually he passed the two entrances to the cemeteries. On the left, there was a gigantic painted-red brick archway that was at least five or six meters thick. On the right, it was just a flimsy chain link fence gate... Either way, he could see a lot of trees, some that were evergreens, while most were just barren, with branches that were covered in snow or dangling icicles.

Eventually he passed the cemeteries and ducked down behind a small red brick wall. There was a road on the left side, where he saw those five 'soldiers' standing in front of a few red-brick 2-story townhouses in the distance. He couldn't hear what they were saying or even see what they were doing for the most part. He waited a while and saw some drones flying around nearby. A couple helicopters also hovered in the area, shining down searchlights.

Pah~!

There was a gunshot from one of the windows and an extremely large muzzle-flash, then one of

the five soldiers was directly decapitated! Or more specifically, their entire head was torn apart and destroyed, along with their likely bulletproof helmet...

“Fuck!”

“Bastards! I’ll kill you!”

“Jessie!”

There were three loud screams and then the light machine gun in that giant’s right hand started firing rapidly into the window where the gunshot came from. It didn’t take long before the window, the brick wall and even the roof behind it were ripped apart by over a hundred rounds of belt-fed 5.56mm rounds.

‘Shit...’

While they were distracted and the helicopters hadn’t flashed their search lights in his direction yet, Jake quickly ran down the street as ‘quietly’ as he could. Fortunately, the sound of footsteps is miniscule compared to choppers, machine guns and all that screaming or roaring. He avoided a group of male and female ‘zombies’ with dark-brown skin that were having an orgy in the middle of the road. Taking a right turn and passing some duplexes, taking a left turn and stepping on a half-frozen leg of a small child, almost slipping. He ran a little further and kicked a big gray squirrel that jumped down from a tree, trying to climb up his right leg.

‘Meat!’

“No meat! We can’t eat everything!”

‘Can.’

“How?!”

‘Eat!’

“Shush! We need to keep moving! We’re running out of time! I can feel it! Can’t you?!”

‘Danger?’

‘Like... Impending doom.’

He reached another intersection. There were red stop signs on his left and right, with a bunch of power lines stretching across from his left to the right side on the corner ahead. He looked over at the red townhouses on the right and then at a bunch of trees, with white townhouses on the left. He eventually just kept going straight instead of thinking too hard.

There was another small graveyard on the right. Well, it wasn't actually that small. It only covered less than a block where he was running along, but it actually stretched for a few blocks deep... Not that it really mattered. He passed by there without any incident.

"Haah-haaah-haah~! Fuck me..." Jake had to lean up against a wooden fence up ahead to catch his breath. He didn't keep running anymore, because it was kind of pointless. At least, he didn't see any zombies, monsters or soldiers nearby. Those helicopters in the sky would sweep by from time to time, but their search lights didn't scan everywhere. It was pretty easy to hide as long as he was careful. The drones were a bit harder to notice, but they also weren't too interested in him in particular.

'Move! Danger! Run! Escape! Survive!'

"If I die of exhaustion, this whole escape thing is kinda counterproductive..."

Just when he said that, Jake noticed something. There was an individual house up ahead, to the left, which had a garage and a nice black car in the driveway. He didn't care about that though. He was more interested in the blue mountain bike that was just laying on the ground, next to some tattered clothing and blood stains in the snow.

"Yes!"

Jake grinned, revealing his four freakishly long canines. He put his two pistols in the basket on the front of the bike and struggled to ride it unsteadily, then picked up speed and carefully avoided the potholes as much as possible.

'Danger! Danger! Stop! Slow down!'

'Don't worry, Vora! I haven't ridden a bike in like...'

He swerved and almost crashed into a downed power line in the middle of the two-lane road, "Well, I can't remember the last time I rode a bike, hahaha~! But it'll be fine, I promise!"

'Shit, it's really hard to ride a bike uphill, on an icy street... In the middle of the night... During a motherfucking zombie apocalypse!'

It only took a few seconds before he was passed some stores on the left and individual houses on the right. Then there were all individual houses on the left and right for a while... He noticed some eyes looking down at him from some dimly lit windows. People had generators in this area and were hiding at home. There were also some less fortunate people who were being besieged by small packs of crazy naked men and women.

'Why are they all naked? Aren't they cold?'

'Sick.'

'Yeah, maybe... Hypothermia? The irrational mind of the zombie is better than the brainless ones in the movies, but realistically, even a normal person might go crazy and take their clothes off when they're about to freeze to death.'

'Breeding.'

'That too... They might have been fucking or had their clothes torn off. Then they just never put them back on again, because they're not humans anymore. They're something else.'

Chapter 27:

After passing a short and wide white church on the right, Jake finally reached the end of the uphill battle... Now it was all downhill from there. Literally, not metaphorically. In fact, there didn't seem to be any soldiers, helicopters or drones anymore. So his biggest danger would be crashing and dying like an idiot. Of course, there were still zombies here and there, but they had other things distracting them most of the time. Like the ones having sex, giving birth, hunting other creatures, that were also having sex or fighting. The humans who were still alive, were either hiding and cowering in fear, going literally insane, or just having sex. Whether that sex was pleasant or consensual is a mystery, though the occasional screams and cries would allow Jake to imagine all sorts of horrible scenarios that he could do nothing about.

From what he encountered along the way, whether it was men or women, they were all predators. From children to the elderly, they were fully capable of killing, eating and/or raping each other. Even little baby zombies would fight tooth and nail with a full-grown tiger without crying out in fear or pain as they're crushed to death.

'Sorry... But I need to live. I need to protect Vora... And I don't even know if you're real!'

'Danger! Danger! Slow down! Jacob!'

Voracity was so terrified that she actually learned and spoke Jake's name for the first time! They were picking up speed and wobbling a lot. Especially since she was panicking and twitching uncontrollably, Jake's legs were also really weak and his left wrist was probably sprained. Eventually they started turning slowly to the right, along with the downhill road that was also turning in that direction.

There was a massive graveyard on the right side of them and the left side was more individual houses, with a lot of trees in their front yards. Jake also noticed a soccer goal in the middle of a large snowy field on the left side, but he also saw a group of red-eyed deer that were charging out of the woods, being chased by a pack of big, beefy wild dogs. He eventually passed the entrance to the graveyard on the right and almost crashed into a tall, dark-skinned man who was standing aimlessly in the middle of the street! Well, he wasn't completely aimless. He had a backpack on his back, a thick gray coat and carried a shotgun in his hands. Fortunately, at the last moment, he rolled over to the side and dodged the almost out of control biker.

"Motherfucking asshole!"

Of course, even though he cursed, he wasn't stupid enough to waste any ammo on the guy who was almost gone. Jake also didn't care what happened to that random stranger either. He passed yet another church, this time to his left, while that enormous graveyard was almost at the end...

'Oh my God, how fucking huge is this goddamn cemetery?!'

He was still going downhill at a very fast pace, but even after passing several more blocks and reaching the point where the road started turning left... That cemetery turned left along with the road! He passed a bunch of shops on the left side, then decent sized individual houses again, then some duplexes, finally he left the graveyard zone. Of course, it wasn't necessarily the same graveyard, but more likely, just several graveyards all combined into the same area. Some of them were individually fenced off after all.

'Oh God! Oh shit! Fuck, fuck-fuck, no!'

'No! No! Stop! Stop! Slow! Stop!'

Jake and Vora started freaking out even worse when they saw the huge intersection ahead! There were a bunch of buses and semi-trucks with gigantic shipping crates all over the place! Some of them crashed or stuck into each other. It wasn't just the street either. The whole area was completely cluttered with vehicles piled up!

Thankfully though, they actually had a little while to slow down naturally as the road evened out a bit. Also, there were patches of snow and other junk on the street, so as long as it didn't cause him to flip, it would all be able to slow the bike down.

Pop!

"Fuck!" Jake flipped over on the side and skidded across the ice, tumbling along with his bike, until he hit a big truck tire and stopped. Well, he was actually pretty lucky the whole way there. But he finally ran out of luck and popped one of the tires. There were so many nails, sharp pieces of ice and various metal debris that basically anything could have done it. It's also possible that the wheels were faulty in the first place, because they were likely left out in the freezing cold for a long time. Then he was abusing them so badly all of a sudden.

"Are you okay, Vora?"

'Uninjured.'

"That's good."

He sighed and went over to pick up his pistols. His rifle and backpack were still on his back. It should be noted that Jake has only traveled about 2 kilometers since he reached Dundalk. Including the 2 kilometers before that, his total journey since he left his house has only been about 5 kilometers rounding up.

'If they're gonna nuke us, they would do it everywhere simultaneously. For example, some in

the middle, but most of the bombs would need to be detonated around the infected area to achieve the maximum influence. But if it's chemical weapons or even some sort of biological weapon that can fight against the plague, I have no idea what might happen. All I know is that we need to escape as far as possible.'

Jake breathed heavily as he spoke to Vora in his mind. Even though they could clearly read each other's thoughts to a certain extent, Vora didn't seem to react to things unless Jake thought about them much more deeply. On the other hand, Vora's thoughts were much simpler. Usually only a few words or just using actions directly.

'Food. Eat. Recover. Grow. Continue.'

Although his body felt like it was going to break, Jake was afraid to stop moving at this point. He passed the various wrecked cars, buses and trucks, ignoring the moaning, groaning 'zombies' that appeared from time to time. Most of them were trapped inside vehicles or directly hiding in shipping crates. Explosions, gunshots and sirens echoed in the air from far away in the downtown area. Some of those explosions were so powerful that he could even look back and see fireballs in the sky. It almost looked like a low-key version of a mushroom cloud. Those were just conventional explosives or even simple natural gas explosions. A nuclear bomb is much, much more terrifying.

'Let's see if there's anything to eat over there. We could gather some more supplies too. I need to piss and shit.'

On the left side was a large parking lot, mostly empty, and lots of shops. It was basically a shopping center. Of course, nothing as fancy as a 'mall' type situation. He walked along under the long awning, with a lot of concrete support pillars on his left, while the glass windows on his right were mostly trashed already. The doors were also often made of glass, so they were broken down. Frozen blood could be found everywhere. Along with bones and half-eaten corpses.

Jake held the two guns and entered a generic 'dollar store', which actually barely had anything that was only a dollar anymore. Then again, everything was 'free' now. Looting was something that Jake honestly never thought he'd do, but... So was killing.

Chapter 28:

“Looks like somebody already looted this place. Probably more than one person. But they didn’t take everything.”

He looked around and picked out the items that would be useful. One of those items was actually a gray shopping cart that had functional wheels. He put a bunch of random things inside. Peanut butter was a great source of calories and protein. There were quite a few plastic jars of different brands available. Relatively cheap kitchen knives. He used to be addicted to chewing gum, but now it’s a bit meaningless to bother with something like that. Instead, candy was actually an important staple for him to keep his body and mind going.

Not just chocolate bars, but basically any kind of sugary candy was very useful. Preferably ones that didn’t need to be chewed. Voracity also liked candy and she didn’t have to worry about cavities.

‘White Fluff!’

“Marshmallows.”

‘Twisties!’

“Licorice.”

‘Gummies!’

“Well, that’s basically what they are, hahaha~! You’re learning, good job, Vora. I’m proud of you. Seriously. You’re so young and already so smart.”

‘We are one!’

“Yeah, together forever.” Jake nodded with a serious expression on his face, “I really do love you, Vora.”

‘Love...’

“Do you understand love?”

‘Explain.’

“Yeah...” He sighed, “I might be a thirty year old virgin, but it’s not like I’ve never felt ‘love’ before. I’ve loved a lot of people. Just not sexually. It’s just... Without sex, without that kinda

relationship, it never really lasts. Then again, people can be married for decades and get a divorce. It doesn't mean that they never loved each other though. I love my parents, all my relatives really, I love... Bunny. But I love you the most, Vora."

'We are one!'

"Yeah, we're one. Body and mind, body and soul. That's love, ain't it?" Jake snickered, "Or maybe the reason it's called love is because we're stuck together and we actually enjoy it."

'Eat. Fight. Breed. Grow. Evolve. Live. Together... Love.'

"Hehe~! Pretty much."

As the two of them were chatting, they also started eating random packaged candies and tiny cakes. Jake washed his hands off with soapy cold water first, which disgusted poor Voracity, but she's learned to avoid 'drinking' the soapy water by now. Then he lit a campfire and roasted some marshmallows on the floor of the dollar store. There was plenty of ventilation because of the broken windows and he was far enough inside the store to avoid drawing attention because of the light.

"Roasting marshmallows over an open flame... Hahaha~! Never thought I'd do something like this."

'Sugar. Heat. Life.'

"Yes, very philosophical, hah~!"

In the end, there was no way that they could sleep or heal from their wounds, but they did manage to relieve a lot of tension. They spent a few hours eating various things. Jake was able to relieve his bowels. He changed into some new clothes he found in a clothing shop he found nearby. The concept of wearing clothing that hadn't been washed yet was absolutely appalling for the poor bastard with normal hygiene tendencies. However, wearing tattered clothes that were covered in blood, guts and parasitic worms was definitely not the more hygienic option.

"It's already morning..."

When they started walking along the road to the East once more, the smoky and cloudy sky started getting a lot brighter. It was still obscured, just getting brighter by the minute. German Hill, that's the name of this road he was traveling down. Which makes a lot of sense when you consider that he went up and down a hill. Even now, the road was still a decline, just not as extreme as the situation earlier.

He passed a gas station and some scattered buildings. But there was a lot of parking lots, which made everything feel a bit desolate. However, with the sun coming up, it meant that it would be

even easier for drones to scan the city. He could also see the helicopters in the distance pretty easily, but they were so high in the air that they looked pretty small.

“I hope there’s still time to escape...”

‘Survive... Live... Breed... Spread... Evolve... Love.’

“Yeah, we’ll make it. Sorry for being so negative.”

His missing left ear wasn’t wrapped in a bandage anymore, because it wasn’t really bleeding. The wound already scabbed over. It still hurt and it wasn’t growing back. His scalp was also still aching a bit, just like the wound on his left leg. However, they weren’t bleeding. Aside from acne, he never really had trouble with various wounds bleeding throughout his life.

“We’ll have to be a bit more careful from now on... Don’t wanna get sniped.”

He stopped walking on the road and picked a house that didn’t have a fence on the right side. Then he just walked through several yards, passing under big trees and reaching a cul de sac. For those who don’t understand what that means, it’s basically just a small group of houses in a circular or semi-circular arrangement, with a large round street in the middle.

Jake was even more careful now, because he noticed that a lot of these houses had signs of non-zombie activity. In other words, people were living there. And they might have firearms... It should be noted that while it was very easy for gangsters and other criminals to obtain firearms in the State of Maryland, it was still fairly difficult for law-abiding citizens to arm themselves for self-defense. Thus, for a lot of people who survived in these neighborhoods, they didn’t actually have firearms before the end. It was perfectly legal to own crossbows, bows and other weapons like that though. Plus, anyone who survived this long was probably prepared or resourceful.

“I’ve noticed that zombies are less active during the day... And they seem to avoid sunlight sometimes. Does sunlight hurt you, Vora?”

‘Light... Warm... Light... Good.’

“I’ve also noticed that there are different kinds of infections. I don’t think you’re related to those red worms that seem the most common. But are you a black worm?”

‘Worm?’

“Never mind. We’ll figure that shit out eventually.”

Chapter 29:

Jake smacked a pigeon that dive bombed him with the long silver barrel in his right hand. Then stomped on a big fat mole that popped out of the dirt, trying to bite his left foot off! Although there was a lower chance of being shot or discovered by climbing over fences and wandering through snowy backyards, with big trees everywhere, the number of mutated or rabid animals was obviously far greater than on the street.

“Arf!”

‘Fuck...’ Jake kicked a pug that tried to jump on him and climbed over another chain link fence, making a bit of noise in the process. A bunch of other dogs started barking nearby as well. There was also a group of cute white cats that screamed and tried to attack him when he passed through their territory.

Bang~!

He finally had to fire a round into the head of a big, angry, horny stag that tried to either gore or rape him. He didn’t want to find out. One bullet wasn’t enough though. He had to waste a few 9mm rounds and a single hollow point .357 magnum bullet. The 9mm FMJ rounds tore through the hard skull, while the last hollow point was able to obliterate what was left of that brain, plus some of the worms inside.

‘Eat! Devour! Grow!’

“Can we really get stronger if we eat these worms? Are you sure it won’t make us sick?”

‘Worm! Meat! Blood! Eat!’

“This is a fucking three-hundred pound deer... How the hell are we gonna eat all that?”

He crouched down and put away his guns in his pockets. Then he reached inside the bloody neck with his carapace covered right hand. The ‘mouth’ on his palm opened up and sucked in a lot of blood, brain matter, even pieces of bone and fragments of metal. However he quickly pulled his hand out and allowed Vora to vomit all that unnecessary stuff onto the ground. Then he put his hand back inside and she was able to slurp up a big, juicy black worm. Not the usual red ones!

“A little chewier than the red ones. And it tastes a little more bitter...”

She learned her lesson from before and didn’t try to swallow it whole. Instead, she smashed up the meat first and then started digesting it. The tenacity of these worms was pretty high, so even

if they were ground into paste, they weren't necessarily 'dead' yet. It's just that on a macroscopic scale, they couldn't fight back and squirm around anymore. Microscopically, there was always a war between Jake and Vora's immune system, against any foreign entities that would cause them harm.

Fever, nausea, dizziness, basically all the symptoms he already had, so it just made things worse. The good thing though was that these worms had a lot of nutrients. It wasn't just the visible worms either. The meat and blood had countless eggs, tiny worms and other things that could be digested. They could also infect and hurt the two of them though, which was why Jake was a little hesitant to 'eat' too much, too fast. He also didn't eat it with his own mouth. Only using Voracity, who hopefully had a much stronger digestive system than him.

Closing his eyes for a moment and breathing out a long sigh, Jake saw a bunch of glowing yellow dots and flashing lights. When he opened his eyes, he could see a lot of dark squiggles and shivered. He looked at his reflection in a nearby window of a small red shed and smiled wryly.

His dark-brown irises had bright golden dots, while his sclera was almost blood red, only his pupils were still black as usual. He used his relatively clean left hand to reach in and grab a long, string-like black worm that started peeking out of his right tear duct. He also pulled out and threw away a few small red worms that were squirming around in the wreckage of his left ear. The hair on his head and beard was getting longer, but there were a lot of white, gray and even orangish-red hairs. His cheeks weren't as skinny anymore, but they still looked a bit abnormal, with squirming black things under his skin where there wasn't hair to cover up.

He reached out and touched the hardened obsidian carapace that already formed on the right side of his neck, reached across his throat a bit. There was a large goiter on the left side. He always had a goiter from his Graves Diseases, on each side really. But it was never that noticeable visibly. Now... He poked it a few times and felt a lot of pain. His heart was also racing.

"Everything will be fine. Totally fine."

'You know that's a lie.'

'Just give up. Go to sleep and it'll all be over soon.'

'Live.'

"Yeah, we're gonna live."

Jake snickered and ignored the negative voices in his head. Only Vora's voice was different. The others sounded like himself. She had a sexy, raspy, feminine voice... At least, that's how he felt about her voice.

“Fuck me...”

After climbing over a few more fences, Jake looked at the walls of the two white houses up ahead and shivered a bit more than usual. Two sentences were written in big blood red letters!

[A MAN WITH NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE]

[HAS NOTHING LEFT TO FEAR]

‘Run! Run! Run! Escape! Danger!’

Then he heard a woman’s voice whispering into his right ear, “You’re running out of time, Jacob.”

He looked down at the wrinkled old hand on his left shoulder and shuddered! When he looked back, nothing was there... When he turned around again, those words on the sides of those houses also disappeared. As he walked through the two houses, his heart was still racing.

“Fuck my life! I’m either being haunted or hallucinating! Maybe both!”

Pa~!

“Mmmn~! Aaah! Fuck you!”

Jake groaned in pain from yet another gunshot wound. This time he was hit in the left shoulder from a small caliber rifle. He quickly hid behind a thick tree trunk. He saw the muzzle flash in the window of a house over a hundred meters away. There was a large wide-open space, which had four separate baseball fields in the corners. Such a wide open area was a perfect killing field or hunting area. In fact, it wasn’t just that one window either. Although he hid behind the tree and was blocked from the area where he was shot from, a few other flashes lit up and were accompanied by various ‘bangs’ or ‘pops’. Some of them nearly hit him from other angles!

“Shit, shit, shit...”

Reality wasn’t a FPS Game! He couldn’t just wait a few seconds and recover his health to max or use a medkit to magically be totally fine. His left arm was numb and he could barely even lift it at all now. The 9mm pistol was still in his pocket or he would have dropped it already.

‘Fight! Kill! Live!’

“Fight how?! If we can hit them, then they can hit us... And I don’t trust our accuracy over theirs.”

He quickly retreated back behind those two houses. Specifically, he hid behind the one to his right because it was much closer. A few more gunshots rang out, but they didn't hit him. He placed his right palm on the open wound on his left shoulder, using those two slimy tongues to reach inside and wrap around that small lead bullet. Then he tossed it onto the bloody snow nearby.

With the pistols in the pockets of his blue jeans, he finally took the rifle off his shoulder. He already did some target practice earlier, when he was 'resting'. His accuracy was decent at relatively close ranges, but his hands shook a lot. Especially now that his left arm was limp, it was very difficult to fool with the .308 bolt-action hunting rifle. Bolt action means that there was a metal bolt that needed to be pulled back and moved around to reload... It also had a 5 round internal box magazine, which used the so-called 'clips'.

Jake looked up and saw a smiling old woman's wrinkly face peering down at him from a window nearby. Her dark brown eyes glowed with an eerie yellow light. But when he blinked, she was gone.

'Goddamn it.'

Chapter 30:

Three hours later, the sun was already high in the eastern sky and the clouds were relatively thin. Jake felt the warmth on his face and breathed a sigh of relief. He could feel the worms and other 'germs' on his face, left hand and even the hole in his left shoulder were all being purified... Well, irradiated with ultraviolet and infrared light. The darkness faded and he was feeling a lot stronger than before. Vora also digested a lot of food.

Bang!

"Finally let your fucking guard down, asshole."

Jake smirked, hiding behind the back of the house again. He's been stuck here for three hours! Occasionally he would need to deal with some rabbit squirrels and rats, but for the most part, he was just waiting. Watching, listening, and preparing. When his arm started working again, he began taking shots occasionally with his rifle, but it was only now that he actually hit someone.

He couldn't use the night vision scope anymore, because it was too bright. So he basically had to aim at a target over a hundred meters away with only his blurry eyes. It should be noted that he was very nearsighted before the apocalypse. His vision hasn't gotten any better either! His eyes were dry and cold, sometimes they had worms crawling in them, other times they were actually bleeding! How could his vision be better than before?!

Ching~!

Ejecting the casing by pulling the metal bolt back, Jake pushed it forward very familiarly to set the next round in place. He walked over to the other side of the building and hesitated, then went back to the same spot as before. Breathing out a long sigh, he aimed and pulled the trigger without having time to think. He also went back behind the corner of the house again before the exhausted assholes on the other side could react.

'Shit.'

'Danger...'

"I know. We're running out of time. Every moment we waste here brings us closer to death."

Jake looked up at the window where he saw 'Miss Maria' before and breathed a sigh of relief when she wasn't there. Although he wasn't sure if she was real or a hallucination brought on by basically anything at this point, he was still terrified. Voracity could also see and hear her, so the two of them were obviously wary.

“Have you noticed? The gunshots and explosions have stopped. The helicopters aren’t circling anymore... I think they’re evacuating.”

‘Escape!’

“Yeah, we can’t waste any more time here.”

He looked ahead and sighed. There was actually another option besides going through the baseball field park area. But it wasn’t necessarily safer. First he put the rifle on his shoulder again. Now that his arms are both functional, it was an actual possibility.

Behind the house, there was a fairly tall white concrete fence or wall. There was no way for him to do it before, but now he could put something underneath. For example, a big picnic table. It was always there, he just couldn’t move it before now. Then he stood on top of the highest part and reached up, mostly relying on the right side of his body, which was much stronger than the left.

After getting to the top, he smiled wryly. There were bear traps covering the area where he had to jump down. Only the area within his jumping range! Those bear traps weren’t placed there long ago either, because they looked shiny and new. It also looked like someone shoveled all the snow in the whole yard!

“Fucking Maria!”

Jake couldn’t help cursing. Then he pulled out his 9mm pistol and shot one of the bear traps that was a little farther away. In case the bullet ricocheted up at him. He shot one in the center... Nothing happened. It just made a loud ‘ting’ and bounced off the metal. It didn’t trigger the spring trap at all.

“Ugh... I’ve seen a video with these stupid things where they had to drive a truck over each side just to have enough pressure to set the damn trap. Then they dropped heavy chunks of meat on it and it wouldn’t even trigger properly... I’ve also seen videos where these things trigger real easily and snap through bones just as easily.”

‘Careful...’

“Yeah. I’m stupid.”

He snickered and put the safety on his pistol again, placing it in his pocket. Then he slowly hung down with his hands on the cold concrete wall. He didn’t jump down immediately. Instead, he used Vora’s powerful grip to slowly make his way over to the right. Of course, if he poked his head up above the wall by accident, then he might get shot in the face.

Eventually he hopped down onto the dirt and looked around the empty yard. Those shiny traps

were gone...

“Goddamn it! We’re still hallucinating?!”

‘Danger! Escape! Hurry!’

Jake cut through the yard and avoided the creepy shed to his left, jumped up and grabbed the edge of another tall white wall... Then he slipped. It took him a few tries before he managed to pull himself up and over, into another yard. The whole time he was very careful though. He was afraid that there really might be a bear trap below him if he let his guard down. Or maybe an actual bear?

He had to go back the way he came from, crossing through the same yards, where he encountered a few more rabid animals, but nothing too crazy. At least he wasn’t injured and didn’t need to fire a shot. Then he crossed the street to the right when he was sure that he was outside the line of sight of those assholes.

Although he didn’t run, he was walking very briskly, keeping an eye on the surroundings at all times. He didn’t want to get sniped again. Eventually he went behind some houses and cut through dozens of yards with relatively low or no fences. He crossed yet another street and passed by a church. He was breathing heavily and sweating a lot.

“Almost there... I can feel it. Hopefully.”

Honestly, he went in circles a few times, which made him waste time and energy. However, he ultimately reached a very ‘short’ middle school building. It took up a very wide space, but it was only a single-story red-brick building. His goal wasn’t the school though.

‘River.’

“It’s called Bear Creek. *Cough-cough-cough~!* Fuck... Mmmn, I’m so fucking tired.”

‘Escape. Rest. Recover. Reproduce. Survive.’

‘Yeah...’

Jake crossed along the icy field on the right side of the school, looking at the woods that were getting closer. When he finally reached the destination, he looked down and noticed that there was just a bunch of white snow and brown ice down below. It was still way too shallow in this area.

“We need a boat anyway.”

Eventually he followed a sidewalk to a small bridge and crossed it, reaching another residential

area. He followed the road to the left listlessly. His thoughts were getting as blurry as his vision. His mind was so foggy. Before he noticed, he was standing in front of a small white metal dingy, with a black motor on the back. There was a shed nearby, where he found some oars just in case. There was a river only a few dozen meters away, but it was still incredibly difficult for him to drag the boat over. Probably caused some damage to the bottom of the boat too, but he didn't have the presence of mind to care at that point.

Then he put the boat into the freezing cold, dark, disgusting, greenish brown murky creek water. He climbed into the boat carefully and used the oars to push himself away from the shallowest area.

"Motherfucker, there's no gas!"

Chapter 31:

“Mmmn... Ugh... Fuck...”

‘Jacob... Danger!’

“Huh?”

Jake shivered, curled up in a ball on the cold metal floor of the little dingy. The cold night wind blew some large waves that crashed against the side of the hull. Shaking the tiny ship back and forth, up and down. Some dirty brown water splashed into the boat and landed on his haggard face, finally causing him to open his eyes and look up at the bright silver crescent moon in the sky, behind the large bridge above him. It was as if his pupils had dilated so wide that his sclera and irises disappeared!

“Where are we? What the fuck happened?”

The last thing he remembered was filling the motor with gas he found at some random house that had a pier. There were a lot of them along Bear Creek. He was also shot at more than once, but for the most part, he was just driving around. Trying to figure out how to leave the creek. There were three other small branches near the end of Bear Creek, so he went down a few of them before finding the one that went south. Then he crossed under a short bridge... He vaguely remembers passing through a few more bridges, but then he likely blacked out.

‘Hungry. Thirsty.’

Vora always had her priorities straight. So even though his hands were shaking really badly, he still dug through one of his black backpacks, finding a cold can of chicken soup. It needed water, but he didn’t care. First he poured the clump of gelatinous tan ‘soup’ into Vora’s mouth, then he poured half a bottle of spring water inside. Before drinking the other half himself. Then he found a blue sports drink and guzzled it. Feeling a little more refreshed, though he was still incredibly sick in many ways.

All his hair had already turned white and gotten much longer, while the right side of his face was covered in large silver scales. The goiter on his neck was no longer visible, because his whole throat was now covered in ‘armor’. His teeth had also started to emerge properly. However, aside from the canines that were even longer, the rest were all relatively short. They weren’t completely grown out, but when Jake looked at his face in the reflection of a butcher knife, he couldn’t help but laugh.

‘These tiny teeth look kinda cute.’

'Bear.'

'Yeah... I know. It's kinda obvious. Well, I get that the hair and teeth are from the bear, but what about the scales? Because we ate a lot of fish in the past? Am I gonna start growing tomatoes out of my ass next?'

'Unlikely.'

"Hahaha~!"

Jake looked at his left hand and sighed. The wound was healed, the hole in his shoulder was also healed. But they were all covered in those same silver fish-like scales. The black carapace crossed over to the left side of his head from his neck and reached his missing ear, covering it completely. He could still hear, but it was slightly muffled and dampened.

'Not necessarily a bad thing though...'

Having sensitive hearing is great, but it's also a potential danger. With all the gunshots, screams, cries, roars and explosions lately, his sensitive hearing drove him crazy. He looked at his left leg and also noticed that his calf was covered in scales. There were patches of reflective silver scales in random places all over his body. Vora was also spreading across his chest and back, down to his waist and hip, especially his lower back. A lot of places were really itchy or sore.

Taking off his wet clothes didn't make him feel any warmer though. The temperature at night was much lower than the daytime. Polar Bear hair is actually clear and hollow, not white. The hair absorbs sunlight and channels it directly onto the Polar Bear's black skin in order to absorb as much solar radiation as possible... Unfortunately, it was night time, the skin on his scalp was still pale and he also didn't have the same thick layer of blubber as a polar bear.

"Pffff~! Huhuhu~! Fu-fu-fuck me~!"

He wrapped his arms around his chest and sat on the cold wooden seat, with water splashing on him occasionally. Create a fire to keep warm? How? With what fuel? All he could do was eat. He started eating all his supplies. Various types of candies, cookies and cakes. He didn't care that his scally webbed left hand was dirty. Vora never cared about hygiene in the first place, so she was fine with eating whatever. Not only eating, but she could even drink the briny brackish, disgusting Patapsco River water.

The Patapsco is about five kilometers at the widest point. Which also happened to be where he was floating at the moment. He could see a small island not that far away. The Francis Scott Key Bridge was above his head, which was more than two kilometers long but not very wide. Less than thirty meters. Enough for 2 on each side of the road.

'I can't see any other ships... Just wreckage.'

Jake looked around and noticed that there were pieces of debris floating everywhere nearby, but only a few dinghies, kayaks and canoes looked functional. There were even some cute ducky paddle boats that must have drifted over from the Inner Harbor in the Northwest. All the larger vessels were clearly dealt with though. Either taken away or sunk directly. There weren't any warships visible...

'They already completely evacuated.'

'Survive... How?'

Vora was confused and scared. Compared to Jake who was starting to feel 'numb' again, she still had a very strong survival instinct and willpower. Unfortunately, neither of them had an answer. They could feel it getting closer. That ominous sense of dread and doom.

'This water...'

Jake looked down at the brackish water that was filling the bottom of the boat. His sinuses were clogged and he was getting used to smelling shit, so he didn't notice. But now... He looked down at the water and noticed that there was an awful lot of green algae in the brown, murky water. Especially since it was the middle of winter.

There were also tons of dead or decaying fish carcasses everywhere. Many of which were covered in green goo... He picked up a squirming red worm out of the water and smiled wryly. It was writhing and struggling. Not a quick death, but it was clearly turning green. The green parts weren't moving anymore.

'Is this part of their plan?'

"Are you okay? Did you eat or drink this shit?"

'Devour. Grow. Evolve. Adapt. Survive.'

"I'm still cold as shit and feel like I'm dying, but yeah, maybe this was something created to deal with those worms... Not us."

Jake smirked, "Actually, this is a good thing, ain't it? Maybe they'll just spread this shit throughout the city?"

Even though he said that, he didn't feel any better or safer. The sense of dread was getting worse by the second!

Chapter 32:

'Be at peace, Child. Your suffering will end soon.'

Jake heard a melodious androgynous voice in the back of his mind. There was a beautiful angel flying across the sky from the Southeast. With wings of fiery orange flames and-

"Nope! Nope-nope-nope~! Fuck! Fuck! Shit! Aaaah!"

'Run~! Run! Escape! Live! Live! Survive!'

Both minds in the same body had the same action at the same time! They jumped off the side of the boat, into the glowing green algae-infested river and dove down! Fast! As fast as they possibly could! The water was actually much warmer than the air above, which was somewhat comforting... Of course, it was about to get much, much hotter and that's why they were so afraid!

'Not gonna die! Not gonna die! Not gonna die!'

'Live! Live! Live! Survive!'

As he went deeper and deeper, it got harder to hold his breath. Eventually he breathed out and his right ear had already popped by the rapidly changing pressure difference. The deeper he went downward, the less green slime and the harder it was to see anything with his burning eyes. However, he didn't care. He didn't care about anything else at that point. That 'angel' was traveling at least twice the speed of sound. From his current position to the center of 'Downtown' Baltimore was about twelve or thirteen kilometers.

'Five, four, three, two, one... One? One...'

"Blub~!"

Jake breathed out that last bit of air and was on the verge of suffocating as he kept swimming downward. His heartbeat slowed down from the pressure, his organs were more uncomfortable than usual, he also shit himself a bit and a lot of gas was evacuated from his bowels. The deepest part of the Patapsco River near the Key Bridge was nearly 20 meters. He was only about 15 meters deep, but to be fair, that was really deep even for a person with diving equipment and a lot of practice. Of course, there are people in the world, 'ordinary humans' who can dive up to 70 meters, easily, and hold their breath for up to 13 minutes. However, the Bajau people adapted after many generations because of a lifestyle of free diving and fishing... Even if Jake seemed to be turning into some kind of merman, insectoid or crustacean, he obviously didn't have the ability to breathe underwater or survive such high pressures for long periods of

time.

'Maybe we were wrong?'

The moment he started hesitating a bit, the dark, murky brackish water near the riverbed instantly lit up like he was on the surface in the middle of the day! He could see an old sunken wooden ship buried under the rocks, sand, brown slime, seaweed, shellfish and barnacles... Then he blacked out.

'Are we still alive?'

'Yes.'

When Jake regained his senses, he felt like his whole body was being scalded or burned. He couldn't open his eyes, he couldn't breathe, everything hurt so much and it felt like he was moving really fast. Jerking around in different directions along with the turbulent currents. Rocks, maybe even crabs and other shellfish were smacking into him occasionally, which poked holes in his soft flesh or tore apart his skin. But if it hit his carapace, the damage was minimal. He lost a lot of scales too, which was similar to having his skin scraped off.

He couldn't hear anything, because both of his eardrums were completely destroyed. Even through the protective 'armor' that covered the missing left ear, the sound of the explosion earlier was just too loud. Not to mention his ears, his sinuses also ruptured, along with several internal organs and his lungs that were filled with water/blood at the time.

'How are we still alive?'

'Adapt! Resist! Grow! Survive! Live! Must live!'

'Okay then.'

Jake couldn't breathe with his broken lungs... But he didn't feel like he was suffocating completely. His brain was still getting oxygen. He could feel the hard carapace on his neck opening and closing every time he struggled to breathe. Although his mind was very blurry, he curled up in a ball and protected his head/abdomen as much as possible. He didn't bother trying to swim or stupidly flailing around.

'It burns so fucking much.'

'Yes.'

Vora could feel pain as well, but she could also tune it out much more easily. He couldn't tell if the water was really hot or if his skin was just severely burned already. From the perspective of a person with burns, it's hard to tell the difference. After a while, he realized that the water was

'warm', not very hot at all. But warm water in the middle of winter is pretty scary as well.

'I love you.'

'Love.'

'I hope we didn't get irradiated too badly... I read that water can block neutron and gamma radiation pretty well. Alpha Radiation is more dangerous if you ingest it, but... It can't even pass through a sheet of paper normally. Beta Radiation is like electrons or positrons. They can pass through a decent amount of water, but we should have been deep enough back then. Neutrinos are relatively harmless. Unless they're coming from an exploding star that's not too far away...'

'Radiation... Eat?'

'Uh, well, technically, if you can use photosynthesis, then the Sun's rays are also 'food'. However, when it comes to ionizing radiation from a nuclear detonation of some sort... For most living things, nuclear radiation is their greatest weakness.'

'Hmmm...'

'Did you just hmmm? You can hmmm now?'

'Mmmmn.'

'Hahahaha~!'

Jake wanted to smile and laugh out loud, but both actions were basically impossible in the current situation. He was still tumbling around in the water, sometimes rising and often sinking back down. Eventually though, he could tell that he was slowing down significantly and the situation wasn't as dangerous as before. The temperature of the water was also getting much colder.

'I think we drifted pretty far by now... My eyes... Oh, I can actually see!'

'Light!'

He thought that his eyes would be blinded by radiation, but those pitch-black eyes were able to see lots of glowing green lights all around him. He was afraid it might be radioactive waste at first, but then remembered that strange algae. There were big goopy green balls floating around. There were also some creatures that looked like blue jellyfish...

'Well, those are actually jellyfish.'

Chapter 33:

'Jellyfish... Food?'

'Uh, sure, why not?'

Jake reached out with his right hand and a poor oval-shaped blue jellyfish without tentacles was sucked inside. It didn't taste particularly good, but then again, he was also tasting the nasty Chesapeake Bay water. Not as salty as the Atlantic Ocean, of course, but there were a lot of added 'flavors'. He tried not to think about it too much.

Vora also ate some of those green algae spheres that were glowing green. Whether it was bioluminescence or radioactivity, they didn't really care at this point. Jake's digestive system and lungs were totally fucked. He was in horrible agonizing pain and discomfort, as always. Vora on the other hand... She was fine.

The two of them swam around slowly, eating jellyfish and algae. The temperature was much more comfortable than what they endured on land recently. The burning sensation on their skin went away after they slept for a full twelve hours. They intentionally avoided surfacing, which meant that they had no idea where they were or how far they drifted.

'We know they nuked Baltimore, but it's possible that they also nuked other places as well. So even if we're far away, the air is still probably highly radioactive. Then again, the water won't be that much better off. Maybe the initial blast can be effectively blocked by enough water, but after a while, a lot of the radioactive materials will get into the water and contaminate it. Then we'll have to worry about swimming in rads, breathing it, drinking, eating it... Shit, we need to find the direction and get the hell out of the Chesapeake Bay.'

'Escape?'

'Yeah... Escape again. Fuck my life... Fuck our life. Oh well. At least we're better off than the unlucky bastards who stayed in the city?'

'Eat. Heal. Grow. Adapt. Survive.'

'Yep... Yep. Gotta take things one step at a time.'

Eventually Jake poked his head up above the glowing green surface of the water. His white hair didn't fall out and his beard was even thicker than before. His face was covered in large, thick, reflective silvery fish scales. His ears were missing, covered by thick black carapace, just like his neck, which had three small plates opened up with brown gills inside. When his neck was above the water, it struggled to breathe for a few seconds, but quickly closed automatically.

He was basically in a state of holding his breath, because his lungs were still not working. He looked around with those pitch-black eyes and noticed that it was daytime, but there was a thick cloud of smoke and dust covering the sky very ominously. Looking into the distance, he couldn't see any mushroom clouds or whatever. Then again, the mushroom cloud doesn't really last that long. It's probably been a whole day already.

'I see some beach houses! They have lights on!'

Jake was excited, because that likely meant they had electricity. And if there was still someone living there, then they shouldn't be too close to the blast or blasts. With his neck in the water, he started swimming leisurely. Even if he got there, he couldn't breathe on land. He couldn't speak.

Surprisingly enough, he didn't feel the cold temperature that much anymore. It was definitely colder in the air than the water, however, his scaly face and the black carapace were either less sensitive to the cold or they simply had a higher resistance to the cold.

'They might have guns.'

'Danger?'

'Maybe. Maybe not. We survived this far, I don't wanna die so stupidly. We can't survive that long above water anyway.'

Not just above water, but his small gills had trouble providing oxygen to his whole body. So he had to move slowly and calmly. Compared to before, his heart was beating very slowly and steadily. He was actually very relaxed, aside from all the pain and discomfort. After all, people are afraid of the water because they can drown. Well, that and the fact that there are countless scary monsters called 'fish'. At the moment, most of the fish he encountered were things like minnows or small perch. No mutated monsters. He was actually having a pretty good time.

'Fish!'

'Yes, lots of fish, hehe~!'

'Clam!'

'Those are mussels, those are clams.'

'Oyster!'

'Vora is so smart!'

Although Jake felt a little awkward about killing things at first, it was Vora that did everything

herself, so he was more of a spectator. For shellfish, she had to use her sharp and hard carapace-covered fingers to dig their squirming meat out of their hard shells. Jake's left hand was still relatively 'human', at least in the sense that there were bones inside. The skin was covered in thick and abrasive silver scales. His fingers and toes were also webbed now.

'Being a fish is not that bad. But... It's still a little chilly. We should find a deserted, tropical island somewhere.'

'Breed. Reproduce. Conquer.'

'Conquer what?'

'Everything.'

'Well, whatever makes you happy. I just wanna survive.'

Jake swam around in the relatively shallow water. He reached out with his right hand and scraped some white barnacles off the side of a wooden pylon. Separating the shell from the meat, he smiled and fed the insatiable Voracity. He could feel her pure and innocent enjoyment when eating, which distracted him from his own suffering.

When he surfaced after swimming along the shore for a few hours, he saw a somewhat familiar beach with orange sand. Though it was covered in dead fish and green algae now. There were a bunch of rocks that were piled up in lines and reaching out into the water like piers.

'Wait, I recognize this place... This should be Gibson Island? Then over there is the south.'

'South... Warm.'

'Yeah, the south will be warmer and more comfortable.'

'Warmth... Reproduction. Good.'

'Well, I mean yeah, generally, I guess? Are you going to lay eggs?'

'Maybe.'

'You don't know?'

'Hmmm...'

He wanted to laugh, but it didn't work out. His ribs and chest hurt really bad when he tried. His broken and collapsed lungs were full of dirty water, probably lots of algae too. Jake didn't even know where to start or if it was even possible to fix his fucked up situation, so he tried not to

think about it too much. Just enjoyed the peace and relaxation after being exhausted for so long.

Jake surfaced again, looking over to the right with a wry smile, then shook his head and dove down into the dark depths...

'I can't stop here. Even if they're still alive, it's better if they think I'm dead. Sorry. I love you...'

Chapter 34:

'When I was a kid, I used to live down there. At least three or four family members still live in the area. A lot of friends I grew up with should still be living there too... All along the Magothy River or in some of the smaller creeks. I used to kayak down the creek, all the way to Gibson Island, almost every day when I was a teenager. At least, during the summers. Obviously not in the winter like now.'

'Family... Unnecessary.'

'If you don't wanna start a family, then why do you keep talking about breeding and reproduction all the time?'

'Breeding. Reproduction. Purpose. Grow. Improve. Survive. Live.'

Jake smiled wryly and walked slowly along the bottom of the relatively shallow channel between the tip of Gibson Island and the other shore to the south. A place called Persimmon Point. Of course, he wasn't going all the way to the other side. Just trying to stay close to the land in order to avoid getting lost. Also, he was afraid of the deeper waters... For obvious reasons. Mainly water pressure, but also because it was creepy and terrifying.

Even at only three to five meters, the murky Magothy River and Chesapeake Bay waters were scary. He saw a lot of small and large crabs scuttling around. Along with plenty of carp, catfish and even a few horseshoe crabs. There was plenty of seaweed and other junk. Speaking of junk, he also saw a lot of broken bottles, pieces of plastic, ancient rusty metal chains and an old crab cage that was turned into a fish nest.

'Did you hear that?'

'Food?'

Jake rubbed his left 'ear' and smiled. He looked over toward the deeper water and explained in his mind, 'No, I mean, our ears are finally working again.'

'Oh.'

'Well, aren't you full yet?'

'No.'

'Then... Umm, any preferences?'

'Meat!'

He rolled his pitch-black eyes and complained, 'Other than meat, what else is there? Seaweed? Or more of this damn algae?'

'Fish!'

'Good girl. Now, you see these fish... Which one do you want?'

Jake pointed toward the small black catfish, then the silver scaled carp, perch and minnows. They weren't very large. Especially the tiny minnows. There were also some green-scaled bass, some yellow and silver sunfish, et cetera.

'Minnow. Easy. Weak. Stupid.'

Without him having to do anything, Vora reached out and those little pink tongues wiggled around like worms. Not to mention the minnows, even the other fish were attracted and swam over foolishly. To the extent that she needed to pick and choose. In the end, a big, fat, juicy black catfish pushed the other competitors out of the way. Biting down onto one of the tongues and then having its head crushed/minced by those sharp claws. Its body twitched and wiggled around for a while, but Vora slowly grinded it up and 'swallowed' everything inside her mouth.

'Ew...'

'Taste... Bad.'

'Of course it tastes bad! You ate the bones, the eyeballs, the scales, the spines, the guts, ugh, if my stomach wasn't totally fucked, I might throw up.'

'Hmmm...'

In the end, Vora's 'stomach' acid was strong enough to dissolve and break down everything into useful nutrients. However, a lot of effort was wasted trying to eat the bones, scales, fins, et cetera. She only has one hole. One orifice. She doesn't really 'shit' or 'piss', at least, she doesn't need to use the same hole to do it. Instead, since she's connected to Jake pretty thoroughly, small pieces of waste will be sent to his kidneys and even his bowels to be excreted.

A while later, they crossed the channel by walking very slowly. It was a whole kilometer wide, even though it was only 5 to 7 meters at the deepest point. Walking underwater requires a lot less energy and strength than on land, but you do need to contend with the undertow and currents depending on the situation. If you're not worried about drowning, then it's much easier than swimming. Another feature is stealth. Less movement means that they draw less attention from the various creatures underwater.

'Breed?'

'Um, okay?'

Jake looked up at the relatively bright, cloudy sky above his head. The water was murky, but the closer he got to the bay, the clearer it became. Now, even if his head was a meter or two below the surface, he could still see the sky pretty clearly.

Then he looked down at his skinny, scaly waist. Although the black carapace was spreading, it seemed to have very specific goals. For example, his chest and over his ribs were being covered in a similar black shell to his arm. Yet, his abdomen was completely untouched. Instead, his back was also covered in carapace, especially around the spine. His face was also avoided.

'Do you have control over the transformation of our body?'

'No... Yes? Maybe. Unknown.'

'In other words, it's probably subconscious, rather than conscious?'

'Yes.'

He figured that this was the reason he would still have skin and hair on his scalp, instead of just having it covered by black carapace or silver scales. The white beard and mustache was the same way. He had skin there, yet his upper cheeks and forehead were all covered in scales. He also still had eyebrows. Of course, it hasn't been that long and he understood that his current appearance was definitely transient.

There weren't many places where normal skin still existed, but his genitals were one place. His right nipple was already gone. Completely covered by a black shell-like exoskeletal armor. The left nipple was still there, but some of those new scales were already being invaded by carapace. The groin was the same way. Starting at his tailbone, the dark shell was reaching down, covering up his anus and taint, not far from swallowing up his scrotum. The pubic mound still had some short white Polar Bear-like hairs growing on the pale skin. His penis and testicles were still about the same in appearance and function. He still had the same circumcision scars and injuries from using some silicone masturbators with saliva instead of lube. Not to mention the scars from the cysts and boils. Then the other injuries he suffered afterwards. Now the skin has healed, but he didn't know what was going to happen in the future.

'Mate. Breed. Reproduce. Fun.'

'Yeah, that's the main reason people do it. Because it feels good. Making babies is incidental most of the time.'

Chapter 35:

There's a difference between surviving and thriving. A lot of fish that live in brackish water can survive in the ocean, but they can't really 'thrive' there, or they can survive for a while, but not for too long. Jake was in a similar situation. It's been three days since he started slowly walking and swimming along the coast. His body has been changing every day. In order to not only survive, but also thrive in his new environment.

"Hahaha~! Finally! I can finally breathe again! Holy shit!"

Jake shouted in a deep and raspy voice as he poked his head up above the choppy waves. Snow was falling from the sky and the temperature was much colder than before, so his happiness didn't last long. It was still January after all. He's been traveling 'south' this whole time, but he still hadn't reached the ocean yet. In fact, he was only around Chesapeake Beach. About 30-40 kilometers south of Gibson Island. The reason it took so long is, first of all, he wasn't moving very fast and took a lot of naps, more importantly... The geography of the area was confusing without a map. If he didn't surface often, he would end up going down a bunch of small rivers and creeks, which would have made the trip dozens of times longer.

'Air... Cold. Losing... Warmth.'

"Sorry Vora. Phew~! Well, let's go back down, I guess."

He took a deep breath and submerged once more. Even with his lungs full of air, he could still open his gills to breathe, but it was a little difficult and counter-intuitive. In the end, Vora was in charge of the gills, while Jake focused on lungs instead. His new lungs were actually much, much more efficient and effective than the last ones. At least, he didn't feel nearly as much pressure when he walked around a dozen meters below the surface with his lungs full of air. The bigger issue was just managing buoyancy.

It wasn't just his lungs that had healed or transformed. His other internal organs, like his digestive system, were all mostly recovered or 'modified' in various ways. He really didn't understand that much. And he wasn't about to vivisect himself to figure it out.

'I finally feel good for once.'

'Cold.'

'Well, yeah, it's cold, but compared to before, at least we don't feel like we're dying constantly, right? Hahaha~!'

'Yes.'

Jake kicked off a random rock and put his hands forward. His left-hand fingers were webbed, so when he had them wide open, he could 'push' more water at the same time. Vora had to close her fingers instead, but her hand was also much larger than Jake's. His toes were also webbed, though it didn't seem to have too much of an influence, since his feet/toes didn't grow any larger in comparison to the rest of his body. There's a reason why flippers are so large and floppy.

Maybe a few days ago, Jake couldn't even swim. Now, he's become pretty adept at it. The average person can swim about 2.1 kilometers per hour. Of course, they need to worry about staying afloat and not drowning. Jake was about twice that speed underwater, only coming up for air every ten or fifteen minutes. He wasn't competing in a race or marathon though. He just wanted to escape from the cold!

In Ocean City, which was close to the same latitude as where he was currently swimming, the ocean water was about 37 F in the middle of January. Virginia Beach on the other hand, was about 44 F. Myrtle Beach, another famous beach, this time down in South Carolina, is usually between 50 and 55 F around this time of year. Off the coast of Savannah Georgia, it's only around 58 F. But the distance is hundreds of kilometers to the south...

'Ugh... The more I think about it, the more annoyed I get. Wait, why do we need to swim there?! What the fuck is wrong with me?! I feel like turning into a fish has made me significantly stupider.'

'Drive.'

'Yeah. I know... We can just fucking drive there.'

Whether in a car or a boat, it'd still be much faster than their current speed. Not to mention much warmer and less effort. Besides, he didn't need to be naked the whole time. He was a little worried though. Well, very worried... About a lot of things, but one of the most important was whether he could stay out of the water for long periods of time now.

'Hopefully we can still go up on land without negative effects.'

'Adapt.'

'Yeah, true. If we can adapt to become whatever the fuck we are now, then we can definitely keep changing.'

In some ways, they were like a shapeshifter... But still within the realm of realism. A lot of animals have similar abilities. Especially amphibians and insects. Their overall size and shape really hasn't changed that much. Jake grew about 10 cm taller, from 160 to 170, which is still short for the average human male. He still has two arms and two legs, a head, the torso is still of normal proportions to the size of the body. Only the right shoulder and arm are significantly

larger than the left.

'I should be able to pretend to be a cosplayer or have some weird disease, right?'

'Danger. Hunt. Capture. Kill.'

"Haah~!" He breathed out and took a deep breath above the cold, white-capped waves, "I mean, yeah, sure, there's always a danger. But I'm just thinking... Could we take a bus? No, we might infect people though... I don't wanna start another zombie apocalypse if I can avoid it."

'Land... Colder. Dangerous. Bullets. Bombs. Water. Safe. Food. Endless.'

"Safe? Just because we've been lucky thus far, doesn't mean we're any safer in the water than on land. It's gonna get even more dangerous once we reach the ocean."

Jake wiped the green slime off his scaly cheek, but it still got in his white bushy beard and shoulder-length hair. Some snowflakes landed on his head and he shivered a bit. It's been cold. The whole time, it's been really cold. He just put up with it. Now that he had another option, he followed his instincts and swam ashore!

The pale-orange sand that was dyed green and then covered in a thin sheet of snow. This was a few kilometers south of Chesapeake Beach. This whole area didn't have any piers and seemed relatively deserted. Hence why he chose it.

Up ahead was a small hill... And then forests. So many trees that he couldn't see anything else. Whether there were houses inside or if it was just an endless forest, he wasn't sure. However, he could see a long wooden pier a few hundred meters to the south, while he passed a pier to the south a few hundred meters as well.

'Hmmm... What the fuck am I doing, anyway?'

'Warmth. Heat. Fire. Shelter.'

"Oh yeah. We're going camping, hahaha~!"

Jake grinned his sharp bear-like white teeth and started walking into the woods. There were quite a few evergreen type trees, but there were also a lot of leafless ones. He wandered through the woods for only a few seconds before he came across a house...

"Well, that was anticlimactic."

'Empty.'

"Yeah, it looks abandoned. Then again, we're not that far from Baltimore. Along the way, there

weren't many places with houses with the lights on... Probably didn't wanna deal with, you know, nuclear fallout, hahaha~!"

'Fallout, dangerous?'

"Yeah. That's nuclear radiation. Or well, tiny particles of nuclear material that get swept up into the atmosphere and then come down in the form of... Rain or uh, I guess snow could also work."

'Danger?'

Jake looked up at the snow falling from the sky and sighed dramatically, "There's nothing we can really do about it now. I only hope we can adapt."

Actually, they used to test nuclear weapons in the desert not far from Las Vegas for many years. There were no real immediate effects on the people who lived nearby...

'At least not officially. But my parents knew a lot of people who used to play music in Vegas back then. Most of them died from cancer or at least got cancer once or twice in their lifetimes. Tons of famous celebrities who spent a lot of time in Vegas back then have also died from cancer. It took decades though.'

'Humans, weak. Jake, Vora, strong.'

"Yeah, we're strong. We're the strongest, hehe~!"

Chapter 36:

The silver and black merman with dyed green hair sneaked around outside the house, peeking in the windows, but the shades were closed. The house was two stories, with a bunch of dead vines on the mottled white walls and windows. Probably the roof as well, but he couldn't see it. There was a very real danger of those big tree branches or even entire trees falling over onto the house. This whole place seemed like it wasn't very well maintained.

"No car in the driveway. No sound coming from inside. No smell... Umm, well, I can't smell or taste anything but fish, seaweed, salt and shit."

There was an asphalt path leading from the side of the house into the woods, but it was blocked by a downed tree. So basically, it was an abandoned building in the middle of nowhere. There were a lot of places like this in Maryland though. A lot of rich people had huge waterfront mansions that they never used, even before this latest pandemic.

'New Lair?'

"Uh, sure, call it a 'Lair' or whatever you want. It's just a temporary home for us to stay for a while. At least until the weather gets warmer. We're not in a hurry either way, right?"

'Hmmm...'

"If you wanna say something, just say it."

'Mmmmn.'

"Okay then."

Those pitch-black eyes rolled and he continued searching around the front/back doors. Eventually he found it! Underneath a random rock near the front door, aside from a bunch of worms and other bugs that Vora slurped up, Jake managed to find a key! Putting the key in the bronze knob, he turned it carefully and the door actually unlocked. He went inside the freezing cold, mostly empty house and sighed.

'Prey!'

Vora got excited when she heard the rustling of small creatures that were startled. Jake also noticed a lot of chewed up furniture and feces in the corners of the rooms. The floors were all hardwood, which was at least better than carpet in terms of cleaning.

"Thank God! They still have power! Hahaha! Fuck me!"

Jake was happy for less than a second before the flickering lightbulb of the old-timey lamp burst and the room got dark again. He sighed dramatically and didn't really care about it anymore. His body was dripping dirty bay water and green slime all over the ground. However, he didn't really care about that at this point. Instead, he went straight for the kitchen. Checking for any usable food... There were lots of cans of various soups, beans, corn, et cetera, but the dates were all from 2018 to 2020.

'Maybe they died during Covid?'

'Eat?'

"Ummm, not yet. I don't wanna make ourselves sick. Then again, with your digestive talents, I doubt some old beans or corn will have much of an effect."

'Prey?'

"Those racoons? Or the bats? Either way, I don't feel like 'hunting' right now. It's too damn cold."

Jake looked around and quickly came to the fireplace in the living room. Of course, the living room was also pretty nasty looking now. The leather sofa was torn apart and there was a skeletal racoon laying in the fireplace... He ignored it and picked up a dry piece of wood from the big pile on the side. Tossed it on top of the old, brittle bones, causing some of them to turn into powder. A bunch of ashes also 'puffed' out and got stuck to his dirty, scaly, silver legs.

"Holy shit! I bet we could take a shower!"

He was legitimately excited, thinking about washing the 'gunk' off his body. But first he found a match, lit it and slowly ignited the fireplace. There were red bricks all around it. Lots of fur, dust, cobwebs, dead spiders, centipedes, cockroaches, et cetera. The whole house was filthy. Not much better than being outside, except that the insulation was decent.

Crackle~!

"This brings back memories..."

'Pizza.'

"Umm, I was thinking a little further back than the pizza place, heh-heh. We used to have a fireplace like this one back at my grandmother's house... There were a few times when the power went out in winter and we had to use it. Of course, we usually didn't use it, because it needed special fake wood logs that were super expensive. Whoever used to live here just chopped up some logs to make this firewood. It's been so long that it's really dried out now..."

“Hiss, rou~! Rou~! Rou~!”

“Rou! Rou!”

A family of fat gray and black racoons started hissing, barking and chirping at him angrily from the darkness. However, he just ignored them and sat down on the dirty ground in front of the fireplace. Warming and drying his body for the first time in a long time...

“It kinda hurts.”

Jake grumbled in his deep and raspy voice, “My scales are drying up, but at least your hard shell feels fine, whether it’s wet or dry.”

‘Efficient.’

The racoons were startled and obviously scared, but they still tried to frighten him off by making noises. He just glared at them with those reflective pitch-black eyes and they were scared away pretty easily. Of course, they didn’t leave the house. The only entrance and exit was the fireplace. Now they were trapped inside, just like the bats in the attic and basement.

“I don’t wanna kill them. They’re so cute...”

‘Meat.’

“No.” Jake sighed, “Unless they turn into ‘zombies’, I don’t wanna kill them, Vora.”

‘Hmmm... Meat.’

“Saying meat over and over again ain’t gonna convince me, hahaha~!”

‘Meat! Meat! Meat! Meat! Meat! Meat! Meat!’

“Meat! Fuck! Meat! Meat! Meat! Eat! Stop it! You have your own mouth! No wait! I mean, stop spamming my brain with meat!”

‘Spam? Canned Meat?’

“Yeah, I think I saw some in the pantry... First though, let’s take a shower. Please God, let the shower have hot water!”

They already checked the sink earlier and the pump in the basement was working properly. These houses outside the cities generally have their own wells that they draw water from. Along with septic tanks for their sewage. Although it’s great to be self-sufficient. There are a lot of places where problems can arise and it’s fairly expensive to have various problems fixed. Then

again, even in the city, there are always all sorts of problems. Maybe the extra tax and housing costs from living in the city will far outweigh the expenses of living in the county? Either way, Jake didn't care.

"Now that I think about it though. It's kinda weird that this house that's probably been abandoned for several years still hasn't had its electricity cut off by the power company..."

'Danger? Trap?'

"I don't know."

Jake frowned as he felt the hot water burning his scales and carapace, not to mention his scalp and chin. His nose was also covered in scales for the most part, but had normal flesh underneath. He had to blow out lots of brown, green and even black snot for a few minutes. It was a pretty long ordeal. Thankfully they had some antibacterial soap in the bathroom. No shampoo, just some unopened bars of soap. Which he used to wash his hair and body as thoroughly as possible.

"If this is a trap, it's awfully complicated and elaborate. Also, why bother?"

'Fun?'

"I hope not..."

Chapter 37:

People usually think the world revolves around them... It doesn't. Logically, no one should know that Jake is alive. Most people probably never knew that he existed in the first place. After a few days passed, the paranoia faded and he became a little more comfortable in his new temporary home.

"All the clothes in the closets were eaten by moths."

'Dusty Meat!'

"There are termites infesting the walls, ceiling and floors."

'Tiny Meat!'

"The beds and sofas have been taken over by racoons."

'Fluffy Meat!'

"There are actually field mice and river rats living in the basement with the bats."

'Squeaky Meat!'

"Whoever used to live here, made sure to take all their TVs and computers. But at least there's a working electric stove and microwave. The fridge and freezer also work, amazingly enough. They were just unplugged before. So we can theoretically catch some fish or other seafood and store them for later."

'Delayed Meat!'

"Hahaha~! Fuck, why are you so cute?"

'Hunger!'

"Okay, okay~! Be patient. We don't need to live like total savages anymore. I'll be finished cooking this bass soon. Don't worry."

'Snacks?'

Jake rolled his pitch-black eyes, though it was difficult to tell. His pupils were definitely much bigger than before, while his sclera really did disappear for the most part, but he still had irises. If there was any sclera, it likely turned black, just like his formerly brown irises. Now he can see

much better than before in low light conditions. His normal light vision has also gotten much better, just not 'superhuman'. At most, it was just at the level of an ordinary human with good vision. After all, his eyes were pretty bad before they were 'revamped'. He also has a protective film over his eyes, which allows him to see underwater more easily.

"My fingers are less flexible than before. But my hands don't shake as much anymore."

Jake looked down at his left hand and spread his fingers. The webbing looked like pale-pink flesh, spreading from the distal interphalangeal joints and connecting them together with his fingers that were covered by silvery fish scales. His palm wasn't scaly though. It looked about the same as before. Still very pinkish and reddish.

"I wonder if I can still play the guitar like this? Probably won't work with the piano..."

'Meaningless.'

"It's not meaningless. I mean, sure, I haven't played any instruments in a few years... But still, it's like my testicles. Even if I never used them to have kids, I still wouldn't want to lose them inexplicably."

'Hmmm... Eat First. Breed Second.'

"I wasn't... Well, whatever. It's not like we have anything better to do, right? Hahaha~!"

Aside from hand-fishing, cooking, eating and sleeping, their main recreational activity is mating. Although it's always called 'Breeding', they have yet to reproduce any offspring. It was mostly just for entertainment at this point. It should be noted that Jake hasn't bothered trying to clean the house yet. He hasn't even kicked out the racoons. As for basically all the other unlucky animals... Well, if they hadn't been eaten yet, then they were considered reserve food.

"Do you wanna use my mouth or yours?"

'Mine!'

"Go ahead then."

Once the big bass filets on the frying pan were cooked in vegetable oil and seasoned with various spices he found in the cabinets. Jake sat at the small, circular wooden table, on a simple wooden chair. It was a few kilos of meat total, so even Voracity had to take her time. Although it was possible to swallow a giant worm from a Polar Bear whole back then, that was just an emergency measure. And she's learned her lesson over time. Now she prefers to eat slowly when possible.

Those two long pink worm-like tongues stuck out of Jake's right palm and licked the fish a few

times. Then they broke some pieces of the filet off, pulling them back inside the large, gaping slit that was quivering with excitement... It might seem a little exaggerated, but even normal humans can get sexually excited when eating delicious food. Vora's mouth is as sensitive as a human vagina, though the general structure is a bit different, so it makes sense why she gets so horny whenever she eats or hungry when she's horny.

Although Jake can feel all the same sensations, there's still a bit of a disconnect sometimes. Especially when he intentionally weakens his control over a certain part of his body or even his entire body. Vora is the same way.

"I love you."

'Love.'

"Please don't leave me, Vora..."

'We are one.'

"I know... I just get scared sometimes. I'm afraid you'll disappear or maybe I've just been hallucinating you this whole time."

'You... Hear them? Still?'

"No. I haven't heard those voices in a long time now. Basically since we got nuked and woke up. Maybe a few here and there, but nothing like back then. Now the only voices I hear are yours and mine. Hmm, no, actually, I think I hear that other voice sometimes. Whenever we eat those weird green algae or seaweed. It's like..."

'Androgynous. Peace. Harmony. Balance. Neutrality. Annoying.'

"Yeah, exactly! It makes me wonder if those worms and algae have some weird hallucinogenic effects?"

'Maybe. Like, Me?'

"It's unlikely that every single worm has its own consciousness... But they might have a collective consciousness of some sort? Who knows? I just hope that you never leave me, Vora."

'Never, leave. We are one.'

"Yeah... We're one."

'Breed?'

“Wait until you finish eating first and then you need to rinse your mouth out. I don’t wanna get pepper and spices in my urethra.”

‘Why?’

“Vora, we share the same body. We are one, remember? So please don’t give us a UTI.”

‘Hmmm... Agreed.’

Chapter 38:

Creak~!

Jake opened his eyes the moment he heard the door open. He was in the living room, by the fireplace. This was where he usually slept. Right next to the open flames. He was afraid that he might get eaten by rats or racoons if he slept somewhere dark. He didn't even use a pillow or a bed, just laid on the relatively clean wooden floor and rested on Voracity's black carapace.

'Someone's here!'

'Enemies? Prey? Weak. Fear. Prey.'

It only took Vora a moment to figure out that the intruder in their territory wasn't very dangerous. However, Jake wasn't so careless. He moved away from the fireplace and hid into the darkness, sneaking around behind the dirty ruined couch. The front door closed and some soft steps could be heard moving from the entrance to the living room where he was hiding.

"Hello? Is anybody there?"

'A kid?'

It was a little boy with short blonde hair, blue eyes and deathly pale skin. He was only about 150 cm tall and maybe 12 years old at most. He was wearing a puffy blue winter coat with mittens on his hands. Along with similarly padded pants and big brown boots.

"I know you're there! Come out!"

'Unarmed.' Vora whispered in the back of his mind, 'Weak Meat!'

'Seriously...' Jake snickered and startled the poor kid, but he didn't come out from behind the couch or show himself. He just asked, "What's up, Kid? Haven't your parents told you not to break into other people's houses in the middle of the night? Especially when they look haunted as fuck..."

"I know it's not haunted." The kid giggled with a black cellphone in his hand, "This is my Grandpa's house... He died from Covid, but he didn't die here."

"Hah! I was right!" Jake snickered and raised his head from behind the dirty couch, glaring at the little boy with those pitch black eyes...

"But Kid, didn't your parents ever tell you not to confront a crazy naked homeless man squatting

in an abandoned house before?”

“My parents are busy being cam whores. They don’t give a shit what happens to me.”

The little boy pouted and showed him his phone, “Are you Jacob Cinagra, the furry porn artist from Baltimore?”

“I don’t just do Furry Porn, okay?”

Jake looked at the screen with his pitch-black eyes squinted. It was one of his websites where he posted ‘art’ for money. There was a comments section with a lot of people asking how he was doing, whether he was okay, did he evacuate in time... But the last post he made was talking about how he was really sick and felt like he was dying. So most people just assumed that he was already dead and wrote comments like: [JC, the Furry God, sacrificed himself for our sins.] or [RIP Furry God! I’ll never forget the Scaly Wars or the Fluffy Brothels you cursed us with!] and other ‘wholesome’ eulogies.

“Anyway, that’s me. So what? Did you tell anyone about me being here? Did you call the police?”

“Fuck the police!” The boy sneered, “You escaped from Baltimore, right? If they knew you had contact with me, they’d put us both in ‘Quarantine’.”

“Makes sense.” Jake nodded, with his black right and silver left shoulders partially visible above the back of the couch. Then he frowned when he noticed the kid taking pictures with his phone!

“Didn’t you just say-”

“I already have a bunch of pictures and videos of you. So if anything happens to me, the cops and FBI will know it was you.”

The kid snickered and introduced himself, “I’m Ryan. Amateur photographer.”

“Well, that’s kinda smart. But if you ever see someone or ‘something’ like me in the future, stay the fuck away. Ryan.” Jake sighed, shaking his head, “There were a lot of people mutating and changing in Baltimore... Although most of their changes weren’t as dramatic as mine, it was still pretty obvious.”

“I know. Everybody knows.” Ryan rolled his blue eyes and pulled up a picture of a giant 3 meter tall monster with five bulky arms, two heads and hundreds of legs on its long fleshy centipede-like body. It was crawling around on the walls, ceiling and floor at the same time, since its lower body was so long. Those eyes were glowing yellow in the darkness and caused Jake to shiver. Remembering the way that old later looked at him before!

“These’re pics and vids from Manhattan... The Quarantine Zone.”

There were some shaky videos of streets filled with thousands of ‘zombies’ down below, wandering the freezing cold streets, totally naked and holding babies or toddlers in their arms. Huge tides of gigantic rats. There were swarms of cockroaches, not necessarily huge either, just the sheer quantity was horrifying. There weren’t many pigeons or other birds in the sky, because it was too cold. The weather there was much worse than Baltimore, so a lot of the zombies and other creatures in the streets were frozen or in the process of freezing.

Inside the buildings, where the temperature was warmer, those creatures were able to breed and survive even more easily. But because there were so many of them in the buildings, tunnels and sewers, many were pushed out into the streets in order to survive and find new territories.

But there were still a lot of ‘safe zones’ within the city, where relatively normal people were able to gather and survive against overwhelming odds. After all, there was a vaccine and various cures. They also knew the weaknesses of those creatures pretty well by now. Ultraviolet Light, Gamma Rays, X-Rays, basically all the generic harmful forms of electromagnetic radiation and good old fashioned nuclear radiation can be used as a weapon against these creatures. There are also biological weapons, like the green algae that was infesting the waters around Manhattan Island. Various chemical weapons they dumped from planes that flew over the city occasionally.

“In other words, they don’t mind nuking Baltimore, but they can’t afford to lose Manhattan? There’s no possible way that this shit hasn’t spread across the world by now.”

Jake snickered, “What about other countries?”

“Who gives a shit about other countries?” Ryan frowned, “The world’s ending and everybody’s still acting like it’s not their problem. My parents are still busy making money. My sister’s addicted to video games. If it wasn’t for the blizzard, I’d have to go to school!”

“I give a shit. Because even if they deal with the infection in the US, sooner or later, the shitstorm from the rest of the world is gonna hit us too.”

Jake reached out and grabbed the phone from the kid, using his left thumb to scroll down through the ‘news’. Which was mostly just disinformation, misinformation and propaganda. However, he could still read between the lines. Considering how much crazy shit was just out there in the open at the moment, he knew that there must be much darker and scarier things hiding in the shadows.

“Moscow was hit by a nuclear missile... Shanghai, Beijing and other major cities have also suffered from nuclear power plant meltdowns or were directly bombed. Tokyo... Los Angeles. Fuck! Shit! It’s too much! There are at least a hundred nuclear power plants melting down at the moment! There are hundreds of cities that have been bombed officially and who knows how

many have been wiped out unofficially. Not to mention the entire continents of Africa and Australia going dark...”

“What’s the big deal?” Even though the little boy was certainly smart, he still didn’t understand the problem.

“What’s the problem?! Nuclear bombs don’t put that much radiation into the atmosphere, but power plants... Especially if they’re ‘intentionally’ made to melt down to artificially increase the ambient radiation like this... This is a goddamn nuclear apocalypse! This level of fallout, shit! How is this any better than a nuclear war?!”

He wasn’t too worried about a nuclear winter. Because realistically speaking, the amount of ash and dust produced by nuclear weapons was nothing compared to volcanoes. The biggest danger was the radioactive materials in the air, water, food, et cetera.

Ryan on the other hand, just shrugged, “Why worry about getting cancer in twenty years when everyone’s a fucking zombie already?”

Chapter 39:

“Thanks. Although I don’t mind being a nudist when I’m alone, it’s different around other people. Especially kids.”

The next day, Ryan came over to Jake’s house again and brought some clothes that fit surprisingly well. They belonged to Ryan’s grandfather, who has been dead for almost three years, yet his mother still hadn’t gotten rid of anything yet. However, their hoarding habits saved Jake a lot of trouble.

‘Food!’

“Nice, I haven’t really had fresh veggies or fruit in a long time. All the cans of shit here are almost inedible... Almost.”

Aside from the suitcase full of clothing, Ryan was also carrying a few white plastic grocery bags full of apples, bananas, potatoes and a head of iceberg lettuce. Of course, there were also some chocolate chip cookies, rice and other random items as well. The kid was a lot stronger than he looked. Then again, it only took a few seconds to walk from one house to the other. There were trees in the way to block line of sight, but the actual distance was really close.

“Everything is so expensive in the grocery store now. And you can’t even buy a lot of shit...”

Ryan sighed as he sat down across the table from Jake, who had already put on his new clothes in the bathroom and came over to the kitchen to start boiling some fresh mussels and clams. Obviously the little brat wasn’t giving him things for free. It was a trade of seafood, which can’t even be bought in the grocery store anymore, for other random kinds of foods that were expensive, but still within the range that the boy could afford.

The boy took off his heavy coat and thick gloves, wearing only a black t-shirt and blue jeans. Revealing bulging muscular arms and a puffed out chest that really didn’t match his age. At only 12 years old, most kids his age were fat or skinny, but he always liked playing sports since he was much younger. He was a popular kid in school, on a Football Team, even played Soccer and photography was something he started after all the shutdowns, lockdowns and other bullshit. He still exercised regularly though.

“Reminds me of Covid.”

Jake sighed as well. He only wore a white t-shirt and gray shorts. The temperature in the house was actually pretty high. He had a bunch of stoves in the kitchen, a fireplace in the living room and a few small electric heaters that went on/off depending on the temperature. The rest of the house that was ‘uninhabited’ or inhabited by other creatures was closed off by doors as much

as possible, to avoid wasting too much fuel and electricity.

“It’s worse than Covid. A lot worse.” Ryan frowned, “You were so lucky. At least you had time to grow up and live your life a little... I’m only twelve and the fucking world is already over.”

“I mean, yeah, but I didn’t even have access to the internet until I was like twelve, hahaha~!” Jake shrugged, “Besides, the past week or so has been more exciting than the previous thirty years of my shitty life.”

Slurp~!

Ryan watched the two pink tongues sticking out of Jake’s palm. They sucked up slices of green apples one at a time, while his webbed left hand was using a fork to eat a salad he made out of lettuce, croutons and salad dressing. Jake’s incisors were more like eight extra, smaller canines, with four big fangs. But he did have relatively normal-looking molars to grind and chew things.

“Are you still... Changing?”

“More slowly than before.” Jake smiled wryly, “The changes were a lot more dramatic and rapid at first. I almost died... More than once.”

“You said you got shot, blown up, burned with acid and eventually nuked.” Ryan snickered, taking a picture of Jake and Vora eating, “Is it contagious?”

“I have no idea.”

Even though Jake said that, Ryan still had the same expression as before on his immature face. He didn’t seem too concerned at all.

“Will I turn into a fishman too? Or some kind of bug person? Do you have superhuman strength? Is your arm bullet-proof?”

“Uh, maybe. Also, who knows? I don’t think my strength is that great though. Vora... Umm, Voracity is what I named my parasite. I’ve been grazed by bullets and shrapnel on my right arm and it left some scratches, but they healed and faded by now. It’s not like some fucking superpower in a comic book or TV Show. But... I definitely feel a lot better now than I ever have before, in my entire life. Which isn’t really saying much. I’ve been sick so many times, injured... Always something wrong. I’m used to it. Now it feels like growing pains, a second growth spurt.”

“I’ve never been sick before.” Ryan snickered, “My whole family got really sick from Covid back then... Grandpa died. Even my sister, uh, Kelly was only sixteen back then. Even she almost died and my parents were pretty sick... But I didn’t even get sick.”

"I had a friend like that when I was growing up. He used to do weird shit like lick the floor in the dirty cafeteria, share drinks with everyone, eat food that fell on the floor... He practically did everything that you're not supposed to do, yet he never got sick. I, on the other hand, got sick all the fucking time, even though I was a lot more cautious and hygienic. He even became an alcoholic and a pothead later, but was totally fine after quitting. I don't know how he's doing now... Bastard just got married and had kids, now the fucking world ends. Haven't talked to him in years..."

"I'm not that disgusting." Ryan frowned, "But I get what you mean. I'm glad my girlfriend didn't get pregnant."

"Goddamn it, you're only twelve and you already have a girlfriend." Jake glared at the little brat with his pitch-black eyes, "I was single for thirty years before Vora found me-"

"Pft~! Hahahaha~! Wait, wait, are you serious? I don't know what's more depressing. The fact that you're a thirty year old virgin or that you consider your alien parasite your girlfriend! Hahaha~!"

"Meh." Jake shrugged, "When you're a teenager, you give a shit about that kinda stuff. When you reach my age, you're already too jaded to care anymore. And I'm only thirty."

"Does 'she' talk to you? I heard that a lot of people who get sick end up hallucinating voices. Telling them to do horrible shit."

"I heard those voices too." Jake shook his head, "Vora is different from them... When those worms were telling me to kill myself or kill people, Vora just wants to live. She likes eating and uh, other things. But we're connected. We're basically two minds sharing the same body."

"Like conjoined twins? I guess that makes sense." Ryan nodded and looked over at the pot of boiling crabs. They were still alive, but after boiling for a few minutes, they were obviously dead by now.

"Basically all the meat, fish, milk and other animal products have been recalled now. I heard that millions of chickens, cows and other livestock have been infected. A lot of people have already abandoned or killed their own pets. It's fucking insane."

"People are stupid. They're even stupider when they're scared." Jake snickered, "I remember back when Covid first started... People overreacted even worse. Then again, everytime some Bird Flu or other sickness crops up, countless animals are slaughtered out of fear."

"You know that green shit is toxic, right?" Ryan frowned when he saw 'Vora' sticking out her tongue and slurping up a big hunk of algae from a bowl on the side.

"So is chocolate. But I still can't help eating it." Jake smirked and picked out a fudge cookie with

his left hand. Then he sighed, "Well, that was a mistake. Chocolate cookies, plus salad, plus algae is definitely not a good taste combination."

