

— Something —
To Teach



The Risen

The Risen

"That if any House be Infected, the sick person or persons be forthwith removed...for the preservation of the rest of the Family...be shut up for forty days, and have a Red Cross, and Lord have mercy upon us, in Capital Letters affixed on the door..."

King Charles II, *Orders for prevention of the Plague*

In these tales, the question looms...what will you do when the dead have risen? People must confront their fears and save their loved ones.

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Nom de Guerre: _____



Creative Writing Prompt

Imagine if your day started like this...

For some reason I was at school early. I walked to school most mornings unless it was raining or really cold outside. It seemed like a pretty normal day. I grabbed some food from the cafeteria then went to hang out in my homeroom teacher's class. Mr. Allen. He was older, bald, and kinda tense, but an okay guy one-on-one so long as you didn't get his blood pressure up. The television was on. I stared at the screen for a moment, then looked at Mr. Allen.

His face was all scrunched up and his eyes were squinting like he was in some sort of pain.

"Hey, Mr. Allen?" I said. "What's going on?"

I figured he was a Social Studies teacher so he would know what was going on in the world. He looked up from his computer screen and stared at me, but he was looking through me.

"People are going crazy," he whispered.

I nodded, and said, "Seems like it. Especially the bus drivers. Aren't they all supposed to be here by now?"

And it was true. The bell was going to ring at any moment, and not a single bus had arrived. I walked over to the window and looked down at the long empty drive in front of the school. Not a single bus had pulled in and parked. The only person in front of the school was the assistant principal.

I stood watching and waiting. I didn't have to wait very long because shortly thereafter a bus angled into the lot and pulled forward to park. Only it didn't park.

The assistant principal broke into a run - aiming straight for the bus. He started waving his arms all crazy and kept pointing.

"And the assistant principal too," I said. "He's going all crazy at the bus driver."

Mr. Allen joined me at the window. Together we watched as the bus driver pulled out of the parking lot, just as three more buses arrived. The assistant principal really went crazy now. The vehicles pulled up and kids started pouring out onto the sidewalks, but it looked like he was trying to get them back onto the buses.

The loudspeaker sounded. It was the principal's voice, but she sounded different. Scared.

"Staff and students," she said, then paused. "I'm afraid everyone is going to have to go home...now. There's something going on and we all need to be with our families right now." There was another pause, and then, honest to God, she started yelling at someone in the background. I don't think she realized that we could all still hear her.

"I don't care," she yelled. "Get those damn buses out of here. Now! We need to get these kids home..." Silence. "Oh my God." Mrs. P realized what she had done - broadcast her rant to the entire school.

"I'm so sorry," she continued, her voice almost normal. "Just go. All of you. Now. Get out of here and go someplace safe. And..." her voice trailed off for a moment. "God bless you."

Mr. Allen looked me - his eyes wide.

"Let's get the hell outta here, son." It was strange to hear him curse. He was always so proper and formal. I nodded...and ran for the door.

Imagine you are the narrator. What happens next? Continue the story in your writing journal/notebook.

Regional Field Investigation Outbreak Report

This form is used to report regional disease outbreak investigations. Complete as much of all sections as possible.

Primary Mode of Transmission

- Food
- Water
- Animal Contact
- Person-to-Person
- Environmental Contamination
- Indeterminate/Other/Unknown

Geographic Location(s)

Reporting state(s): Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio,

Exposure occurred in multiple states Yes No

City/Town/Place of exposure: St. Louis, Effingham, Indianapolis, Columbus (Interstate 70)

Signs or Symptoms

Rapid development of flu-like symptoms, including body aches, chills, fever, followed by coughing, pulmonary hemorrhaging from nose and mouth, cyanosis, and cessation of bodily functions. Progression of symptoms is rapid. Victims display atypical signs of algor and livor mortis. Unexplained signs of post mortem motility.

Laboratory Section

Etiology Known? Yes No

If etiology is unknown, were patient specimens collected? Yes No Unknown

If yes, what were they tested for? (circle all that apply)

Bacteria Chemicals/Toxins Viruses Parasites

Additional Notes

Viral infection, possibly the Immortuiviridae Virus, also known as IMV-1, due to reports of post mortem motility. Considered highly contagious – spread through the air by breathing, coughing, or sneezing. Possible infection by touching an object which is contaminated. Rapid spread of infection along interstate highway system. Predicted spread of disease is both rapid and deadly - likelihood of pandemic.

Paranoia

"Women and children first."

from *The Birkenhead Drill*

Adam flicked on the kitchen lights, walked to the door that led to the back porch, and pulled back the curtain to visually inspect the locks. Both the doorknob and the deadbolt were properly secured. He then checked the front door of their house and the garage door. Everything was locked.

"Adam Shaw," his wife said from the bedroom. "You are the most paranoid man alive. You check those doors every single night. What do you think is going to happen? Someone is going to break into our house? Snatch the kids while we're asleep?"

He walked into the bedroom, looked down at his wife who was lounging comfortably on their bed, and said, "I'm not paranoid. I am appropriately cautious."

"You're paranoid," his wife disagreed. "Some people have a bump of wisdom, or a bump of direction. But you have a bump of paranoia."

"Call it what you like, but I will see to it that this family stays safe. There is no need to take risks, Karen."

"I know it," she soothed. "I'm just teasing. You know I love it how you take care of us."

"That's my job," Adam said simply.

"Yes," Karen agreed, taking his hand, smiling. "Women and children first. Just like on a sinking ship. That's what you always say."



Adam stared at the cashier and the cash register. Both were too far away for his liking, but all of the registers were similarly occupied. It didn't help that his children were grouchy and ill behaved.

"Sam," he cautioned his daughter. "Stop touching your brother. And Wes, leave that alone. I told you both I'm not buying any toys or candy today. Just the basics."

He was tired of shopping and so were his children. The next ten minutes were going to be critical to his sanity. If the line could just move quickly enough so that they could be out the door before the name-calling and making-faces stage began, then all would be well.

"Come on people," Adam whispered, staring at a middle-aged woman who had just presented the cashier with a plethora of paper coupons - some were expired, others were not. The two began the tedious task of sorting through the coupons, separating the good from the bad.

As Adam and his two young children inched forward, his view of the outside world, and imminent freedom, changed perspective. He could now see beyond the confines of the parking lot and out onto the interstate that teemed with afternoon rush hour traffic. The steady pulse of cars and trucks flowed both north and south.

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Something in the corner of his field of vision caught his eye. He looked down. "Wes," Adam said. "I told you to leave that alone. We're almost done here."

He looked back outside and was lost momentarily, mesmerized by moving people and cars. Finally it was their turn to unload the contents of their cart. Just in time.

"Daddy," Samantha whined. "Wesley is looking at me."

He looked down at his daughter and was about to scold when his eyes snapped back to the exit and the outside world. He saw debris cascading through the air.

"What the hell..." he breathed. There was no sound. No explosion could be heard from this distance, but the impact of the semi tractor-trailer with the overpass was spectacular. The cab of the truck caved in as the inertia of the trailer carried it forward, tearing it apart and scattering the contents of the trailer all over the interstate.

"Look at that," Adam said, pointing. The cashier turned and gasped at the carnage. Samantha and Wesley craned their necks but were still too short to see anything.

"What's wrong?" Wes asked.

"I want to see too!" Samantha insisted. "Lift me up, Daddy. Please?"

Adam ignored them as he watched the drama unfold. Drivers on the interstate acted and reacted, some adding to the carnage while others managed to avoid the ever-growing mess.

"Somebody better call 9-1-1," the cashier announced, but no one reached for his or her cell phone. Other people inside the store began to stream towards the door in search of a better view. Adam continued to watch as he unloaded the contents of his cart. Somehow his children sensed the gravity of the situation and remained quiet.

There were people milling about the crash site, a crowd gathering, looking and hoping for survivors. People were dazed and confused. It was difficult to discern from a distance who was the victim and who was a Samaritan.

"Did you want any cash back?" the cashier asked.

For the briefest moment Adam looked away from the crash scene and down at the card reader. He swiped his card, dialed his code, and then hit "enter".

"No. Thank you," he replied. When Adam looked up the scene had changed. Even from inside the store, several hundred yards away, he knew something was wrong. He squinted. People were scattering in all different directions - away from the truck. A lone figure stood in the middle of the ever-expanding circle of panicked people in flight.

"What's going on?" Adam wondered aloud. It appeared as though the solitary figure was wearing a dark red shirt, but then it turned and Adam moaned, "Oh no."

It was not a red shirt. It was stained with blood, and an arm was missing. As it shambled toward

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the fleeing people, Adam could clearly see that its head lolled to one side at an unnatural angle.

He knew at once what he must do. He didn't know how he knew. He just did.

"Samantha! Wesley!" he barked. "Move!"

He scooped up his daughter and unceremoniously dumped her in the baby seat, then snatched up his son and held him against his body with one arm while he shoved the cart forward with his free hand. Tears welled up in Samantha's eyes while Wesley just looked afraid. There was a sudden intensity, almost a ferocity, in their father. They had never seen this before and were afraid.

Adam ran for the door as fast as he could, ignoring the stares of indignant patrons. He burst outside and rushed into the parking lot, heedless of oncoming traffic. When he made it to his car, Adam stopped and listened. As his eyes scanned the parking lot for signs of logjams he thought, "No sirens. Not yet."

He looked over toward the crash site and shook his head. "I don't care about the overpass," he thought. "I'll find another way across. Get the kids in the car and call Karen."

"Get in the car now," he told his children. Samantha was openly crying now. "Buckle up. Hurry."

For a moment all the pair of children could do was stare in fear at their father. They were scared, confused, and just stood frozen. Adam paused, saw their fear, and took his daughter's pig-tailed head in his hands and kissed the top of it.

"Sam," he told her. "It's going to be okay. Just listen to me real close. Do exactly what I say. Okay?"

She nodded, blinking away tears. Adam hugged his son to him and told him, "Be a big boy and help your sister, Wes. All right?"

Wesley wanted to cry too. He'd never seen his father act like this before and he was terrified. Adam popped the trunk as his children dutifully climbed into the car and buckled themselves. He literally threw the contents of the cart into the truck with no thought given to smashing the bread or bruising the bananas. He didn't even bother to put the shopping cart into the shopping cart corral. He just shoved it away and made for the driver's seat.

Fumbling with both his keys in the ignition and his cell phone, Adam managed to get his car started and a dial tone for his wife. He hit the "speakerphone" button and dropped it on the seat next to him. Tires squealed as he laid down a patch of rubber out of the parking space.

"Samantha. Wesley," he said, gritting his teeth as he veered just in time from sideswiping a car. "Daddy has to drive very, very fast. Do you understand?" He risked a look in the rearview mirror. Their eyes were wide. "I want you to hang on to your car seats as tight as you can. I'm going to drive very fast, but not too fast."

"Adam?" a voice sounded on his cell phone's speaker. "Is that you?"

"Karen!" he shouted. "Can you hear me? Hang on." He careened out of the parking lot and approached the oncoming red light at breakneck speed. He slowed down slightly, but didn't stop as he laid on his car's horn and rolled through the intersection. Protesting horns sounded as other cars

with the right-of-way squealed to a stop.

"Adam, what is going on?" his wife asked. "Are the kids all right?"

"Just be quiet and listen to me," he said tightly. "Do you understand? You need to be quiet and listen to me right now. And you need to do exactly what I tell you to do."

"Adam," his wife said, her voice shaking. "You're scaring me. What's going on?"

He cursed to himself. Adam didn't want to scream at his wife, but she needed to understand the gravity of the situation. With as much control as he could muster, he said, "Stop talking and do exactly what I tell you. Do you understand me?"

He waited. There was silence at first as he heard his wife sniffle back tears, then a tentative "Yes."

"You have to do exactly what I say. Right now. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Karen insisted. "I'll do whatever you say, but you haven't told me anything to do. Please, tell me..."

"Get in your car and get home as fast as you can. Now!"

"But I can't just..."

"Do it now, Karen!" Adam yelled. "For God's sake, you have to listen to me. Don't shut down your computer. Don't tell your boss that you're leaving. Get your purse and get out of there as fast as you can. Run!"

"Oh God," he heard her say. "What's happening? Please let my babies be okay." He listened as her breathing became rapid. In the background he heard someone say, "Karen, what's the matter?"

Adam's eyes went wide as he slammed on the brakes, fishtailing slightly, and barely stopped in time. The eyeballs staring back at him in the rearview mirror were wide. He heard Samantha whimper.

"It's all right, baby," he reassured.

"Adam was that you?" his wife asked, still on the phone. "What's going on? Talk to me?"

He ignored her request as he jerked on the steering wheel, pulled around the annoyed driver in front of him, and pulled into and through another intersection.

"Are you driving?" Adam said. "Tell me you're in your car and you're driving."

"Yes," Karen replied anxiously. "I'm in the car. I'm..."

"Good," he cut her off. "Now get home as fast as possible and as safely as possible. Slow down at stop signs and red lights, but do not stop. Do you understand? Don't hit anyone and try not to cause any accidents, but you get yourself home now. I don't care if someone calls the cops or if a cop comes after you. Don't stop. Just get home as fast as you can."

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Adam's wife briefly considered the possibility that her husband had gone insane. There was no history of mental illness in either family. Her husband was a calm, levelheaded man. The only thing that could possibly set him off in such a manner was if the children were in danger.

"Tell me the kids are safe," she demanded.

"The kids are fine," Adam snapped, looking up in the rearview mirror and scanning the pair. They weren't fine. They were scared witless - too scared to speak. "Where are you now?"

"I'm at Thompson and 14th Street."

"You need to drive faster, Karen," he said. "Run the red lights and don't stop at stop signs. You have got to hurry."

"I'm hurrying," she insisted. "Why can't you tell me what's going on?"

"Not now," Adam said. "Not in front of the kids."

Karen groaned in frustration as she pressed down on the accelerator and surged past a slower-moving vehicle.



Adam heard brakes then an engine revving followed by two voices sounding in unison.

"Mom's home," Samantha and Wesley chorused.

"Go get her," Adam encouraged. The two bolted for the door, tears dripping anew as they sought the comfort of their mother's arms. Karen saw them burst from the door and barely put her vehicle in park before she jumped from the driver's seat. The two practically bowled her over as she gathered them to her.

"It's all right, Sam. It's all right, Wes," she reassured, trying to kiss away their tears and their fears. She let their emotions run their course before ushering them to the front door. As she pulled open the door, her husband appeared.

"Good," he said. "I'm glad you're here. Kids," he looked at his children. "Why don't you two go into the living room? I turned on a movie. I need to talk to your mother for just a minute."

More tears welled up in Samantha's eyes, tears that threatened to spill over. Having just got a hold of their mother, they were loath to give her up even for a moment. Karen hugged her daughter to her, leaned over and kissed Wesley, and whispered, "I'll be right there. I promise."

Reluctantly the two children shuffled into the family room with longing stares at their mother. Karen smiled at them, then turned to her husband when they were out of eyesight and earshot, eyes narrowing, "What is going on?"

"I don't know," Adam admitted. "I'm not..."

"What?" Karen practically shrieked, fighting to keep calm. "I almost killed myself getting here..."

Adam reached out and grabbed his wife by the arms.

"Listen to me," he said. "Listen to me."

Karen stopped. There was no feverish light in his eyes. No signs of temporary insanity. He was looking at her intently.

"My husband has to have a good reason for acting this way," she thought. She took a deep breath, held it, and then exhaled, calming herself.

"I'm listening."

"I told you I'm not sure what is going on," Adam said. "But something is happening. I've turned on the news in our bedroom, but nothing much is happening on the television. Still, I don't want the kids watching television at all. They might see something. All of the doors are locked right now and I want you to keep them locked. The blinds are closed and I want them to stay closed too. Are you with me?"

Karen nodded. She was trying to take it all in. She had to ask.

"If there's nothing happening on the news, then how do you know that something is wrong?" she asked. Her husband shook his head.

"I saw something," he said slowly. "While we were at the store. I'm not..."

What had he seen? A dead person walking? The crash site was at least one hundred yards away from where he'd been standing inside the store. He hadn't seen things too clearly, so how could he be so certain? How could he know for sure?

"What did you see?"

"I'm going to the store."

"I thought you were just at the store," Karen said. "Why do you need to go back to the store?"

Adam thought, "I'm wasting time. Standing here and talking to her. It's a waste of precious time trying to explain something that I can't explain. I don't know how I know. I just do. I can feel it in my gut. I knew it the instant I saw it. Maybe others did too? People that were closer and could really see what happened. Maybe they're doing the same thing I'm doing?"

"Wasting time," he said aloud. "I don't have time to explain. I've got to go. I'll be back soon. Don't answer the door for anyone. No matter what. Do you understand? This is very important. Don't open the door for anyone."

"Are the police looking for someone?"

"Uh, something like that," Adam hedged. "Just make sure that you don't open the door no matter what. I've got to go. Okay?"

"Can't you..." Karen was at a loss for words. Adam stopped her.

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"Take care of the kids," he told her. "Take care of the kids. That's all I need you to do right now."

"Okay," she faltered. "I'll take care of the kids."

He kissed her quickly, and then turned to sprint for his wife's vehicle. It was a Chevy Suburban and it could be loaded with far more of the food and supplies he wanted than his own sedan.

"First thing I need to get is food," he thought. "The grocery store is only a few minutes away. I can probably make a few trips if I need to. If I have to. I may even be able to make it to the hardware store before it closes."

Adam's mind was racing. There were too many things to consider. How soon before things got bad? How soon before people started flooding the stores in a panic? Could he beat the rush? How soon before things started going to hell? There was no way to tell.

"Just get as much as I can as fast as I can," he told himself. A new thought struck him. "Maybe Karen can get to the drug store? It would be better if we worked together - both of us grabbing as much as we can. But what do I tell her?"

The world was coming to an end?

"No," he said aloud. "I know what I know. I don't know how or why but something terrible is about to happen - is happening. And it started with that crash on the interstate."

He turned on the radio and scanned the talk stations for the latest news. He listened to two brief news snippets before turning off the radio and dialing his wife.

"Karen?" he asked when she answered. "What are you doing?"

"Watching the movie with the kids," she answered. "I keep going back to the bedroom to check the news. Adam, I haven't seen anything awful on the news. No alerts or anything."

"Good," he said. "Here's what I want you to do."

"Oh no!" Karen said. "What now? What do you want me to do now?"

"Trust me. I want you to trust me. I think we have some time to prepare. A little bit of time before..." Adam was a loss for words. How do you explain something that you know in your gut but your head refuses to acknowledge? How could he expect his wife to listen to him when he didn't exactly know what to tell her?

"Before what?" she pleaded.

"I told you," he hesitated, pulling into the grocery store parking lot. "I don't exactly know." He wished that the big box wholesale store was closer, but Adam didn't want to risk getting caught too far from home. "You just have to trust me on this one. Here's what I want you to do. Get the kids in the car and go to the drug store. The one right by our house. Make sure you lock the doors when you leave and turn out all the lights. I don't want you far from home. No matter what."

"I'll stay close to home. I promise."

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"When you get in the car, turn on one of the talk radio stations and listen to the news. I know Sam and Wes will complain, but tell them you need to hear the news. If you hear anything strange before you get to the drug store, then turn around and get home as fast as you can. Lock the doors and wait for me to get home."

"What do you want me to get at the drug store?"

"Okay," he took a deep breath. "I want every bottle of aspirin and ibuprofen they'll let you buy. Cold medicine."

"Batteries?" she asked.

"Yes," Adam replied. "Get as many as you can. Extra flashlights too, if they have any. Have Wesley push a cart and you push a cart. Then get some bandages, shaving gel, and razor blades. Go to the health food aisle and get a bunch of vitamins. All sorts."

"Come on, kids," Karen called out. "We're going shopping."

Adam heard Samantha whine in the background. "But Mommy I want to finish watching the movie!"

"Sammy," she told her daughter. "We'll finish watching when we get back."

Adam was glad his wife was moving the kids along rather than waiting for them to finish their telephone conversation.

"Adam?" Karen asked. "Do you want me to..." she searched for the words. "Get enough stuff so that we don't have to leave the house for a while?"

Adam heaved a terrific sigh. She understood - at last. He pushed his way into the grocery and made for the cart storage area near the entrance.

"Karen, I love you," he said. "That's exactly what I want. Get everything you can possibly think of. Everything."

"I'm going to use the credit card," she said. "I can buy more." Her mind was racing now too. She didn't understand it, but she wasn't going to fight it. "I'll make it a game for the kids. There's a magazine section at the drugstore. I'll get some magazines and books for you, me, and the kids."

"Good thinking," he agreed. "And whatever else you think we might need. If you think you can make more than one trip before I get back, then do it."

"I'm going to fill up the car with gas too. And maybe grab a pizza for dinner. The kids will like that. We'll make tonight pizza and movie night instead of Friday night."

"That's perfect," Adam said, pushing his cart into the canned vegetable aisle. He started at one end and began stacking cans and jars of beans, carrots, corn, and potatoes into his cart.

"Adam?" she asked, her voice suddenly tentative. "Are we going to be all right? I mean, are we..."

"Not if I can help it," he replied. "Not if I can help it."



Adam walked through their darkened house, checking the locks by touch. All of the doorknobs and deadbolts were properly secured. Still, he sighed in frustration.

"This place isn't safe," he thought. "Somebody could get in here if he really wanted to." Adam shook his head. The house wasn't nearly secure enough by his new standards, but there wasn't much he could do about it in the dark. They did have food, water, and supplies to last for the time being, but Adam was still not satisfied. He said a silent prayer as he padded silently back to his bedroom, stepped over his two gently snoring children who were sprawled out on a pallet of blankets and pillows at the foot of their bed, and climbed into bed with his wife. She smiled at him.

"Does everything look okay?" Karen asked.

"It's all good," he lied. She looked at her husband soberly.

"Is that what your bump of paranoia is telling you?" she asked.

Adam smiled. He didn't want to admit to his wife what his appropriately cautious nature was telling him, so he asked, "You remember when was Sam was a baby?"

"Well sure," she said, smiling at the memory.

"Remember how I would stay up late with her if she was fussing? Then you would take over around three in the morning?"

Karen's smile faded slightly, understanding dawning.

"You take the first watch," she said. "I'll take the second."

"That sounds good," he said, grateful for his wife's understanding. "Women and children sleep first."

Karen nestled next to her husband, who leaned over, kissed her, then sat up to stare at the television screen. She fell asleep knowing that he would remain wide-awake, vigilant. He would remain awake, carefully scanning the news channels because there were now strange reports of unexplained events involving injury, death, and the risen dead. The reports made his bump of paranoia throb.

End

Experientia Docet

"The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."

William Shakespeare, from *Henry VI*

The school counselor stared at the young man who slouched in his seat at the conference table. The young man, Ryan, was fifteen and wore a bored expression. The adults at the table were discussing his fate. He stared out the window, oblivious to the proceedings, wondering instead about zombies. The counselor considered pleasant thoughts of an unnatural and unpleasant fate befalling the young man and his defendants, including being eaten by the living dead.

"Mr. Marshall?"

"Yes?" the counselor replied, snapping out of his welcome reverie. It was the attorney for the young man. Marshall considered anything out of the man's mouth a lie, but he couldn't say so. He couldn't even hint at his true feelings. Instead, he attempted a smile, hoping to muster some semblance of a professional demeanor.

"How much contact have you had with the parents? My clients feel that both the amount and scope of the communication from the school has been insufficient to provide a complete picture of their son's academic and social progress."

Marshall brandished a file, replete with copies of email communications from his office to the parents detailing numerous incidents - both academic and otherwise - involving their son. The attorney waved him off.

"I've seen the emails," the attorney said. "I'm not concerned with emails. I'm talking about actual telephone conversations with Mr. and Mrs. Bonham. There seems to be a dearth of real communication between the parties. If the situation were as serious as your school corporation seems to think, then why were there no phone calls? If there were phone calls, why is there no record of these calls? I find that I am troubled."

Mr. Marshall considered his words before speaking. There were no records of phone calls. He cursed inwardly at his lack of foresight. He was normally very careful. Careful in his handling of parents and students alike. This time, however, he hadn't documented every single detail. The end of the school year loomed, and it was a busy time. He had neglected to write down the dates, times, and nature of his phone calls to Ryan's parents. Certainly phone calls had been made. But without the specific details of the phone calls, the attorney could, and would, argue that no phone calls had been made. The devil was in the details.

"I believe Mr. and Mrs. Bonham know that school officials kept them adequately apprised of the scope and nature of the discipline problems we were facing with their son. Phone calls were made..."

"Where is the record of these phone calls?" the attorney interrupted.

Marshall restrained himself, looking calmly at the man. "I believe that..."

Again the attorney interrupted.

Something to Teach

"But what is the hearing officer going to believe?" It was not a veiled threat. Things had yet to progress to formal legal proceedings, but here was this man openly threatening it. The parents sat mute. They'd been carefully instructed to refrain from speaking during this meeting. Thus far both mother and father had remained largely silent, letting the attorney take the lead in what was supposed to be an informal meeting with all interested parties in a discussion about their son's future at the school. Most informal meetings don't require legal counsel.

"I think a hearing officer would see," Marshall said, tapping the file of emails, "that we have taken appropriate steps to keep Mr. and Mrs. Bonham informed."

The attorney was not dissuaded.

"Can you tell me what you've tried to do to help this young man?" he asked. "Aside from trying to punish him?"

Marshall looked at the parents, then turned back to the lawyer.

"I tried to talk with him. To have a conversation with him. To help him understand that he needs to grow up."

The attorney shook his head. "Mr. Marshall, I think..."

It was Marshall's turn to interrupt. He was tired of this nonsense.

"He needs to grow up," he said. "Plain and simple. Yesterday, Ryan told several young ladies in his U.S. History class that he was going to cut their heads off and feed them to the zombies that are supposedly running amok. This because they had asked him to stop tapping his pencil...repeatedly. The ladies were upset by his threat and informed their teacher. The teacher asked Ryan about the matter and he told the teacher to go to hell and walked out of the classroom."

The lawyer stared blankly at these pronouncements. Mrs. Bonham, at least, had the good graces to flinch slightly.

"When I found Ryan," Marshall continued, "hiding in one of the upstairs bathrooms I escorted him to my office where we had a conversation." He paused. "Rather, I attempted to have a conversation. I spoke. Ryan told me to go to hell and refused to come out of the stall."

Ryan smiled at the memory, then his eyes went wide as he stared out the window of the conference room.

"Hey!" he yelled, suddenly jumping to his feet. "Check it out,"

He stood, pointing out the window.

"It's one of those zombies. The risen dead."

"Ryan, sit down."

Ryan ignored his father.

Marshall rose slightly from his chair for a better look. He did so more from a desire to ensure the safety of the school population than any belief in zombies or Ryan's words.

"You see him, Mr. Marshall?" Ryan asked. Marshall wasn't sure what he saw. A man in bloodstained clothing was shuffling awkwardly across the front lawn of the school. That didn't mean he was a zombie. The man probably needed medical attention.

"If you'll excuse me," Marshall said, reaching for the radio he wore on his hip. "I think that man needs help."

The lawyer started to puff up, but the counselor cut him off.

"This can wait," he said in short, clipped tones. "Someone needs help. I'll be right back."

Marshall moved quickly to the door, calling on the radio to the school resource officer as he moved. "Marshall to Officer Thompson. Marshall to Officer Thompson."

The radio crackled. "This is Thompson. Go ahead."

"There's a man on the front lawn. He might need medical attention. Can you meet me by the front door?"

There was a pause. Marshall waited, keyed the microphone and asked, "Did you hear me?"

Another long pause.

"Do not engage. I repeat do not engage. Make sure the front door is secure and remain inside. Do you copy?"

"Got it."

Marshall started running. What was happening? Should he call a lockdown? Was he being paranoid? Thoughts swirled in his head. Unpleasant thoughts. Ryan's words echoed in his head. Risen dead.

"First priority," he panted, standing at the main entrance, grateful that the conference room was close. "...secure the building."

Officer Thompson arrived moments later.

"See anything?" he asked.

"There," Marshall said, pointing. Shuffling closer to the front doors of the school building was the same bloodstained man Ryan had seen. Marshall squinted, studying the figure, trying to assess the situation. Officer Thompson was a touch faster in his assessment.

"We need to lock this place down," he said softly. "Now."

The counselor didn't hesitate or ask why. He knew better. Grateful that all outside entrances and exits to the school building were locked during normal business hours, he stepped over to the nearest desk, reached for the phone, and pressed the alert button. Suddenly his voice could be heard throughout the entire school building.

"Lockdown. Lockdown. Lockdown. This is not a drill. Please secure your classrooms at this time. We are now in a lockdown situation."

Moments later two figures burst into the main office - the principal and assistant principal.

"Marshall!" the principal barked. "What's going..."

His words were interrupted by the staccato popping of gunfire. The trio turned to see the school resource officer standing with his service weapon drawn. The bloodstained figure was on the ground, both knees shattered by bullets, but still moving and seemingly unfazed by its wounds. Moving inexorably toward the police officer. Marshall watched as the man moved backwards, weapon still trained on the slow-moving figure, while simultaneously calling on his police radio.



There were problems to consider.

"What do we do?" the principal asked, dismayed. He was a capable administrator, but the situation was beyond his scope of understanding or training. The man was at a loss. Officer Thompson had already left to do a sweep of the entrances and exits to the building - the sanitation crew assisted having been duly deputized in the process.

"We keep the kids safe," Marshall said. "Keep the kids safe."

"But what do we do?"

The counselor didn't hesitate. Action had to be taken. Any action. As long as they were doing something, then people would be less likely to panic. With over a thousand students in their building, the thought of a panicked mob sent shivers of cold fear prickling up Marshall's spine. They were in charge and they needed to act like they were in charge of the school and the situation.

"We don't want to send anything over the announcements," he said. "That would panic people." He paused, thinking. Then it hit him. "The teachers still have access to their e-mail accounts. We can let them know what to do by e-mail."

"But what about the teachers that are going to panic?" the assistant principal asked. "Some of them are going to freak. You know that don't you? And what about the parents?"

Parents. Mr. and Mrs. Bonham! Marshall's eyes widened as he remembered the parents he'd left sitting in the conference room. He started moving.

Something to Teach

"Hang on," Marshall called over his shoulder. "I left some parents in the conference room. I need to talk to them. Make sure they don't leave. I'll be right back."

When he pushed open the door to the conference room he saw Ryan peering out the window, trying to get a better look at the drama outside.

"Get away from the bloody window," Marshall snapped. "We're under a lockdown. You know better."

"This is awesome!" was his only reply.

"Now see here," the lawyer said, starting to puff up.

Marshall thought fleetingly of his career as he let his professional demeanor slip. He swept the room with his gaze. "Shut up," he said. "All of you. We're..."

"You mind if I use the bathroom?" Ryan interrupted.

The counselor walked to where the young man stood, curled his fists into Ryan's shirt, picked him up bodily, and held him close - their noses inches apart.

"Listen up, Ryan," Marshall hissed through clenched teeth. "You're going to do exactly what I say when I say it. And if you so much as look at me sideways, I'm going to throw you out the front door of this building and those risen things are going to have you for lunch. You understand me?"

The rest of the adults stood in shocked silence. Unable to speak. Barely able to comprehend his words. The teenager nodded. He knew full well Mr. Marshall meant what he said. Ryan wasn't stupid. He also knew that his days of pushing the limits were over. His parents had lots of money. Enough money to hire lawyers to get him out of trouble. Money didn't matter so much any more. Survival was more important.

"Yes, I understand," he said, eyes wide with fear.

End

Carpet Dien

"Seize the day, put no trust in the morrow!"
Horace

"This has got to be the worst day of my life," Rob spat. One frantic phone call from his wife, abruptly cut short, told him everything he needed to know.

"Rob," she'd whimpered into the phone. "They're in here. In the office. You've got to come help. Please hurry." Then suddenly he'd heard his wife scream, "Oh my God, no! Tommy get..."

And that was it. He was left standing in the living room, holding his phone, thinking about how to save his wife and children from the risen dead.

"I need to get there and back - safely. Can't take any chances," he told himself.

He thought furiously. Rob knew better than to take foolish risks such as running pell-mell into the street with no regard for his safety. It wouldn't do much good if he went and got himself killed before he even reached his family.

"I should be safe in the car," he said. "Unless somebody crashes into me. The real problem will be getting in and out of the office. There's bound to be lots of those things all over the place. They're probably going to come after me, and I can't let them bite me. No matter what. There's a good chance that more than one is actually going to get its teeth on me."

Time was running out. Every minute he spent frozen in thought was one minute that might mean life or death for his family.

"Come on and think!" Rob yelled. "I've got a brain. What's the answer?"

Rob caught himself. Getting frantic was not going to solve the problem. He took a deep breath and looked around the living room.

"I have to leave in five minutes," he said aloud. "What do I have right here and right now that I can use to protect myself?"

The irony of the statement was not lost on him. Their living room was all but bare. Freshly laid carpet stretched from wall to wall. It had been a frustrating do-it-yourself project he'd managed to complete in twice the anticipated amount of time and three times over budget, especially after he'd insisted on putting down one of the more expensive brands of carpet flooring. This added expense had provoked an argument between he and his cost-conscious wife. His eyes ran across the length and width of the floor that had cost him so much in time, money, effort, and frustration.

"Right here. Right now," he whispered. "What do I have?"

And then he knew.

Without a second lost on tears for all of his hard work, Rob ran for the garage.

"I've got all of the tools," he thought. "This might just work."

Something to Teach

Feverishly, he found the tools he'd recently used to lay the new carpet scattered about the garage - a nearly new hammer tacker for securing carpet to the floor, a box of carpet pad staples, a carpet knife, and two rolls of duct tape. After finding what he needed, Rob ran back to the living room and surveyed his handiwork. All of his blood, sweat, and tears for nothing. The smell of fresh carpet filled the room and his senses. It looked perfect.

Then he dropped everything but the knife and attacked the center of the carpet. With one long stroke of the blade Jim cut a long straight swath about five feet long.

"Looks good," he said, then proceeded to cut the carpet into ribbons - each strip varied in length as he was not being terribly careful to make uniform cuts. Most were three to five feet long and one to two feet wide. By the time he was finished there was a pile of carpet strips near a wall and carpet fibers littered everywhere. The whole job had taken longer than he'd wanted to, but saw little help for it. Rob wasn't about to take unnecessary risks.

With a hurried glance at his watch, he told himself, "Time to go. This is going to have to do."

Rob gathered up an armload of carpet strips and ran to the front door. When he stepped outside he quickly scanned the neighborhood, alert for any strange or slow-moving forms. No one was on the street, but he heard car horns and sirens in the distance. Ducking quickly to the end of the driveway, he unlocked the car doors and dumped his armload of carpet into the front passenger seat. He raced back into the house and to the car two more times before all of the carpet strips were loaded, along with all of the tools he'd collected.

Looking at the loaded car, he had one final moment of inspiration.

"I need work boots and gloves," he said. "I've got to protect my hands and feet."

Rob ran back into the garage, scavenged for the gardening gloves his wife wore in the spring and autumn when she ventured outdoors to attend to their shrubs and fallen leaves, found them, and then snatched up his heavy leather work boots. He almost forgot to lock the front door of their home as he left.

"Not that anyone is going to come knocking," he thought, "but better to be safe."

Finally, Rob was in his car, scanning the roads for danger, speeding to his wife's office. She was a real estate agent and shared office space with about ten other agents in a single story building. There was a strip mall nearby so traffic was fairly heavy during the morning and afternoon rush hours.

"Let's hope I can get through without too much trouble."

Rob didn't even bother to turn on the radio. He already knew what he'd hear. Reports of a pandemic spreading through the various peoples of the world. Civil unrest. Rioting. People dying. And worse.

"The Risen," he whispered. There were more and more reports of people who'd died from the unnamed plague coming back to life. Only these folks weren't risen from the dead to spread glad tidings of the God's reward in the hereafter. These flesh-eating zombies appeared only interested in adding to the ranks of the Risen. He risked a glance at the carpet next to him.

"They can't bite me if they can't get to me."

And that was the sudden inspiration he'd had. From somewhere in the depths of his memories he remembered reading about Doughboys during World War I who used strips of carpet thrown over barbed wire to protect themselves as they raced through the No Man's Land between the trenches.

"If carpet," he reasoned, "can protect a soldier from barbed wire, then it sure as hell can protect me from zombie bites. And this world looks like it's turning into a No Man's Land."

He pulled up to an intersection. There was a car in front of his, unmoving. The light was green. Rob looked closely at the driver's seat - empty.

"I'm not sticking around to find out where the driver is."

He pulled on the steering wheel and sped around the immobile vehicle, only to slam on the brakes too late. There was a sickening crunch as the right front of his car went up and over the figure of a woman sprawled on the ground.

"Oh no," he whispered, pulling hard on the wheel, and easing away from the body. He looked in the mirror, and saw a bloody form still on the ground. The thing raised its head and stared at him with lifeless eyes.

Rob stomped the pedal to the floor as hard as he could. The four-cylinder engine strained, revving higher and louder, as the grisly scene faded in the distance. His heart raced as a million thoughts flooded his mind. He started to slip into a state of shock as intersections and other vehicles blurred past.

"They're going to be fine," he said. "They're going to be fine. They've got to be fine."

As he came to the top of a low rise that bottomed out at his wife's office, Rob's face went white.

"This can't be happening," he groaned, looking down at the carnage. The streets and parking lots on both sides of the road were festooned with bodies, blood, and empty cars that were parked, crashed, and abandoned. Chaos. There were people down there too. Some figures were running, apparently for some sort of safety, while the rest were in slow, steady pursuit of those in search of escape. Few of the living were winning the race. Even fueled by fear, most were too out of shape to run long distances or were simply paralyzed by fear. Fortunately the street was mostly clear up to his wife's office. Beyond that the chaos grew exponentially.

"I don't want to be out in the open if I can help it," Rob thought. "But I don't want to get caught in a traffic jam either. That means I'm not going to the grocery store. Supplies are going to have to wait. I need to be able to get out of here as soon as possible, and that parking lot looks a mess."

Rob slowed the car, peering closely at his wife's place of business. It appeared largely intact. There were no broken windows. There was no smoke or flames leaping from the roof. The main entrance looked intact as well. The lot had only a few cars in it.

"People probably bugged out early," he thought. "Didn't want to stick around for the main event - hell on earth."

He edged his car around another vehicle that stood unmoving in the street. There was no oncoming traffic so it was easy to avoid the obstacle without stopping. A dark form flashed in his rearview mirror, catching his attention.

"Stupid!" he hissed. With all of his focus on the tableau before him, he'd completely forgotten to pay attention to what was happening behind him. The first shambling figure was joined by a second. They were headed his way.

"There may be more," he thought, "and I can't go off-roading in this car. I have to stay on the streets. If too many of those risen things crowd the streets, I'm in trouble."

Rob pushed the negative thoughts aside. He slid into a parking space directly in front of the main entrance and cracked a window, listening. No noise came from inside the office building, but there were cries from the nearby strip mall and other sounds of pandemonium and despair. For a moment, he was lost in indecision.

"Do I lock the doors when I get out?" he wondered. "Or leave the car running?"

He considered briefly the possibility of a living person stealing his car and opted for caution.

"I'll take the keys but leave it unlocked," he said. "I might not have time to wrestle with the keys. Okay. Time to get ready."

Rob reached for his heavy work boots just as the front door of the office building opened. The man, if you could still call him that, was wearing a bloodstained shirt and tie, and his head lolled to one side at an unnatural angle. One foot was turned out at an equally unnatural angle. It made his already unsteady shuffle all the more ungainly. Rob sucked in a breath sharply.

"That's Mark Evans," he whispered. "Oh no! What if I'm too late? Please God, let Amanda and the kids be all right."

He pulled the keys from the ignition, jammed them into his pocket, then reached for the hammer tacker that lay atop the pile of carpet strips.

"I need a weapon," he thought. "This will have to do. No time to get myself wrapped up in carpet. Just gotta go and hope for the best. Better take some of these in case."

He pushed open his door with his leg while simultaneously grabbing and dumping a load of carpet strips on the ground. Quickly he got a second load onto the ground just as his wife's erstwhile colleague shambled up to the car.

Rob fought the urge to retch as he looked at the man, pushing up and out of the car.

"What a mess!" he said. "What an awful mess."

Without thinking, and more importantly, without panicking, Rob reached down with his left hand and grabbed a strip of carpet, while carefully watching the thing before him. He flexed the fingers of his right hand around the hammer tacker.

Something to Teach

"Please God," he prayed aloud. "Let me be better at working with carpet here and now than I was home. Amen."

He moved quickly to the shuffling creature that continued to draw closer still, again fighting the urge to vomit, and held up the carpet to its face. It reached for him just as Rob swung the hammer tacker. The staple went cleanly through the carpet and embedded firmly in the skull of the dead man. The contact didn't slow it even slightly. It continued to move forward, clutching, as Rob swung the tool three more times. With each sickening crunch against carpet and cranium, the living man fought the urge to throw up. When he finished swinging, the creature stopped moving. It stood swaying. Rob pushed it away then bent forward, the contents of his stomach emptying on the sidewalk. He stood shakily, wiping vomit from his mouth.

"Can't see me," he heaved, breathless. "Can't bite me. Time to get the kids."

Stooping to retrieve an armload of carpet from the ground, he made for the front door. Down the street, three more shambling figures joined the macabre parade, slowly headed toward Rob and his family. He didn't think about this. He didn't worry about this. All of his attention and focus was centered on the main entrance to the office building and what he might find when he pushed through the doors.

The man hurried to the entrance and took a deep breath. As he reached from underneath the load of carpet to pull on the door handle, it suddenly opened, startling him.

"Ahhh!" Rob cried, nearly face to face with a blank-eyed, slack-jawed young woman with disheveled hair and blood all over her. Almost involuntarily he lashed out with a kick. His foot caught her in the stomach, sending her stumbling backwards. Rob caught the door with the same foot, followed by his shoulder as he moved indoors.

"Amanda!" he bellowed, stepping in to deliver another kick to its midsection. This time it went sprawling.

"Amanda!" Rob yelled again. Listening for sounds of his wife and looking at the sprawled form of the young woman, he suddenly had an idea. Rob dropped all but one of the strips of carpet and stepped up to the prone form. He could look at it now without reacting. There was no involuntary urge to retch. Planting a foot firmly on its blood-soaked chest, holding it down and still, Rob draped the carpet strip over its head and swung the hammer tacker again and again. Only this time he didn't merely affix the carpet to its head. The strip was long enough for him to secure the ends of the carpet onto the floor. It struggled, reaching and grasping, but was not able to escape its bonds.

"Rob?" a plaintive voice called out, muffled by walls.

"Amanda! Are you..." he stopped, staring at two more forms that suddenly appeared, moving toward him.

"Hang on!" Rob yelled. "I'll be right there. Give me a minute."

He caught up another strip of carpet, wondering briefly how he was going to handle two of these things at a time. One by one was manageable, barely, but trying to secure two of these things at once was going to be difficult.

Something to Teach

"Don't think," he told himself. "Act."

Not that there was much time to think. The two creatures were almost shoulder-to-shoulder as they advanced on him. Both pairs of arms reached. Rob dropped the carpet and snaked out his left hand to grasp at the nearest clutching hand. He caught it, held it, and pulled as hard as he could. The dead man spun awkwardly then fell heavily to the ground. He danced backwards as the second monster lost its footing and tumbled forward. With a quickness that belied his age, Rob lunged to retrieve the closest piece of carpet strip. He turned back to the struggling pair and hammered the top one's nearest appendage to the ground. The carpet strip was across the back of its knee, hampering its ability to move, much less stand. Quickly, Rob got another strip and fastened it to both bodies and the floor. In a matter of moments, he had the struggling pair secured to the ground like a grisly Gulliver held captive by the Lilliputians.

"This won't hold them for long," Rob said, surveying his work. "I'd better hurry."

He snatched up the remaining carpet strips from the floor and called out again.

"Amanda! Where are you?"

"In my office," came the muffled cry. "Hurry!"

Rob rounded the corner and charged down the hallway. Before his wife's office door stood yet another figure, staring at the handle. He didn't hesitate. Rob leaned forward, tucked his chin, and slammed into the once-living man with his left shoulder. It went down.

"I'm not even going to mess with him," he panted, trying the door handle himself. It was locked.

"Open the door!" he yelled. "It's me."

"I can't!"

"What do you mean you can't?" Rob called out, irritated. He looked at the newest threat as it rose to its feet, staring intently at him with its vacant eyes.

"I can't get to the door, Rob," his wife sobbed. "We've got one of those things in here."

Panic seized him as he thought of his wife and children terrorized by this waking nightmare. He stepped back and kicked at the door. It shuddered but held. He kicked again. Nothing.

"Tommy! No!" his wife cried out again. Breath freezing in his chest, Rob froze ready to lash out with another kick to the door or the dead man who inched closer to him.

The door handle moved.

Rob lunged, pushing into the room just as clutching hands reached and missed their mark. Before him, Rob's son lay sprawled on the floor, shoved backwards by the force of his entry. He didn't have time for apology. A blood-spattered figure, Mike Wheeler, was reaching for his wife and daughter. The three of them had trapped the lead real estate agent between the wall and his wife's desk, holding him there with the weight of their bodies. Between the three of them, they'd managed to keep him secure. When Tommy had moved to open the door for his father it managed to gain a measure of leverage and push the desk back away from the wall.

"Close the door, son," he said quietly to Tommy. "Lock it."

Rob hurried to the desk, dropping his armload of carpet strips on the surface, and got ready to work.

"Grab a hand," he told his wife, again calmly. Amanda stared at her husband in awe and disbelief as he reached out and pulled the clutching figure forward across the desk. It bent forward at the waist, awkwardly splayed over the oak veneer. Before it could pull its arm up and away, Rob had laid a carpet strip over an arm and swung the hammer tacker in quick succession, anchoring the limb to the desk. The second arm reached, clutching and pulling to its blood-soaked mouth. Instead of fighting the bigger man, Rob grabbed a second strip and held it up to the creature's nose. He swung the tool again, securing the strip to its face. Satisfied for the moment, he turned.

"Thank you for closing the door, Tommy," he told his son. "You did a good job. That door will hold for a minute. Stay there and watch it. Do you understand?"

The boy nodded, wide-eyed. Amanda was still staring in disbelief at her husband. Here was the man who quailed at the sight of a spider standing before her, entangled with some creature risen from the dead, seemingly nonplussed by the whole affair. Rob twisted the hand that held him, managed to pull it down and hold it firmly with one hand.

"Amanda," Rob said, more forcefully. "Lay a piece of that carpet across his arm. Just like the other one. Do it now."

She still stared.

"Amanda," he repeated. "We need to get you and the kids home. Now. I can't let go of Mike here until he's secured. Okay?"

The woman nodded. She did as her husband asked, then backed away while he completed his grisly work. Soon carpet covered both the desk and the deceased, and Rob gathered his family to him, their bodies, tall and small, wracked with sobs. He kissed them, comforted them, and thought, "It's turning out to be a much better day than I thought. Even though I'll have to lay new carpet again."

After another long moment of quiet comfort, Rob smiled as he looked at the floor covering that had cost him so much in time, money, and grief, and now held death at bay. He laughed.

"What?" his wife asked, her voice muffled against his chest.

"Aren't you glad," he whispered, "we got that expensive carpet after all?"

End

Carnivore

"To me, life without veal stock, pork fat, sausage, organ meat, demi-glace or even stinky cheese is a life not worth living."

Anthony Bourdain

"That's disgusting. Eating meat."

The professor, an aging academic with a closed mind, although he would protest strenuously to the contrary, and a penchant for intellectual laziness, looked on with interest at the young woman.

"Do you mean enjoying a hamburger or reports of the IMV-1 victims resorting to cannibalism?" he asked.

The young woman grimaced. "Eating any flesh is disgusting - cooked or not. You see, I'm a Vegan and I don't intend breaking the promise I made to myself more than two years ago." She paused, thinking. "And why should I care about people eating other people? Maybe that's not such a bad thing. Especially in certain parts of the world."

"Are you serious?" a muffled voice said. He was bent over the desk, head down but listening. Her words had struck a chord.

"I think maybe it's Nature's way of ridding the Earth of her greatest scourge. People."

"So are you suggesting that somehow this planet is attempting to shed itself of excess humanity? Natural selection?"

She sniffed. "If you want to look at it like that. It doesn't really matter what it is or why. It just is. And I don't think it's such a bad thing."

Mike groaned in pain. And it wasn't just the pain from his head. He cracked an eyelid, focused on the speaker - young, slender, athletic build, dark hair.

"Are you kidding me?" Mike asked.

She barely acknowledged the young man who'd only recently awakened. It wasn't clear to whom he was speaking - his fellow female classmate or their professor, so she kept talking.

"I figure this sort of thing has happened in the past - lots of people getting sick and dying. It's like our planet has an immune system or something. Think about it. Do you remember the Black Plague? What if these plagues are Nature's way of protecting life on this beautiful earth of ours? It almost makes perfect sense."

"You can't be that stupid?" Mike asked, a little louder.

"Excuse me?" the young woman asked archly. "Are you talking to me?" She could barely contain her disdain. He was all that she despised. From his clothing that reeked of fraternity to his lack of respect for their professor, Mike, in her mind, was nothing more than a blind consumer of Earth's natural resources. In her heart of hearts, she felt no one was more deserving of falling to the scourge

of this mysterious Risen plague than Mike and his ilk.

"You're Rebecca, right?" he asked. She had no clue as to his name. Paying attention to the people around her was secondary to her causes. These causes were numerous - from the plight of the Palestinians to the rights of indigenous coffee growers in the third world with the Holy of Holies being the environment. Every time a tree was unjustly felled in the pursuit of something as crass as paper production, Rebecca felt its pain to the very marrow of her being. Hers was a holy war and it consumed much of her waking hours.

"Yes."

"Why don't you stop talking?" Mike said. "If you quit now, then maybe everybody in the class won't think you're stupid."

Rebecca was speechless. No one spoke to her like that. Ever. Fortunately one of their classmates who happened to share Rebecca's worldview, and was equally offended, spoke up.

"I don't appreciate such blatant sexism," he said. "In an open and open-minded classroom we should be able to express our ideas without fear of reprisal or attempts at intellectual intimidation."

The professor nodded and murmured, "Well said, young man. Well said." Rebecca smiled gratefully.

The speaker smiled in return.

Mike rubbed his temples, sat up straighter, then stretched languorously. He sighed heavily. Most of the eyes in the classroom were zeroed in on him. He saw it and didn't care, letting the silence stretch on.

Rebecca fidgeted slightly.

"Oh," Mike finally said. "Was I supposed to rebut your boyfriend? My bad." There were titters. The professor was about to offer his own rebuttal, but he hoped Rebecca and her champion would rise to the occasion. Mike looked at his antagonist with a bored expression, and said, "It's kinda hard to intellectually intimidate someone who's a moron."

Their professor coughed. He didn't like confrontation, so rather than tell Mike to behave himself he coughed. Everyone knew this was the man's call for order, well, almost everyone.

"Sorry, Professor," Mike said. "I'll ease up." He closed his eyes against the pain. He'd been up most of the night nursing the flu. Rather, what he hoped was the flu...and not something worse. Unfortunately there was no medicine to spare him from his classmates. This class was a required class. No escape. And while most days he managed to ignore his peers, the discussion of the newly named IMV-1 plague touched a raw nerve.

"Can I ask one more question?" he asked intently.

"Yes," their teacher said cautiously. "As long as it's civil."

Something to Teach

"Yeah, I'll play nice," Mike said. "I was just going to ask Rebecca if she thought it was okay if a father or a mother got sick with this IMV-1 virus and then ended up snacking on his or her own kid? Would that be all right with you? Does that little kid deserve to die in order to protect this precious Earth of ours?"

"I've hear talk of people with the virus being quarantined," a new voice said. "Like the government was going to start locking up people who got sick."

Rebecca ignored Mike, answering the deflecting question instead. "They can't do that," she said. "People have rights."

"But what about the rights of the people who aren't sick?" someone asked. "What about the threat to public safety?"

Mike leaned back in his chair, made a silent promise to stay out of further discussion. It only made his head hurt worse.

"Who said there was a threat?" It was Rebecca's champion again. "The government? How can we possibly trust our government? This is the very same government that's going to lock people up in the name of safety. Don't you see anything wrong with this picture? How do we even know that the government didn't develop the virus themselves in one of their military labs? Maybe they are the ones that are responsible in the first place?"

Mike glanced at his watch. Thankfully there were only ten minutes left in the class. "I can make it," he told himself. "I can make it."

"So how should public safety officials address the growing population of the so-called infected?" It was the first rational question posed by the professor in quite some time. Mike nodded in appreciation, curious as to how Rebecca would respond.

"Education," she said emphatically. "Educate people as to the dangers of the spread of the disease. If the public safety officials did a better job of educating people, then we probably wouldn't have a health crisis on our hands."

"Education is always the answer to everything," Mike said under his breath, grimacing.

"That's true," Rebecca's supporter said. "You can't punish people by taking away their rights. You have to teach them so they can make the right choices for themselves."

"Thank you," Rebecca replied, nodding in his direction. The conversation continued for nine more interminable minutes. At last, their teacher drew things to a close.

"Does anyone have any final thoughts he or she would like to add?"

"Hey," a young woman called out. "I just got a text. There's going to be a rally to support plague victims. At 5:00 tonight. Bring signs. We're protesting calls for the quarantine."

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Rebecca's ears perked up. While she certainly didn't see the IMV-1 virus as a bad thing, especially if it helped to thin the herd of humanity that ran amok on her planet, she felt duty bound to attend anything related to a Cause. In her mind, draconian measures such as quarantine were not justifiable when the situation could be rectified by the proper education of people.

"When is this event taking place?" the professor asked, his interest piqued. He felt there was nothing like a good protest rally to stir the blood.

"The Bradford Commons," came the answer. This bit of green space on the campus was the most popular jumping off point for each cause célèbre that infected the campus.

"Five o'clock it is, then," the man said. "See you all there. Class dismissed."

Mike watched as Rebecca rose from her chair and make for the door. She risked a glance at him and he grinned in return. With a snort and a shake of her head she exited, her champion in tow. The rest of the class filed out in good order, except for Mike. He hung back a long moment before making his exit. Instead of heading for his next class, he slouched to his dormitory room and bed.

"I need to sleep," he said. "That class made my head hurt worse. Some people just don't make sense."

Soon Mike was fast asleep while Rebecca and her fellow Cause-mates were busily making plans for the rally that evening.



The phone buzzed with life, then was quiet. He ignored it at first. It sprang to life again. And again. Finally Mike cracked an eyelid and reached. He looked at the number, groaned slightly, then dialed.

"Hey," he said. "What's up?"

Mike was silent for a long time, listening.

"Are you okay right now?" he asked. "I mean, are you safe?"

A brief pause. Mike rolled to his feet, wide awake.

"All right. Stay in your room and keep the door locked. Don't let anyone in. Just wait and watch for me out your window. I'll be there in a few minutes to pick you up. And when you see me pull up don't just head out the door and meet me on the curb."

Again there was a pause.

"Why?" Mike said, scooping up his wallet and keys, moving quickly. "Because I said so. And because you don't need to risk being in the hallways or outside. I'm going to pull up on the lawn underneath your window. When you see me pull up kick out your screen and jump down to the car. Okay? Good. Now listen. If I'm not there in ten minutes, then something has happened. I want you to

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call Mom and Dad and ask if they can come get you. No. Tell them to come and get you. Both of them. Not one or the other. Both. Got it?"

Pause. Mike stood in the doorway, scanning his room, thinking.

"See you in a few."

He moved back into his room, reached inside his closet and pulled out a worn lacrosse stick.

"It's better than nothing," he muttered, and then ran out the door of his dorm room. He didn't even bother to close the door behind him. It probably didn't matter anyway.

Fifteen minutes later Mike drove past Bradford Commons - it was the fastest way out of town.

"How's it look?" he asked his brother, unwilling to tear his eyes from the road.

"Lots of people," came the reply. "Uh, you'd better run this red light. And the next one too. Things don't look so good over there. I wouldn't stop for anyone...or anything. We need to get out of here."

Mike pressed on the accelerator. He risked one glance at the mass of people that filled the Commons. He spied a familiar form, smiled, and shook his head. She was considerably less attractive when covered with blood. Rebecca's chin dripped with blood that was not her own.

"Eating meat," he whispered. "That's disgusting."

"What?" his brother asked.

"Nothing," Mike said. "Let's just get home safely. Okay?"

End

Stranger on Campus

"All normal people, I added as an afterthought, had more or less desired the death of those they loved, at some time or another.

Here the lawyer interrupted me, looking greatly perturbed.

"You must promise me not to anything of that sort at the trial, or to the examining magistrate."

from The Stranger by Albert Camus

"All right people," the professor warned. "Let's try to concentrate on *The Stranger* and not strange happenings. Okay?"

"But zombies are way more cool than Camus."

"That may be the case," their instructor answered. "But the purpose of this class is to explore real literature and not crass, popular pulp nonsense like the living dead."

The students still buzzed with the latest rumors of undead attacks, mysterious plagues running amok, and the decided lack of student presence in the classroom that afternoon. Associate Professor James Englewood patiently surveyed the class, letting the conversation run its course before he delved more deeply into the famous piece of Absurdist literature.

"How ironic," he thought. "We are supposed to be discussing literature of the Absurd, and yet they," he looked out over his students, "seem to be incapable of discussing anything but the patently absurd."

Eric slouched even lower in his seat when he saw the professor's eyes sweep over the class.

"I don't need Professor Pompous riding my case today," he thought. "Dude needs to chill out. He thinks the whole entire universe revolves around this one class."

And it was true. Professor Englewood was on a mission - a mission to turn young, unformed, uncouth, and uncivilized minds into sharp, insightful minds - like his own. He did this by pushing, prodding, and poking at his students. Few students liked his classes or the man. But the good professor was not troubled by the negative opinions of his students or the equally negative opinions of his peers. He thought too much of himself. He was blissfully uncaring of most of the rest of the world.

"Did anyone finish the novel?" he persisted. "You were all to have finished the novel last night. And while I can appreciate the interesting tales that pervade the latest news reports, life continues. This class continues."

The chattering subsided as attention gradually focused on where Professor Englewood wanted it - himself. He paused, making sure that all eyes were on him, before making his first assault.

"Mr. Roberts," he started. "Were there any quotes in the last few pages of the book that you

found troubling?"

"Here we go," Eric thought, face blank, devoid of any expression. "He's at it again. Everybody knows Roberts didn't finish the book."

Eric knew better than to show any reaction. And it wasn't just because he was used to the vagaries of this particular man. Eric had learned - rather painfully - to be cautious at all times. He remained carefully stone-faced as the young man stumbled through his answer. Professor Englewood just stared throughout the painful discourse.

"Interesting, Mr. Roberts," the man said. "Do you have anything constructive to say about the psychological makeup of Meursault?"

Eric very much doubted that Steve Roberts could spell the word 'psychological' much less understand it. He looked down at his desk, avoiding the gaze of the professor, and scribbled some incoherent words on his paper. It helped to look busy. If Professor Englewood caught a student looking out the window, staring off into space, then he or she risked his full attention. Eric had perfected the art of looking just studious enough, allowing him to fly under the radar during most lectures.

"Uh...no," Roberts mumbled. "I guess not."

"Indeed not," Professor Englewood said. "And what about you, Mr. Norville? Let's consider another question. Do you think Meursault was afraid of death?"

"Not really," the young man replied. Eric barely smiled at the reply. He waited, curious as to what his other classmate was going to say.

"Do you mean, 'Not really, I have no idea' or 'Not really, Meursault was not afraid of death?'"

"Uh...not really." There were titters from the onlookers. Their professor frowned slightly.

"And why not?" Professor Englewood was genuinely surprised. Normally students were averse to answering so rashly. "Careful, young man," he thought. "Let's not be too bold here. Remember who's in charge."

"Uh..." he started.

"Please," the teacher interrupted. "If you're going to speak, I would ask that you refrain from the use of interjections to begin your sentences. Now tell me what you mean."

"I don't think Meursault was afraid of dying, but I don't really know because I haven't read any of the book. I'm afraid of dying though. Not just from boredom because of this class. But because of

the zombies that are out there. I think the people that are getting sick are turning into the zombies."

There was outright laughter now. One student offered, "God, you're so stupid, Norville."

"No one has anything else to add to this discussion?" their teacher asked. There was an edge to his voice. "No one can provide any insight whatsoever as to why Meursault would want an audience at his execution? Perhaps someone would like to offer their opinion about the French government's barbaric use of the guillotine to execute prisoners?"

The muted laughter continued.

"Eric," Professor Englewood said. "What about you?"

Eric silently agreed that Norville was an idiot about most things, except the whole mysterious-plague-turning-people-into-zombie thing. He also wryly noted that his teacher referred to everyone by his or her last names except for him. Maybe it was because he was a little older than most of his classmates? Maybe it was just because Professor Pompous liked to pick on people - especially him.

"Do you have anything productive or useful to add to this discussion?"

Eric thought for a moment. He, unlike most of his peers, had read the novel. He'd read it three times over, in fact. From the very first page, he'd been drawn to the story. His copy of the book was filled with underlined passages, comments, and questions. He had fairly strong opinions about the contents of the book, but wondered if it would be prudent to share them in this setting with these peers and with this teacher. It went against his cautious nature.

He shrugged, sitting up slightly. "I think Meursault was a criminal. He got what was coming to him."

"The death penalty?" Derision fairly dripped from the man's voice. "The guillotine?" Eric ignored it. He wasn't about to be bothered by one petty tyrant's opinion of him.

"Yeah, I guess," Eric continued. "That's what the French used at the time."

Professor Englewood nodded, digesting his words, considering. After a moment, he asked, "You said Meursault was a criminal. What makes him a criminal? The fact that he was not saddened by the loss of his mother?"

Eric was not about to take this bait. He wasn't stupid. Norville and Steve maybe, but not him. They didn't have his advantages or his experience. He shook his head.

"That's a set-up," Eric said simply. "Dude was a criminal because he shot the Arab. Unloaded on him. He didn't care about anyone but himself. That's criminal thinking."

Englewood leaned forward in his chair, suddenly interested. This young man had hardly said a word all semester, and suddenly he had an opinion - an ignorant opinion, but an opinion nonetheless. The professor was intrigued. Eric was older than most of his peers in the classroom and there seemed to be an edge to him. He wondered fleetingly about the young man's background.

"What do you mean by a set-up?"

Eric frowned. It was going to be difficult to explain to the people in this room what he knew from experience. He knew what a set-up was. So did all of his former associates on the inside. Inside prison. But the people sitting in this classroom with him had probably never been locked up, much less gotten a speeding ticket.

"I'll bet," he thought, "Professor Pompous would probably mess himself if he ever got placed inside a cell."

Eric continued to search for the words. He knew his vocabulary wasn't as good as most of his peers, and his formal education was spotty at best. Eric had missed the last two years of high school, and his education inside a maximum-security correctional facility had been more focused on survival than formal schooling. However, he knew in his gut that he was right.

"It's like," he started. "Camus told the story the way he wanted the story told."

There were titters from the scant crowd as a few of his peers shook their heads in pity. Professor Englewood ignored the editorial comments and continued to stare at Eric.

"He made that prosecutor look like an idiot."

"But wasn't he?" the professor asked.

"Yeah, sure," Eric agreed. "I get the whole Absurd thing. All that whole existential stuff. But that doesn't change the fact that Meursault was a criminal. It doesn't matter what anyone else says or does in the rest of the story. What matters was what he did and what was going on inside his head. I get that you can kill somebody out of anger. If you mess with my kid or something, then chances are I'll find you and take care of business. That whole emotional thing. But Meursault? He didn't care."

"Isn't that what the prosecutor said too?"

"Yeah," Eric admitted. "But just because the prosecutor was stupid doesn't mean he was wrong. And it's not just him. All of the characters. What they say and do is all part of the set-up. To make you think that all of us," he held up his hands, indicating his classmates, "are just stupid people living our stupid lives. That's what Camus wants us to think...maybe. But just because we might be stupid doesn't mean we're wrong about stuff. About the only good thing I liked about this story was how he wrote about Meursault's thoughts - what was going on inside his head. That's how Camus shows us he

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was a piece of garbage. He was evil...and deserved to die."

Professor Englewood was dumbstruck. In all of his years of literary exposition he had never heard the main character of *The Stranger* described as a criminal because of the way he thought. Certainly Meursault's actions were considered criminal. He'd shot a man in cold blood, with no seeming explanation or remorse.

"Criminal thought?" Professor Englewood said slowly.

" 'Thought precedes actions as lightning does thunder.' "

The professor sat stunned. Truly, he'd never really thought of Meursault as being a criminal. But then again, the man didn't really understand what it meant to be a criminal. And where had this young man read Heine? Perhaps he'd underestimated him?

Not to be outdone, he asked, "But was there much thought given to his actions when he committed the crime of which he was accused? Please tell me what thoughts were running through Meursault's mind at the time of the shooting."

"He didn't say," Eric explained. "That's part of the set-up. But your boy Camus did let us know earlier on in the story what Meursault was thinking. He didn't tell us anything about why he pulled the trigger. It says he was hot. The sun was glinting off the Arab's blade. Heat stroke isn't a reason to shoot somebody then step up and add four more bullets to the body."

Eric shook his head, then continued, "So then Camus doesn't say anything about the shooting - what's going on inside Meursault - then all we have next is the police questioning him, trying to make sense of a senseless crime."

"That's it!" crowed the professor. "That's precisely it. It was a senseless crime. That's the whole point Camus is trying to make. It was a senseless thing for Meursault to do, and yet all of these fools try to attach their meaning to this one act."

Eric shook his head. "I'm not buying it. Dude was a criminal. He did what he did because he felt like it."

"But how do you know that?" Professor Englewood pressed.

"Because all Meursault cared about was himself," Eric replied. "He had a Narcissistic personality."

Englewood smiled, easing back in his chair.

"Are you taking Intro to Psychology this year?" he asked. "Or Greek mythology? That's an awfully big word."

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The young man could hear the contempt in the man's voice. He could see others in the class cringe, risking glances t both parties. It didn't bother him in the slightest. What was the opinion of one wormy associate professor worth? The guy thought he was big stuff, but he wasn't even a big fish in a small pond. It as a huge campus with a sizable English Department and Professor Pompous was just one man amongst many who thought life centered on literature and literary pursuits.

"I could use a smaller word if you like," Eric said, easily holding the man's gaze. The professor shifted uncomfortably, unused to someone standing up to him. "But it wouldn't change anything. Meursault was still a piece of garbage. The only problem is that you don't see it. You think everyone else in the story is the idiot. All of us too. Here in this room. You think we're idiots too, only we can't see it."

Professor Englewood shifted again in his seat, momentarily speechless. He couldn't admit that the young man's words were uncomfortably close to the truth.

Eric shook his head, continuing, "What was it that Meursault said, 'And just then it crossed my mind that one might fire, or not fire - and it would come to absolutely the same thing.' "

Englewood stared. He was not used to students who actually read and remembered the texts so carefully.

"Guess what?" Eric said. "It does matter if you pull the trigger or not. Actions have consequences. You might not like that. Lots of people don't like that, but that doesn't change things. Does it?"

A phone sounded. A second phone sounded. Text messages suddenly abounded. There were confused stares as people began pulling out their phones and reading. Most tore their eyes from the unfolding drama with difficulty.

"Hey, Professor?" one student asked.

Fumbling with his own phone, the man said, "Yes? What is it?"

"I think something is going on."

"Yeah!" another voice echoed. He stood up, walked to the window of the classroom, and peered outside. "I just got one of those campus alerts."

"Hmmm," Professor Englewood stared at his phone, somewhat in disbelief, glad for the interruption. "Uh, yes. So did I."

He read the message twice, then a third time.

"Campus alert. Possible epidemic concerns. Classes canceled."

Eric stared at his own phone. It was the same message. He was grateful for the interruption. Grateful because he had no desire to explain his reasoning or his past. Yet, Eric felt slightly uneasy about the larger world outside the classroom. First, there were television reports about some rapidly spreading virus, followed by unsubstantiated claims of infected people acting strangely.

"What would I do if the whole world suddenly went to hell?" he thought. "This class certainly wouldn't mean a thing. Not that it does anyway. It's just something I have get through. And I shouldn't have let Professor Pompous get under my skin. He's not worth it."

"Hey look." It was one of Eric's classmates who stood at the window. "There's people running through the courtyard. And not like they're running a race or anything. They're like dropping books and stuff. People are like freaking out."

"Ladies and gentlemen," Professor Englewood intoned. "Let's be calm here. I am sure some of your fellow classmates are slightly panicked after receiving that last text. However, there is no need..."

His phone vibrated a second time. Unfortunately panic had already begun to set in on the part of the university administration. However, somewhere someone in the campus chain of command had had enough sense to realize that by canceling all classes for the day would put a crush of students suddenly on the streets and sidewalks. This person also had the sense to realize that with the threat of a pandemic the easiest way to spread both a virus and panic would be to have large numbers of people outside together. She prevailed upon her superiors and insisted that a second message be forwarded to everyone via campus-wide emergency text message system.

"Emergency Alert. Campus lockdown. Proceed to nearest building or room and secure all exits and entrances. Do not leave secure locations until all clear has been sent."

"What's this?" Eric said. "What's going on?"

He jumped to his feet and ran to the window, knocking over a desk in the process. There was a mad scramble for the best view of the outside world. Englewood sat in his chair, unmoving and confused. Eric looked out the window, scanning the sidewalks and the distant streets, obscured by trees, then caught himself.

"Stop being stupid," he whispered. "I know better."

Ignoring any possible drama unfolding outdoors, he left his peers by the window and made for the door to the classroom.

"Hey, Englewood," Eric said, breaking the man from his reverie. "You got keys to this door?"

"Huh?" the associate professor dazedly replied.

"Keys," Eric repeated, looking at the door handle and the locking mechanism. "You got keys? Can you lock this door from the inside?"

The man stood, dug in his pocket and brought forth a ring of keys. Eric cautiously turned the door handle and pulled it open. He peered down the hallway, saw no one, and then eased the door shut.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Englewood said, seeming to collect himself somewhat. "We need to remain calm and follow directions."

Tears welled up in the eyes of some of the young women, and while they didn't cry, several of the young men looked very afraid. Eric waited by the door, holding the handle securely, and hissed to his classmates.

"Get out of the windows people."

He wanted to yell at them for being so stupid, but he knew better than to yell.

"Classes canceled," he thought. "Then lockdown. Something bad is happening. Whatever is going down in the rest of the world just showed up here in our backyard. Probably not a school shooter. They wouldn't have sent that first text if there was a shooter. Still...I don't want to draw any attention to myself."

"Get out of the window!" he hissed again.

"Why?" someone asked in a normal voice.

"And shut up," Eric continued. "If there's a lockdown, it means there's somebody out there doing something bad. Get out of the windows and be quiet so the bad guy doesn't see or hear us and decide to come in here."

He looked at their teacher, held out a free hand.

"And tell me you can lock this door."

"Young man," Professor Englewood said, his voice returning to its normal disdainful air, "I think it is wise to be prudent, but let's not engage in hysterical behavior. Now let me see if my keys work."

Eric moved just enough for the man to insert a key. He still kept a secure grip on the handle and a steady gaze through the narrow pane in the door, alert for any signs of strange or threatening behavior.

"Oh my God!" a young blonde called out, tears openly streaming down her face. "My sorority sister just sent me a text. She said that Becky was attacked. Somebody tried to kill her. They're not sure if she's going to make it."

"Keep it down," Eric told her. "Keep your voice down. Do you understand?"

Professor Englewood turned the key, felt the locking mechanism engage, and looked curiously at his student. Englewood was again calm, in control. He felt sorry for these students, so ill-prepared for such emergencies, plagued by the storms of youth and inexperience.

"You can let go now," he said to Eric. "The door is locked. We are quite safe."

Mind full of questions, Eric didn't even acknowledge the professor. He moved quickly to the window at the far edge of the room, waved away the stragglers, and cautiously peered out a window, his head barely visible to the outside world.

"Didn't you just warn us to stay away from the windows?"

Eric ignored the man and his classmates, most of whom were furiously texting, trying to call friends and loved one, or simply crying. He briefly gave thanks that their class met in one of the older buildings on campus. It had been made when air conditioning was not the norm, thus the windows could still be opened to let air circulate. Carefully he unlatched the hinge and just barely cracked the window. He leaned toward the opening, and hissed at his peers.

"I need you people to be quiet. I can't hear what's going on outside."

"Oh my Lord!" Professor Englewood exclaimed. "Don't be ridiculous. Step away from that window and sit down. Nothing can be gained from listening at that window."

It was Eric's turn to look at Englewood scornfully.

"You ever walk through the woods, Professor?" he asked softly. "You ever stop and listen?"

"Certainly I've been in the woods," he said, thinking absently of Thoreau and Walden. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Animals will get real quiet when predators come around," Eric said. "Not like us. We tend to freak out and make a lot of noise. All noise does is attract trouble. Something is going on and I want to listen for any trouble headed our way. I can't hear anything if you people are making noise, so you all need to shut up and let me listen."

Eric had also been well trained by his time spent in prison. Emergency situations inside had meant

hitting the floor, no matter where you were, and keeping your mouth shut until you were told you could move and speak again. But this wasn't prison.

A scream cut the air. Heads spun to face the classroom door. One of his classmates pointed, staring in horror at a face pressed against the door window. It was blood-covered and the eyes were empty and staring.

"What is that?" another voice yelled. "What happened to her?"

"Get away from the door," Eric ordered, moving from his place at the window. He scrambled for the door. He knew that someone was bound to do something stupid.

"Let her in," Englewood said, not stirring from his seat. "You can't just leave her out there."

"No!" Eric pushed past a fellow classmate and was at the door. "She's not coming in here. This place is supposed to be locked down. That means we keep the doors closed."

He grabbed and held the door handle, staring at the poor thing that stood only inches away. She was infected with whatever spreading throughout the campus like wildfire. Eric felt his skin crawl as she gazed blankly at him.

"Don't be ridiculous," Professor Englewood snapped. "Let her in this instant."

Eric ignored the man, thinking furiously. It was true. All of it. The dire news reports were true. People were dying from some unknown and virulent plague. More and more people were being infected - and dying. What was he supposed to do now? What were any of them supposed to do?

He felt a hand on his shoulder. Eric turned and found himself staring at Professor Englewood. The man's brows were furrowed as he stared intently at Eric.

"This is absurd," the man said. "I will not stand idly by and..."

"Just like in our book," Eric interrupted. "It's all Absurd, right? None of it means anything." He looked down at the hand on his shoulder then back at his professor. Eric's eyes were hard. Merciless.

"Well," Englewood stammered, pulling his hand back. "I'm not exactly saying that..."

"Then back off," Eric warned. "Now."

The man's head jerked back as if he'd been slapped. No one spoke to him that way. Not even the department chairman when he failed to publish a journal article he'd been working on for months. Especially not a student. Especially not a student such as Eric. According to the professor's standards, the young man was clearly lacking in education and refinement. They were not social equals - not by a

long shot.

Most of Eric's classmates were too interested in their phones, the infected young woman standing outside their classroom door, or their own morbid fears to be concerned with the drama unfolding between Eric and their teacher, but Englewood was not. He suddenly felt an overwhelming desire to make a stand - to demonstrate who was in control. He was not used to anyone challenging his authority. The man felt his face grow hot.

"No," Englewood said, his voice barely cracking. "I will not back off. And I will not let you terrorize this class a moment longer. Do you understand me?"

Eric turned away from him. He'd faced people much tougher than the professor inside. For his part, Englewood's face turned scarlet and veins popped out on his neck at the insult. He was as close to doing violence as he had ever been in his life. With gritted teeth he reached out with his right hand and grabbed Eric's shoulder, fingers gouging. It felt good to lose his temper. He felt stronger than he'd ever felt before.

"Now we'll see who's in charge," Englewood thought. It was so unlike Meursault who'd felt nothing when he'd emptied the revolver into the Arab. Casually pulling the trigger repeatedly. Just as this young man had casually usurped his authority. Well, there would be no more of that nonsense. The teacher felt a thrill of power surge through his veins as his eyes narrowed, and he said, "Back..."

Eric spun with practiced ease, not even trying to shrug off the professor's grip. He lashed out with his own hand, striking Englewood in the midriff with his fist. The man's eyes bulged as air whooshed out of his lungs in a sudden burst. Eric's elbow followed his fist in a smooth arc that connected solidly with the side of the man's head as he doubled over. Stunned, unable to breathe, Englewood stumbled to the side, trying to catch his balance on the nearest desk. Eric decided to help him along. He lashed out with a foot, catching his teacher on the waistline, and sent him sprawling. Chairs, desks, and students scattered.

"Off," Eric finished for him. He shook his head, turning back to the trouble at the door. "Too much noise," he muttered. "Going to bring even more trouble."

There was a scream from the hallway. In response, the grisly visage retreated from the classroom door, honing in on the sound, and staggered away. The screams got louder.

Eric considered his options. The door was locked and he was safe for the moment. He knew this wouldn't last long. Eric quickly scanned the room, searching the faces of his peers. Most were in shock, holding their breath, waiting to let loose with screams and yells of their own. Few, if any, would be of any real use.

"Out the window or out the door?" he thought. "Jump out the window and turn my ankle. Run out the door and find out if one of those things can move faster than me."

Something to Teach

With one more backward glance out into the hallway, Eric turned and walked to the windows. He pushed the nearest one open, jumped up into the frame, and looked down into the courtyard - it was clear - then back at his peers and professor.

"I'm not going to die today," he said simply. Eric wondered if anyone would get the joke.

He lowered himself as far as he could, fingers clutching the edge of the window frame, then let go. Eric hit the ground and rolled, coming to his feet with a smile. As he carefully considered his surroundings, then moved off at a lope, he whispered again, "I'm not going to die today."

From above, echoing from the classroom window, he heard the howls of execration.

End

Judgment Day

"I am ready to meet my Maker. Whether my Maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter."

Winston Churchill

Johnnie Waters slouched in his chair and stared defiantly at the man in a dark suit. He heaved an impatient sigh and thought, "I don't care what you have to say. I don't care what you think. I don't care about any of this. It just doesn't matter to me."

The judge glowered at the young man before him. He did care. He cared about Johnnie's bad posture. He cared about Johnnie's bad attitude. And he cared about the time. With a slightly impatient look of his own, the judge glanced at his watch. There were other cases to contend with and he didn't want to get too far behind schedule. The man had a full caseload of juvenile delinquents to face before the end of the day. Some were minor matters to consider, commonplace courtroom procedures that needed tending to, while others were more important. Like this one.

Just then the doors to the courtroom opened and a disheveled figure came hurrying in.

"Sorry, your Honor," he called out. "Am I late?"

The judge nodded and said, "Slightly. Please try to be more punctual in the future."

The newcomer fumbled forward to where his client stood. "Sorry," he said to Johnnie with a sheepish smile, then to the judge, "Yes, sir. I will be on time next time. Duly noted." He paused, took a deep breath, and announced, "Your Honor. We're ready to proceed."

"With what?" Johnnie asked. "I don't know you."

"I'm your P.D.," the man explained. "Your public defender. I'm here to represent you."

"I don't need you," Johnnie shot back. Then he looked at the judge and said, "And I don't need you either." Finally, he favored the prosecuting attorney with a look of complete and utter contempt and said, "You? You can go..."

"Mr. Waters," the judge snapped. "I suggest you curb your tongue in my courtroom."

Johnnie turned slowly, squinting at the judge. "I don't care what you got to say. It don't mean nothin' to me. Nothing."

His lawyer, while late and disheveled, was not stupid. He laid his hand gently on Johnnie's shoulder, and said softly, "Let me do the talking, please."

Johnnie shrugged him off. "Get off me," he said. "You touch me again and I split you."

"Fine," his lawyer said. "I won't touch you. But you need to be careful. You've already been found guilty. This is the sentencing phase of the trial, and you're not helping your case by acting out like this. I know you're probably angry and upset, but you've got to listen to me. I think I can get you house

arrest.”

“House arrest!” Johnnie yelled. “What kind of lawyer are you? I’m not doing any house arrest.”

The judge sat watching the exchange between Johnnie and his court-appointed attorney. Johnnie’s treatment of the one man in the courtroom who was trying to help cemented his decision. The prosecuting attorney sat and silently watched the proceedings, pleased that Johnnie was making his job easier.

“What’s the purpose of a public defender if you ain’t gonna defend me?” Johnnie demanded.

“I’m trying to keep you out of prison,” the man said. Then to the judge, he continued, “Your Honor, I’m sorry. My client is extremely upset. This is a challenging day for him and I would ask the court’s pardon.”

“Certainly,” the judge nodded. “I understand fully well how this day might be a difficult one. Let’s proceed.”

Shortly thereafter, Johnnie stood and listened to the judge as he handed down his decision.

“While the court feels that you must be held accountable for your actions, it is also the responsibility of this court to see to it that you are given the opportunity for rehabilitation and reflection.” The judge peered over his glasses to look at Johnnie. “Do you understand?”

Sour expression on his face, Johnnie shrugged. “Why do you keep saying ‘the court’? There’s no jury or anything here? It’s just you. So why don’t you just say it’s you who thinks I need to be held accountable?”

The judge refrained from comment. He studied the young man before him, and was tempted to merely dismiss his words.

“Mr. Waters,” the judge began. “I am an officer of the court. As such, when I am acting in my official capacity as a judge I am, for all intents and purposes, this court. My language, therefore, is most appropriate. Whether or not you understand my words is another matter. It is important to me that you understand my words so that you have a complete understanding of what is about to transpire.”

“Yeah,” Johnnie interrupted. “I get it. You don’t need to get all technical on me. I really don’t care.”

Again, the judge was silently patient. Johnnie stared back at him, raising his eyebrows at the man. Having seen too many young men in his courtroom before just like Johnnie, the judge was not inclined to lose his temper.

“Young man. You might not care, but do you understand? That is the question.”

“Yeah,” Johnnie said, shrugging impatiently. “I guess.”

“Fine,” the judge replied. “Then let me just say that I do not make this decision lightly. However, in addition to considering the need for your rehabilitation and opportunities for self-reflection, I must take into consideration the threat to the safety of this community that you pose. You are not some innocent who is ignorant of the realities of the law. Someone with your experience knew the potential price you

might pay for your actions. Yet you knowingly broke the laws of this state. This court has already found you guilty of all charges. The only matter before us is one of sentencing. Considering your continued complete and utter disregard for the safety and security of other members of this community, I am hereby sentencing you to the Department of Corrections to complete a program as set forth by the Department of Corrections for this state."

"What?" Johnnie stood dumbfounded. "You mean I've got to go to prison?"

"The Washington Juvenile Correctional Facility," the judge corrected. "You will have to complete the program at the facility prior to your release. Your time in said facility will be a term no shorter than nine months. However, if you fail to complete the program, then you could potentially remain inside the correctional facility until the day before your twenty-second birthday."

"What are you talking about?" Johnnie said. "What do you mean? I'm not going to prison."

"What the judge is saying..." his lawyer started.

"Shut up!" Johnnie screamed at his lawyer. "I'm not talking to you."

Without warning or hesitation, he picked up his chair and heaved it at the judge. Fortunately the man was as quick as he was intelligent and easily dodged the missile. The two courtroom bailiffs lunged, their eyes hard. After a brief struggle, Johnnie was handcuffed and hustled out of the courtroom.



"Hold your hands out in front of you with your palms facing out and your thumbs down."

It was an awkward position. Johnnie considered briefly making a stupid comment, but the man in the blue uniform of the Department of Corrections was not smiling. He decided against testing the officer. He held out his hands, ready to be handcuffed. The metal was cold. He could hear the teeth clicking as the metal closed around his wrists.

"Are you right-handed or left-handed?"

"Uh," he thought for a moment, confused as he stared at his outstretched hands, now confined by metal cuffs. "Right-handed."

"Put your right hand on your stomach," the officer instructed. "Hold your other hand above the right hand."

Johnnie did as he was told. Watching him very carefully the whole time, the man slipped a black box over and around the handcuffs, then linked a chain through the box and around his waist. A heavy lock secured the chain around his waist, effectively holding the cuffs and his arms in place.

"I want you to turn, step forward, and place both knees on this chair," the man said, pointing to a chair.

Johnnie turned, stepped forward, and knelt on the chair, wobbling slightly. It would have helped to have his hands, but the officer steadied him instead.

"I'm going to put cuffs on your ankles. Do you understand?"

It wasn't like he was going to argue or anything. He couldn't very well escape, not with his hands and arms effectively bound. It seemed like a stupid thing to say.

"Yeah," Johnnie said after a moment's hesitation. He felt the metal bite into his Achilles tendon, and winced slightly. This was going to severely restrict his movement.

"I guess that's the whole point," he told himself, smiling. "No running away."

"I am now going to help you down off the chair," the officer said. "Do you understand?"

"Yeah."

" 'Yes,'" the man corrected. "The correct answer is 'yes'. Not 'yeah'. Do you understand?"

"Yeah," he started, then corrected. "I mean, yes."

The officer placed one hand on his shoulder and the other on his arm and helped Johnnie down from the chair. With his ankles shackled he could only shuffle awkwardly. If he tried to take too big a step, then the ankle cuffs bit into his tendons. Johnnie grimaced at the pain and the fact that he was completely at the mercy of the officer. Slowly the pair made their way down a hallway to a heavy steel door where they waited for the metallic buzz that signaled the release of the door. The officer pulled on the door with one hand, while still hanging on to Johnnie's arm.

"Step through," the officer instructed. "We're going to head for that van over there."

With a few more grunts of effort, more grimacing with pain, Johnnie finally sat staring out the window of the van. It was an old fifteen-passenger model with worn seats and a peculiar odor. He sat alone in the very last seat, shackled and belted in. A different officer sat in the front seat of the van, staring at a clipboard, occasionally glancing up in the mirror to look at Johnnie.

"What's he think I'm going to do?" he thought. "Run away?"

Wisely, he said nothing. Instead, Johnnie waited patiently as two other passengers in khaki jump suits like his were likewise shackled and belted into place. After another inspection of everyone's belts, the officer who'd escorted him to the van joined his partner in the front.

The man in the passenger seat took the clipboard, turned in his seat to face the three and called out, "Say 'yes' when I call out your name. John Waters."

"Yes."

"Michael Berens."

"Yeah." It was the one sitting in the middle row of the passenger van.

The officer looked up from his clipboard and stared at Mike Berens.

"You need to say 'yes'. Understand?"

"Yeah, I got it."

"David Morris," the officer continued, ignoring Mike.

"Yeah," he called out.

The officer just shook his head at the pair, turned around and said to the driver, "Okay, let's go."

Johnnie shifted uncomfortably in his seat as the van pulled out into traffic, bouncing him about. He watched the world around him, knowing that this was going to be the last time he saw the outside world for months. His new life was going to consist of tall fences topped with razor wire and institutional food. And lots of people like Mike and David.

The young man thought about what the judge had said to him as the two bailiffs escorted him from the courtroom.

"Mr. Waters. You need to carefully consider what it means to lose your freedom, albeit for a brief period of time. Use this time wisely. There are few things more precious than freedom."

Johnnie had told the judge what he could do with his freedom. Now he was sitting in the back of a van being driven to some juvenile correctional facility in a town he'd never even heard of without his freedom, without his friends, and without anything to do except sit and stare out the window.

After a few minutes of silence, David called out, "Hey."

The driver looked up in the rearview mirror. He didn't say anything. He just looked at the trio in back without speaking.

"Can we listen to the radio?"

The officer reached and turned on the radio. News filled the van.

"There are unconfirmed reports that this unknown disease, now being referred to as IMV-1, is spreading more quickly than originally predicted."

"Turn the channel," the young man called out. "I don't want to hear the news."

Johnnie smiled. He never listened to the news. He never watched the news. He didn't care about the news. News was for old people. So what if people were getting sick and dying? He wasn't sick, so he didn't care.

The officer obliged the request by turning to another station. More news.

"Flu-like symptoms are often followed by the onset of pulmonary hemorrhaging. If you begin to experience any of these symptoms, please seek medical attention immediately."

"More news!" came the complaint from the middle seat. "I don't want to hear it."

"Sorry," the driver called from the front. "That's about all that's on right now. Everybody's talking about it. You want me to turn it off?"

"Keep it on," David said. "It's better than nothing."

Johnnie watched the two in front of him. David turned his head to the side, spoke out of the side of his mouth, "Check it out, Mike." He nodded his head toward the door.

"What?" Mike said, sotto voce.

"Look," his friend insisted. "The door."

Brian looked but he couldn't see anything unusual from his angle. Mike could clearly see the door, but too much huffing in high school had slightly impaired his cognitive functioning. He stared uncomprehending.

"So what?" Mike said. "I don't see anything."

"It's unlocked," David whispered.

"Are you kidding?"

"I'm serious," David insisted. "Look. The officer didn't lock the door. We can make a run for it. When he stops at a light or something."

Johnnie stared in disbelief. He wasn't about to say anything, but he was surprised that his compatriots could be so stupid. They couldn't run. They could shuffle quickly, but they couldn't run. And where would they run? Down the street to safety? Their khaki uniforms and shackles clearly signaled to all onlookers that they were prisoners.

"Let's wait until we get out of town," Mike offered. It was a ludicrous idea. But David readily agreed.

"Okay. I'll say I gotta use the restroom. Make up something so they gotta stop."

With stupid grins on their faces, the pair stared at the unlocked door, waiting and watching. Johnnie listened to the news. It didn't make much sense what he was hearing, but it made more sense than these two.

"The mayor of St. Louis has reportedly called on the National Guard to help city officials deal with civil unrest that has broken out in the wake of the still unnamed plague which some sources are referring to as IMV-1. There is still no official word from the CDC about the name or the nature of this outbreak."

Johnnie just shook his head. He didn't care.

An hour outside of the city, the countryside was little more than corn and soybean fields with an occasional small town to break up the monotony. Mike and David continued to talk in hushed whispers. Johnnie was glad they hadn't included him in their conversation, although he watched and waited for them to make their move with each passing town.

As the van eased through the streets of yet another quiet town, Johnnie stared at the storefronts and wondered what the lives of the people were like in this small town.

"Must be bored out of their minds," he thought. "I would hate to live in a small town. Nothing exciting probably ever happens in a place like this."

The van eased to a stop on a tree-lined street.

"Hey," Mike called out. "Look at that."

To their left, staggering along the sidewalk, was a lone figure, stained with blood. Both officers stared.

"Pull over. We might need to call for help."

The driver eased the van over to the side of the road while continuing to watch the slowly moving figure. "I wonder if he got hit by a car?"

"I don't know," the other officer said. "But I'm going to find out. You stay here with these three."

The man climbed out of the van and hurried across the street toward the figure. Mike turned around, nodded at his friend, and said, "Get ready." Then to Johnnie, "Hey. Are you coming with us?"

Johnnie just stared out the window at the unfolding drama and said nothing. He wasn't about to jeopardize his future. Not that it felt much like a future at present, but he knew that jumping out of a Department of Corrections van in the middle of a small town was not going to improve his chances of getting out of prison sooner. Mike turned to look too, and then hissed, "Go, go, go!" as he unbelted himself and sidled awkwardly to the door. David struggled with his belt, but managed to free himself and follow his friend.

"What's going on back..." the officer in the driver's seat started, looking up at the rearview mirror. "Hey!" he yelled. "Stop you two."

But it was too late. With whoops of joy, the two shuffle-stepped down the street, away from the van and the bloodstained figure. Brian just watched. On one side of the van he saw the man in uniform approach the injured party, and on the other side he saw Mike and David trying to escape. The khaki jumpsuits were like beacons to all who could see them. There was no way the pair could escape. At best, they could hope to remain free for minutes.

The driver fumbled with his belt, managed to get free of the restraint and the van, and almost fell out of the vehicle. He was a big man and not in the best of shape. The thought of losing not just one but two offenders made his heart race. With a grunt, he caught himself and started to give chase.

"We got runners," he yelled to his partner, who stood staring in confusion at the figure before him. Dimly, he heard the other man say, "There's something wrong here..."

Johnnie watched the officer stand and stare. The bloody figure paused too, as if noticing the officer for the first time, then reached. The man in uniform danced backward, eyes widening in surprise, as he called out.

"What's going on?" Johnnie whispered.

The driver paused in mid-pursuit when he heard his partner call out. He looked from his escaping quarry and back again to his partner. The pair in khaki continued to flee, while his fellow officer was now on the ground, struggling.

"I can't leave a man down," the man said, turning to help. It was part of his training. He didn't even have to think about it. Thinking would have hindered his ability to act.

Johnnie watched from inside the van with horrified fascination as the blood-covered man leaned into the officer and sank his teeth into shoulder. The officer cried out, vainly trying to push the other away. It was too late though. His teeth found their mark again. Johnnie's heart began to pound in his chest.

"What's going on?" he whispered. "What is going on? This is crazy? What are these people doing?"

Suddenly this place was no longer a boring little town where nothing exciting ever happened.

"Thompson, help me!" the officer on the ground called out. "Get this thing off me."

Bloody teeth sank into the man's forearm. There was another scream and suddenly Officer Thompson forgot all of his Department of Corrections training. He didn't think about using appropriate restraint upon the struggling party. He didn't think about how he would write the paperwork if he failed to use the proper procedures. He was past all of that now. All that was left was panic.

Officer Thompson ran to his fellow officer and lashed out with his leg, kicking the bloody man in the ribs as hard as he could. Bones crunched under the force of the blow, lifting the attacker up and off his colleague. But it didn't stop.

Johnnie's eyes widened as he saw the officer kick, and widened further still when the man didn't react to the blow. There was no cry of pain. No gasping heaves in an attempt to fill the lungs. No reaction at all. And then Johnnie saw it - the man's chest wasn't moving at all - and knew something was terribly wrong. All of the news reports that he didn't care about suddenly made sense. Now he cared. Now Johnnie was scared. He was also helpless.

"Get in the van!" Johnnie screamed. Frantically, he struggled and managed to push the release on his seat belt. With even greater effort, Johnnie stood and fell over the middle seat as he tried to get to the still open passenger doors of the van. Fighting the restraints on his hands and feet, he got up and over the last hurdle. And there it was. Freedom. The freedom that he'd lost. The van doors were still open and there was no one to stop him from running away.

But as he looked out into the free world, Johnnie squinted as he saw something. From two blocks away there appeared a figure with a familiar shuffling gait - only there was a frantic quality to the movement. And he was making his way back to the van. Someone was giving chase. Johnnie leaned forward, watching as the khaki-clad figure tripped and went down. And didn't get back up again. The pursuit fell atop the former prisoner, clutching and biting.

Something to Teach

“Get in the van!” Johnnie screamed again. He reached for the door, almost losing his balance in the process. He’d forgotten about the chains around his middle that restricted his movement. Johnnie managed to pull one door closed when a loud thump jarred him. Crouched in the door of the van, shackled hands reaching for balance, he turned at the sound. It was the blood-soaked man. He was standing with both hands splayed out on the windows of the van, leaving bloody fingerprints, and his empty eyes stared at Johnnie. The young man crouched frozen in horror. He couldn’t move. He could only watch in horrified fascination as the face pressed against the window. Johnnie’s breath froze in his chest. There was no fog of breath against the windowpane. The man. The thing. Whatever it was. It was dead. And yet, somehow it had risen.



Officer Thompson didn’t speak as he pulled Johnnie from the van. He didn’t speak when the officer in the receiving room asked for the transfer paperwork.

“What’s going on Thompson?” the man asked. “I’m supposed to have three offenders. My paperwork shows three offenders. You show up with one offender. What’s the problem?”

Thompson walked past the man, through the Control Room, and to the front door of the unit. He stood and waited for the mechanical buzz and click of the lock. Thompson looked back at the man who stood, staring in confusion. He knew that he needed to say something. Something to distract the officer. Something to get the man to leave him alone.

“We had some issues,” Thompson managed. “I need to talk to the Captain. Now. I’ll hit you on the radio in a minute.”

The other man nodded. He could tell something was seriously wrong, but Thompson sounded calm. In control. “Sounds good,” he replied. “I’ll take care of this one and we’ll get the paperwork sorted out later.”

Thompson didn’t go to the Captain’s office. Instead, he walked past the guard shack along the sidewalks to front of the facility. There he turned in his radio and keys and again waited patiently for the officer in the control booth to release the heavy metal doors. Without a backward glance, Thompson left the facility, climbed into his car and drove home. He left Johnnie still standing, staring, dumbfounded. There was another young man waiting in the receiving area with him. Only he wasn’t dressed in the prison-issue khakis. He was dressed in street clothes. The two stared at one another.

“Matthews,” the receiving officer interrupted. “Brian Matthews. Are you ready to go?”

“Yeah,” Brian said. “I’m ready to leave.” Then he nodded at Johnnie and thought, “He’s scared. I’ve seen it before. His first day in prison and he’s scared out of his mind.”

Later, Johnnie sat alone in his cell. He was huddled on his bunk and the thin prison-issue blanket couldn’t warm the cold that ran through his veins. Johnnie sat staring out the window of his cell at the outside world. The skies had darkened and it had begun rain. He sat unmoving for a long time. Then he started yelling again.

“You gotta listen to me,” he called out. “There’s something going on out there. I saw it. I saw it with my own eyes.”

Something to Teach

The officer on the intake unit shook his head as he rose to make his rounds of the unit. "Just what we need," he thought. "Another crazy one. The crazy ones are always seeing stuff. I don't need that type of crazy right now. I need calm. He's going to get the other new people on the unit all worked up into a frenzy. If he keeps on screaming and yelling, then I'm going to put him in the time out room."

The man stopped at Johnnie's cell and peered in through the window. He didn't say anything. He just watched as Johnnie continued to yell.

"Why won't anybody listen to me? They're out there. Zombies. I saw them with my own eyes. I'm telling you."

"The risen dead," the officer said, nodding. "Interesting. Then this must be Judgment Day."

"Judgment day," Johnnie whispered, suddenly quiet, staring off into space. The words jogged his memory. For some reason he thought of the judge and his parting words. "Something more precious than freedom..." he echoed. Then Johnnie curled back into a ball and was quiet. The officer nodded, pleased, and then finished his visual inspection of the unit. Johnnie didn't speak after that. He just lay still and waited.

End

Countdown

The men and women sitting around the table were all relaxed and confident – save one. He was nervous, even anxious, but strove to appear calm. The rest, all professionals – highly esteemed in their respective fields – chatted amiably amongst themselves. There were biochemists, molecular biologists, epidemiologists, virologists, physicians, applied mathematicians, and even an actuary. Each one had numerous credits to his or her name. There was no competition, no locking of bull’s horns. That sort of behavior was for rank amateurs and none present was an amateur.

“Dr. Mills,” a well-padded man in an expensively tailored suit said, addressing the figure at the head of the table. “There is no conclusive evidence that what was reported by the physician in...” he paused, trying to remember the name of the small town. There were many things crammed inside his brain. It was sometimes difficult to keep it all straight.

“Bloomington,” Dr. Mills finished. “Bloomington, Texas.” His head was equally filled with a wide panorama of medical knowledge, but he didn’t share his colleague’s propensity for memory lapses when it came to the smallest of details. That was Dr. Mills’s gift, among others. He could handle large amounts of information without forgetting even the smallest of details while simultaneously able to discern patterns within large amounts data – sometimes divergent and seemingly unrelated data.

“Bloomington. Thank you,” the large man said. “There is no substantial evidence to support the man’s hysterical claim. Frankly, I find the whole notion ridiculous. That a medical man,” he paused, looking around the table at his female colleagues, “or woman, would forward such a report, claiming its veracity, is beyond the pale of reason. The man should have his license to practice medicine revoked and,” he paused again, “institutionalization should not be out of the question. I cannot fathom why a group of learned persons such as ourselves is even entertaining the possibility of such nonsense. The statements made by this Doctor...” his memory lapsed again.

“Dr. Hohn,” Dr. Mills finished for him.

“Hohn, yes,” the man continued. “His statements are better suited for science fiction than science. And what is this nonsense about naming it? IMV-1. By naming it you actually given credulity to the man’s absurd claims. It’s ridiculous.”

Dr. Mills said nothing, only nodding in understanding. He looked around the table at the others to see if any others shared this man’s opinion. There were a few slight nods and some sympathetic stares, but no outright approval. They were too intelligent to follow someone else’s lead. Each would make his or her own mind up as he or she saw fit. Dr. Mills leaned over his keyboard and began typing. In due course, he finished, sat back, and waited. The conversation around the table continued.

Shortly, a nondescript man in a dark suit entered the room without knocking and approached the well-padded doctor, leaned over, and whispered something in his ear. The physician looked slightly startled, eyes widening, then struggled to his feet. The nondescript man stepped back and waited, hands folded neatly across his front. When the outraged doctor had gained his feet, the waiting figure ushered him out the door. Once the door closed, Dr. Mills looked at his remaining colleagues, asked

simply, "Does anyone else think that what I have presented to you is nonsense? Fit only for science fiction? Please speak up...now."

A dark-haired woman with glasses and a furrowed brow leaned forward, staring intently at Dr. Mills.

"Am I to understand," she started, "that what you have presented to us here is the truth? As implausible as it sounds."

Dr. Mills nodded slowly at the woman. "Yes," he said. She leaned back in her chair, unperturbed, quietly considering the ramifications of his one word answer. He was pleased by her reaction. Indeed, he was pleased by everyone's reactions to his answer. He was hyper-vigilant for the slightest show of emotion or disbelief. If any had reacted in a manner that he deemed unfit, there would have been more typing, followed by the entrance of another nondescript man to escort that person off the property, never to return.

"That large man," drawled a voice heavy with the bayou from the opposite end of the table. His words were slow and careful, and belied the fact that his mind moved quickly. "The one who just left. He won't be coming back, will he?"

"That is correct," Dr. Mills confirmed. The slow speaking man nodded, continuing to think on the matter at hand. After a long moment he asked, "How much time do we have?"

"That's one of the reasons I have asked you to come here," Dr. Mills replied, leaning forward. It was time to get down to business. The initial shock seemed to have worn off and the only vetting and subsequent dismissal had been quick and clean. He had chosen wisely.

"There are confirmed reports of what we are referring to as the IMV-1 virus," Dr. Mills continued. "I have not provided you with all of the information at my disposal. My concern." He paused, looking at the people sitting around the table. "Our concern is the possibility of a mutation of IMV-1. The ramifications of the emergence of an IMV-2 are far-reaching. I must consider the very real possibility that this virus will jump from our species to another. And what if it does? We do not know why the dinosaurs were wiped out. Certainly theories abound, but there is no real conclusive proof of why dinosaurs no longer exist. Was it some super asteroid, or a disease?"

"Then I assume," another voice interrupted, "that we are also here to determine whether or not this...phenomenon is an extinction event for humanity? Yes?"

"Our job," Dr. Mills corrected, "is to make sure that our race not only survives this event, but thrives in the face of adversity. That is what humanity has always done - survive. We have successfully met every challenge from the Black Death to world wars, and we will meet this challenge as well. We will meet it and rise above it."

One of the oldest members of the panel chuckled, although it was a dry, humorless mirth.

"Your words," he said, "are filled with irony. We will 'rise above it' you say? We will rise above those who appear to have risen from the dead? What? Will we stand upon their shoulders?"

Something to Teach

Dr. Mills turned to face the older gentlemen, met his gaze unflinchingly, and said, "If need be, yes."

The old man, whose years were filled with experience, expertise, and wisdom, had more reason than any other person on the panel to doubt. To consider the whole problem a waste of time. To want to go home and pay his respects to family and friend and wait for the end. To simply give up. Yet he, in all of his infirmity, was also possessed of a single characteristic in an unending abundance that made Dr. Mills relax slightly.

The old man nodded, and said simply, "Well, then I suggest we get to work. The clock is ticking."

End

Nom de Guerre: _____



Writing Prompt

Directions: Consider the quote and the thinking/writing prompt below. Write a reasoned response to the question in the space provided. Use complete sentences.

"... second star to the right, and straight on 'till morning."

Peter Pan, giving directions to Wonderland, from Peter Pan

Where is your Wonderland?

What are the things that give you hope? Make a list of everything that gives you hope. Choose one, two, or three of the things on your list, and write a paragraph for each one explaining why you chose it.

Lined writing area consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

Nom de Guerre: _____

Creative Writing Prompt

Excerpt from CDH site...

The Centre for the Defense of Humanity: Protecting the Living. Ensuring the Future of Humanity

The Centre for the Defense of Humanity considers communication a vital link in stopping the spread of the IMV-1 virus. In light of the hysteria surrounding the spread of this outbreak and acts of civil disobedience, normal channels of communication throughout our country and the world have suffered. Traditional means of communication such as television, telephone, satellite communications, even Internet services are sporadic, even nonexistent, in certain areas.

This site is maintained in an effort to provide a consistent source of reliable information to members of the public who still have access to the Internet. This section of the site also serves as a tool for those who wish to post information about their respective areas. Not all of the posts are considered reliable or valid. There have been erroneous claims made about a supposed "Zombie plague". The Centre strives to remove any such claims about the dead coming back to life as we feel that this only adds to the atmosphere of hysteria. However, due to recent staff shortages, strict adherence to this policy has not always been maintained.

If you have any questions or wish to add a post of your own, please send us an email through our contact page. Please include your name, your location, any security concerns in your area, and any additional information about the spread of the IMV-1 virus. Thank you.

Protecting Yourself and Your Family

It is important that you take steps to protect yourself and loved ones from the IMV-1 virus. It appears to spread from person-to-person in much the same way as the flu virus. However, there is one important distinction between the IMV-1 virus and other viral infections. The IMV-1 virus is highly contagious. There appear to be numerous forms of transmission. From fluid-to-skin contact (infected blood on your skin), inhalation (coughing and/or sneezing), to transfer of fluids (kissing, bites from the infected) the IMV-1 virus has reportedly been transferred from a contaminated host to a new victim. It is important to take all necessary and appropriate measures to protect you and your family.

1. In the space provided below, what else would you add to the CDH website? This could be advice, directions, etc.



Nom de Guerre: _____

Creative Writing Prompt

The following protocols have been developed in order to ensure the safety of the general public:

CDH Protocol 1: Remain indoors. Only go outside if it is necessary for your survival. The CDH recommends stockpiling as much fresh water and food as possible. Canned goods are recommended. The severity of the outbreak of the IMV-1 virus is only expected to last a few months. Just as other viruses like the flu virus ebb and flow with the seasons, it is predicted that the IMV-1 virus will follow a similar path. It is better to remain indoors as much as possible in order to limit the possibility of exposure to infection.

CDH Protocol 2: Help yourself. State and local authorities are overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation. You cannot reasonably expect help from any of the traditional first responders such as police, firemen, and EMS. You must take measures to ensure your own safety.

CDH Protocol 3: Cover your skin. If you are going to leave a safe location and expose yourself to potential infection from the IMV-1 virus, then make sure that you are wearing long sleeves and pants. The CDH also recommends that you wear socks and shoes as well as gloves to protect your hands and feet. A surgical mask covering your mouth and nose is essential. These protocols should be followed at all times and in all locations. In warmer climates and during the summer months, people should continue to cover themselves. To offset the risk of dehydration and heat exhaustion, remember to drink enough fluids to maintain appropriate levels of hydration.

CDH Protocol 4: There is always hope.

1. If you were going to write more CDH Protocols - add more to the above list - what would you write? Use the space below to add your own protocol(s).

Nom de Guerre: _____



Creative Writing Prompt

Newswire report...

The leader of a local environmental group said "Amen" to the spread of the IMV-1 virus. "Perhaps now the scourge of humanity can be wiped from the face of the earth and our planet will be returned to a more natural state." Later it was reported that the spokesman for this group subsequently became infected and decried the medical community for not acting quickly enough in the face of this medical crisis.

Newswire report...

An unnamed preacher in a local church announced that he was embracing the infected. "There is no need to turn away from our brethren. We must be our brothers' keepers. Our doors are open to both the sick and the healthy." At last report, the survivors of this church were seen setting fire to the tabernacle. The preacher was inside.

E-mail communication to CDH site...

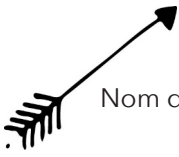
Today was supposed to be picture day at school. Instead my best friend Carl showed up sick. I heard about people getting sick. Zombie sick is what I heard people calling it on the computer. Mrs. Simmons - our English teacher - tried to get him to go to the nurse. Carl wouldn't go. He just sorta stared at her and then fell over onto the floor. That was when Mrs. Simmons started to freak out. I was standing back away from everybody so I couldn't see, but then the kids started to freak too. Everybody started yelling, "He puked up blood! There's blood all over Carl."

Then I guess he got hold of Katie and bit her. I didn't really like Katie all that much, but I didn't want to see her get turned into a zombie. The last thing I heard was her screaming. I didn't stick around to find out if she lived or not. I figured if a zombie bit you, then you are pretty much dead. No questions asked. So I lit out of there.

Mark Wells, 8th grade
St. Louis, Missouri

Directions: Write your own newswire report(s) for the CDH site. Be creative.

Horizontal lines for writing.



Nom de Guerre: _____

Writing Prompts

Directions: Read the following quote:

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Directions: Consider the thinking/writing prompt(s) below. For each one, write a reasoned response. Use complete sentences.

1. There are more things in the fictional heaven and earth that can be dreamt of...like a zombie/plague/apocalypse. Imagine you are confronted with such a reality. Do you think you would survive? Explain your reasoning.

2. What is your family's escape plan for emergencies? Fire, flood, tornado, etc.
