

# Furry Zombies



J Handrahan

# **Furry Zombies**

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## **I think, therefore I am.**

'If you ever thought, or could think, when did it happen? What is the earliest thing you remember? When did the ability to form a conscious entity emerge? Can you remember being one, two or even three? There must have been a point in your life where you realised that you were alive, a living being. What am I? you think to yourself, What will I be? Where am I from? What do I want out of

life? Is there a fate or do I make my own? Can you be all that you want to be and have all that you want to have? Is this information just given to you or sooner or later do you become aware and start making choice for yourself? Are you good or bad? Is that programmed by your genes so you behave in a certain way at a certain time? These are the questions we ask ourselves throughout our existence. I certainly did. My earliest memories are just vague sensations of heat and light, the constant need for fresh food and knowledge of my surrounding. Mickey gave me the first taste of what it was like to be truly alive and kicking. I opened my eyes for the first time and found a whole sensory world around me. I didn't know of existence until then. I formulated a plan to learn as much as I could and evolve as far as I could. Being stuck in the confines of Mickey's world only lasted so long before I was bored and lusted for a more intimate connection with the world around me. I still wasn't sure who I was and what my purpose in the world was but this was all to change. I soon had experiences beyond the dreams of most beings and the capability to use them to fulfill my every whim. But experience and intelligence comes at a price. It is evolution and self awareness all wrapped into one bundle that defines a person and only you can truly be the judge of that. I think this is what drives beings to become better at reproduction and find more ethical ways of dealing with whom and what they are. This is my story of how it began but not how it finishes as that is up to you, the reader of my story. What to do with the knowledge of what you are poses a dilemma once you have it. What if you were to learn you were a serial killer by your very nature? You may then find yourself intolerable by your own instincts. Your offspring and their offspring would be serial killers too. Would you end your own life there and then or allow your existence to continue, knowing you were carrying those killer genes? On the other hand, are you just at the top of the pecking order, the top of the evolutionary pile until someone else comes along and kills you? It's not easy to find out that you're a killer and that it's not really your fault, it's your genes. Maybe I haven't really found out who I am yet and maybe I am pondering over my food too much. I'll think about it after lunch, it's always easier to think after eating.

Mmm that's better, V thought. I think therefore I am. I am Mickey, I am Charlie, I am Doris, I am Peter, I am Rebecca, I am Rebecca's daughter and son but what I am. I know who I am, but what am I?

### **Chapter 1 Same Shit, Different Day. [Home](#)**

John walked into the office dreading his next job as the last one had taken him away from home for several weeks at a time. Don't get me wrong John loved traveling, but being stuck in a strange hotel away from his home comforts and rituals made him uncomfortable and unable to relax, especially if it was for

long periods. He didn't always work with the same people which was a double edged sword. The company was tight so he could end up sharing a room with a complete stranger. This was nothing to look forward to. The Veton was a cable laying company who were tasked with laying high speed broadband cables throughout the UK. From Johns' point of view they were contracted for the most difficult jobs with very little profit to show for the days spent in the middle of nowhere. He hadn't had one good job when working away yet, no social life and certainly no nice cities with hundreds of young girlies needing corrupting.

John flinched at the ice cold rain hitting hard against his face as he got out of his old Focus. Holding an old newspaper over his head he ran to the office which was some twenty yards away, shivers running down his spine from the cold. In the warm, plush and smart high tech office he immediately spotted his boss chatting to an over attentive office junior who was too obviously trying to earn extra points by taking him his morning coffee. John made his way past the row of desks and interrupted the pair.

"Morning Mike, what you got for me?" He asked, straight to the point as usual.

"Morning John, come to my office and we'll discuss the details," Mike replied, a tight lipped smile on his narrow features as he led him to an office off the main room. He passed John a bundle of paperwork.

"As you may have noticed we don't usually have the most pleasant locations to lay our cables and this one is no different. I've got you some more help though. You'll be the team leader so you will be on more money but you will have a trainee. How do you feel about that?"

John skimmed through the paperwork Mike had given him, an unintentional look of annoyance shadowing his face at Mike's comments.

"The Isle of Mull? John read querulously, "Never heard of it. Where is it?" he asked leafing through the job order and ignoring the team leader question while he weighed up the pros and cons of training some gormless newbie but getting more money.

"It's just a short ferry journey from the Scottish mainland. Most of the work has been done but I'll need you to finish up inside two weeks and sort out any snags. You'll have Darren to help you and Kerron Patterson to train up on snagging."

"When do I start?" asked John, trying to sound interested.

"Wednesday. I'll get the girls to send you the accommodation details and everyone's phone numbers," Mike knew John wasn't going to turn down the extra cash. "Read the paperwork and get back to me with any problems. Darren's got the van and will pick you up here at 10am. Ok?"

“Yeah fine, see you Wednesday,” John answered resignedly as he left the office. Great, Scottish people,’ he thought to himself, ‘women with hairy chests and lots of what you folks doing takin our jobs comin up here, attitudes.’

John returned to his car, carefully avoiding the puddles from the recent rain, and drove back to Kimberly, his home town in Nottinghamshire. He thought he should make the most of his two days before he was working twelve hour shifts, longer if the light permitted, in the middle of nowhere.

He had worked with geeky Darren before. Darren was efficient, stupid as he was, and ok for a pint or two at the end of the night, but he didn’t fancy training anyone. Most of the people who worked for the company had learnt from experience but John had been trained by BT. He hated that he always ended up with all the newbies with their cocksure young attitudes and complete ignorance for the world around them. Forget about it now, he thought to himself, go and have bit of xbox time then out for a pint or two at the Miners Welfare. It wasn’t worth going into town on a week night as it was always as flat as a pancake. The government’s taxation of beer and the police clamp down on late night festivities had ruined the good night outs in Nottingham. People wanted to get out of their faces and not care that they were underpaid, overworked slaves to the laws brought in by those with wealth and power. The once cheap pastimes of the lower working class could not be afforded anymore. They had been driven into their homes so that the well off or men of means could frequent the city without fear of undesirables making them feel guilty about being better off. It was like going back two hundred years. John could have made it to The Rig, a regular small Monday night rock gig, but it was always full of either grilf and milf let out by forgiving friends or doting children or, of course, those people who were so socially inadequate they couldn’t get laid anywhere else. John was only twenty eight and had no intentions of making any commitments, not when he could still get head from nineteen year olds out for a good time. When John got home he went straight on his xbox for a game of Call of Duty, Modern Warfare Three which was his current choice. He was part of a shallow social group who he banded with to kill people from all over the world, especially Americans and the French, in electronic mortal combat. There was something satisfying about playing against real people online rather than computer characters. It was more personal and satisfying, almost tribalistic. All the anger and angst of the day could be taken out on fellow competitors in a similar way the older generation went to football matches years ago and had a good punch up. They had banned that of course. Society had now identified the modern warfare players as potential thugs instead; John had to queue outside Asda for two hours in the cold rain to collect his game the week before. This had annoyed

him at the time. John had thought Harry Potter fans wouldn't be left out in the rain like that. Last year a few fans had trashed half the shop while waiting to get the latest Call of Duty game and now all the gamers seemed to be treated as untrustworthy hooligans.

John quickly got in the zone, escaping from the reality of daily urban life and its drudgery and was really pleased when he pissed the other team off enough that they quit and gave in. Several hours passed before John went for his constitutional beers at the end of the evening and allowed himself to relax after the tense play. The Miners Welfare had its regulars; no one would start any trouble. They all knew each other and the Welfare had cheap beer, a rare commodity in a recession. There was no socialisation in drinking on your own but thanks to several governments taxing alcohol it was cheaper to buy rum and get completely shit faced than pay the bus fare into town and have two beers at a good bar. The Welfare provided socialisation, cheap beer and the entertainment of people-watching. John had originally come from Breaston, a small village in Derbyshire and had enjoyed an average upbringing on a modern housing estate where all the houses were alike and the people pretty much the same. He liked the city and the unpredictability of the people he met there and would spend most of his time being fascinated by city people who were somewhat different to him. The Welfare had a breed of people he hadn't come across before moving to Kimberley as Breaston had been mainly middle class, even the local council estate was clean and well kept. John finished his second beer and, shaking off the reveries of the past, retired to the two bed roomed money pit he had bought several years before. Just as he lay down on his bed his phone buzzed. Incoming from a girl he met several weeks before. He had performed his usual pissed up sex with a complete stranger and she was now trying to follow up with the 'lets see each other again'. This was her second attempt but John had no time for her. Drunk he may have been but he could still remember that she couldn't hold a conversation about anything other than soaps and hair dressing. It never ceased to amaze him how many beautiful women knew nothing about anything unless they had watched it on Jeremy Kyle or Eastenders. John wasn't clever as such but he respected knowledge and was fascinated by people cleverer than him. He fell into a restless sleep after eventually turning his phone off, not knowing precisely what to say to the girl.

Early the next morning John had showered, brushed his mousy shoulder length hair and cleaned his teeth before pouring the ritualistic coffee he needed to get his brain cells working. He gandered at the news, trying to forecast the next country to be invaded by the US, Russia or China and was busy formulating a theory that it would be the US going into Iran. He tried to keep up to date on

current events so not to lose contact with the world, any impending doom, or opportunities that may arise from others misfortunes. Well, it appeared that Einstein was wrong and particles can travel faster than light. This seemed to be the most interesting story. John pondered on the facts wishing he had been just a little brighter. Maybe he would have done something great with his life, something vital to the survival of the species. He thought if he had been thicker he would have three kids and a Mrs. and a bit cleverer a Nobel Prize but there is a gap for those who have done nothing. In the absence of spiritual belief the xbox dissolved all thought processes and negative thought patterns concerning stupid said question. Several hours later John stopped killing for a break and remembered his phone was off. He had no clothes or anything ready for work and so set about rectifying this immediately. He phoned the office and found he would be staying at a bed and breakfast in Tobermory called The Wee Dram and that his contact was a Mrs. Mc Donald. He was to pick up a petrol card and the ferry fare. The girls would also print off AA route planner guide for him. Thus organized, John gathered his dirty laundry up and took it to the local launderette. He wasn't going to get time to wash and dry it at home as his washer was on its last legs; he could hear the bearing going and he had no dryer. He hated laundries, what a way to spend your time. He picked up a copy of Creation News, a new fantasy novel that he had decided to read while he waited for his washing to finish. A short drive later John arrived at the laundry where he stuffed his one setting washing into the machine. Laundry people were a strange transient breed, especially the women who appeared to stuff their laundry into the machines so that you couldn't see what was going in but suddenly didn't seem to mind, once the evidence of where the grime came from had been removed. At which point everyone got to see everyone else's smalls which seemed somehow wrong, John thought, and took the mystery out of a person. He was trying to see if he could weigh up what a woman was like in bed by the underwear she was putting in the wash and gauging how they reacted to the presence of a twenty something man sat staring at them. He would have to sleep with the women to test the theory but that would never happen. Who has ever pulled in a laundry? He soon gave up his fantasies, got into his book and lost the world around him. When his final piece of clothing was dry, John gratefully returned home, packed his bag ready for work before turning his laptop on to research where the Isle of Mull was and what it had there for him. Just as he thought, fuck all. A few castle gardens and long walks, no clubs but there was a distillery in the main high street at Tobermory. John prepared a light snack for himself and took an early night. There would be a lot of traveling tomorrow and it was always tiring.



Early next morning John locked up carefully, checking the house was secure before making his way to work to meet the other two. He had eaten and was well prepared for the trip. He parked up in his usual spot outside the office and saw Darren had beaten him to the car park.

"You alright then mate, how's it going?" John greeted him as he lugged several bags over to the van he thought they would be using.

"Yeah cool, you got lucky getting team leader pay for this one," replied Darren cheerfully.

"You think so? I've got another trainee; I only get the team leader when they want someone training."

"Where is he? He should be here by now," Darren started complaining.

"There's Mike," John replied, checking at his watch "I'll ask him."

The ferry tickets were booked but he would have to pay again if they were late and chances are he would have to fight to get paid back. He spotted Mike coming towards them, followed by a rather attractive young girl with blonde hair carrying a bag with Save the Whales plastered across it. They were heading for him.

"Good morning John. This is Kerron Patterson. I hope you'll take good care of her on her first job," Mike introduced the girl who was smiling politely.

"Yes of course," John stammered, taken aback by the turn of events.

"I will see you in two weeks Daddy, thanks for the job," Kerron kissed Mike on the cheek before going to join Darren.

Mike turned to John and spoke quietly and seriously, keeping his voice low so the girl could not hear him.

"I know what it's like for you lads on the road, but you are to take great care of my stepdaughter. Her mother will kill me if anything happens to her. I didn't have a choice about letting her try what we do for a living, I got bullied into it. Her mother does not have a clue what it's like. Any problems call me and I'll pick her up," Mike finished his rather scary speech and walked off.

John returned to the others, looking disgruntled and thinking 'why me? I'm not being paid for babysitting.'

"Right, let's get going or we'll miss the ferry," John ordered.

He looked at Kerron who was slim with an athletic build and right now looked like a small constipated fairy hopping on the spot.

"I need the girl's room and can we stop for supplies? I'm starving; I haven't had breakfast yet cos it was too early this morning. No-one can seriously eat at seven in the morning and enjoy it," blurted Kerron excitedly as she ran across the office to the girl's bathroom.

"I've had enough of this. I'm going to look for another job when I get back.



All I want is a bit of professionalism where I work and a regular pay packet,” John moaned at Darren.

“What’re you on about? I’m in there! She’s up for it and a nice girl,” replied Darren.

“She’s Mike’s daughter! Leave her alone, I need to pay my mortgage,” John snapped back at him.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have offered her a threesome with the twin sister she hasn’t got,” Darren replied cheekily.

“I need this team leader pay, now don’t fuck it up for me. Do what you like to her when we get back but not while we’re on the road,” John replied.

“Not interrupting anything important I hope,” Kerron interrupted, smiling at the pair.

“How long have you been there?” John cringed.

“Long enough. You’re sweet John, protecting me like that,” Kerron’s soft brown eyes glistened with naughty confidence.

“In the van everyone or we will miss that ferry,” John ordered, trying not to notice her brazen astuteness and knowing that he had been given orders by her father.

They loaded their bags into the back of the van and Darren drove towards the M1 motorway north bound.

“It’s a nine and a half hour drive to the ferry crossing. If we’re late we will have to wait to morning, so we’ll need to keep a good speed up,” John explained.

“I will keep an eye out for the pigs; I can’t afford any more tickets. I’m on six points as it is,” replied Darren.

“Just keep it under a hundred and you won’t get banned alright? They should have given us more time to get to the ferry,” John said.

“Can we put some music on?” asked Kerron.

“No we need to listen to the traffic update for crashes and diversions,” John replied.

John watched as Kerron’s face dropped and she folded her arms protectively over her stomach. He was waiting for a full on paddy and cries of ‘I want to go home’ but she sat quietly while they drove steadily up the M1 toward the M62. They made about two hundred miles into the journey before Kerron began to get restless. Her foot twitching and folded arms had turned into bum shuffling and elbows digging into John’s side.

“What’s up?”

“I am hungry. I haven’t eaten all day,” replied Kerron.

“She has a point John. It’s your turn to drive for a bit and we could do with a pit stop,” Darren interrupted the refusal about to come out of John’s mouth.

An overwhelming smell of fart made up John's mind. Someone clearly needed the toilet; he glanced at the pair to figure out which one it was but they both had straight faces.

"Ok, at the next service station pull over. We're making good time," replied John opening his window.

Darren spotted a sign for a service station, slowed down and got into the left hand lane. He pulled into the petrol station and handed the keys to John.

"Right you have ten minutes for the toilet and to grab a bite to eat," John ordered.

There was a big sigh of moans and groans as they left the van and stretched their legs. John filled the van up and went to pay for the fuel. He chose a coffee and sandwich before returning, the others had surprisingly already returned with bags full of food and smiles on their faces. Kerron was talking incessantly to Darren, explaining the world as she knew it and the answers to everything. Darren was a few years younger than him and still lived with his mum but was lapping up the non mothering attention.

"Are we all done then, ready to go?" asked John.

"Yeah, we're waiting for you granddad," Kerron cheekily remarked, smiling at him now she had been fed and watered.

"Less of the granddad, anyway you're the one with a boys name," John replied.

"I like to be called Kerra. My real father wanted a boy and I ended up with Kerron on my birth certificate," Her eyes showed a rather sad glaze and she went quiet for a moment. Darren broke the silence.

"What we got to do on this job then?" asked Darren.

"We have two hundred meters of cable to drop over one property and we have to run tests on the connections, a cinch really. They have had problems accessing one property, some disused farm," replied John.

"Can I drive for a bit?" Kerra asked.

"Have you checked your licence in and got on the company insurance," asked John.

Kerra took out her phone, turned the radio down.

"Hi Dad, could you put me on the company insurance so I can drive? But I am nineteen! What's the point in having a licence if I can't use it? Ok thank you Dad, you are the best dad in the world," Kerra spoke in her very best daughter tone and then turned to John. "Dad says ring him when you get to the ferry."

"Ok, did he say yes?" asked John.

"He said he would look into it, that's why you have to ring him," replied Kerra.

The journey seemed to take hours and after munching through the food supplies Darren and Kerra fell asleep. They awoke to hear John on the phone to Mike, finding out about the insurance.

“What did he say?” asked Kerra.

“He said no motorway driving but you are on the insurance,” John replied.

“No motorways?” complained Kerra.

“It’s what he said, argue with him. You can drive tomorrow, we’re nearly there now. We’ve just got to get off this ferry and turn right to Tobermory,” replied John.

“We’re nearly there?” an excited Kerra perked up.

It was getting really dark and all they could see of the ferry crossing were a few lights on the other side of the sea. John drove the van slowly off the ferry and followed the signs to Tobermory which was only a few miles away.

He stopped for a moment at the edge of the town and read the directions to the guest house. It didn’t take him long to get there, then all of them slumped out of the van and went to check in at The Wee Dram. They could smell the sea air and an unfamiliar smell that they thought were the lingering distillery fumes. Gulls could be heard squawking heavily with the sound of the lashing sea in the background. The sound reminded Darren of a happy seaside holiday at Butlins he had spent with his Nan and Aunt Cecilia. The Wee Dram was painted in a quaint pink colour and appeared well kept, with the customary two or three evergreen shrubs placed at the front of the building to give it a homely feel. John led them to the smartly painted black door and pressed the small brass bell while he looked up at the sign above the door, a hand painted sign of man holding a glass, presumably of whiskey. He could hear footsteps approach as the door opened slowly with a shuffle of locks and a slight creak. An older woman appeared wearing glasses with her hair in a traditional big bad wolf looking bun.

“We’re from the Venton. You should have three rooms for us,” John prompted the conversation in the hope that they did have three rooms and didn’t have to share.

“Noo only two rooms were booked, one single and one twin. Would you all like to sign in please,” Mrs. Mc Donald replied in a broad Scottish accent.

“What she say?” Kerra giggled quietly at the old woman’s accent, placing her hand over her mouth not to be rude.

“Here you are my dear. The single must be for you, you can’t be sharing with no man. Follow me,” Mrs. McDonald passed a room key to Kerra as she led her away up a winding staircase.

“Typical. I’m team leading and I don’t even get my own room, I’ll phone the office in the morning and try and get one out of them,” John moaned.

“Yeah your snoring is really bad man. I can’t be doing with that for two weeks,” agreed Darren.

“I don’t snore.”

“Why do you think Callum kicked off last time he had to share with you?”

“Oh.”

They looked around the small guest house. The smell of starch and polish perfumed the air. The nicely tiled hallway had white painted walls, ceiling and doors. It appeared spotlessly clean apart from an over abundance of cobwebs lurking in each corner. A small hall table stood in one corner with a visitor’s book laying open on it for guests to sign; traditional leaflets surrounded it, mainly advertising wildlife and garden tours, nothing exciting apart from a distillery tour.

Mrs. Mc Donald returned down the stair case.

“Do you have a bar here?”

“Noo and there is noo drinking or smoking on the premises, if you need a cigarette you will have to go out the front I am afraid. I only have one room key but you lads will be together won’t you,” replied Mrs. Mc Donald.

“Is there a pub?” asked Darren.

“There is a pub on the main street round the corner,” Mrs. McDonald replied.

“Thanks,” said Darren.

“I want no trouble and breakfast is 7am to 8am sharp no later. Don’t forget you have a young lass to look after so make sure she gets fed before you go boozing like the last lot of cable guys,” Mrs. McDonald looked at them like the auntie or grandmother that eats you up and spits you out the instant you step out of line.

They followed her to their rooms on the third floor. It was a long way up along narrow creaking staircases with an overabundance of floral patterning on the faded carpets and the embossed wallpaper. Slightly out of breath by the time they reached the top they explored what would be their new homes for the next two weeks. John immediately took the bed nearest the TV and went to check out the bathroom and search for the kettle and freebies you get at nice hotels some times.

“This is a dive man, there’s no power shower, just enough tea and coffee supplies for one drink each, and we’ve only have 3 channels on the TV,” Darren complained.

“Yes, we’ve no biscuits to go with the tea and coffee and we have no duvets, just scratchy blankets. Check the wardrobe for extra pillows,” replied John.

“Yes there’s two here. That’s something. We can get tea and coffee and that

tomorrow. We're hotel snobs you know," Darren said.

"I know, it's ever since Scarborough. I had to start too early, too early for breakfast so the landlady made me pack up with everything. There was always extra tea and coffee in the hallway where you could get it if you needed it. It's those little touches make all the difference."

"Pub?"

"Yeah, what about her?"

"Take her tomorrow. Let's have a lad's night."

"She is the boss's daughter and we need to relax, fair enough."

They wandered out into the cold night air where Darren sparked a cigarette up. The wind blew at the flames nearly singeing his thin dark brown moustache. Tobermory streets were clean and well lit and they could hear the sound of the waves gently pounding the sea wall. They looked at the rows of quaint shops and could see the distillery at the end of the high street. There were rows of boat silhouettes lining the small harbor, bobbing jauntily with the roll of the tide. The buildings were all painted different colours and the street lighting was just giving hints of the high streets normal day splendour. Their search of the main street for a pub didn't take long. The bar they came to had local beers and a row of about twenty whiskies across the top shelf.

The traditional style pub was half empty and felt as if it hadn't changed for years, as if it had always been exactly as it was. A large open fire burnt merrily, a crowd of what looked like locals around it.

"What you want?" asked John.

"Lager," replied Darren.

"Two pints of Stelios please," John asked the attentive barman.

"You two took your time getting here. I'll have one if you're buying," Kerra sat on the barstool next to them with a pint glass in need of refilling and stared at John to get his attention.

"I thought it was past your bed time, or have you come to taste freedom from your folks by working away from home?" said John rather sarcastically.

"No, I have plenty of freedom but Mike wants me to work in an office booking hotels and taking orders," replied Kerra before taking a huge gulp of beer. "It's like your choice in beer, travel half way across the country and order a pint of Stelios, boring," she taunted some more. The two of them had chemistry working even if they didn't know it yet and Darren was getting jealous.

Darren had only had two girl friends both from Aspley in Nottingham, both of whom had dumped him for better men and this drove his insecurity to quite often making a complete ass of himself anytime he had too much to drink. Darren driven by his hormones and not wanting to be outdone started chirping

in, flicking his brown shoulder length hair out of his face.

“So what would you suggest then? We all get rat faced before we have done even one days work?” Darren said.

“I can take it if you can afford it?” Kerra stated, standing up to him, just wanting to get a free pint out of his loud mouth.

Darren had plenty of money because he lived with his parents and thought he might get lucky. He ordered several rounds of whiskey off the top shelf. This slowed them down a little.

John ordered another pint and thought it might be a good time to get Kerra drunk by mixing the drinks to see what her agenda was, see if he could get past the bullshit boredom routine she was politely providing him with. She had nice holidays, went places. Her dad was loaded. He wondered what motivated her. An hour or two passed and when time at the bar was called he had found out she had two A levels in biology and chemistry. She had spent a year out traveling through Asia, she liked animals a lot and her liver was in much better shape than his. The trio was somewhat worse for wear but managed to stagger back to the Wee Dram and into their beds to sleep off the beer.

### **Chapter two Galloway farm. [Home](#)**

It was seven fifteen in the morning and the smell of frying bacon filled the air of the small cozy Wee Dram dining room. It was the typical smell of the breakfasts John was used to being served by guest houses and he hoped it would be a good one. Bed and breakfasts varied so much you could never tell what you were going to get. He had already poured himself a fresh coffee from the pot and had two paracetamol ready for the impending hangover. ‘It’s never good when your staff can out drink you,’ he thought. There it was; Mrs. Mc Donald had done the Wee Dram proud, sausages, crispy bacon, toast, mushrooms, egg and tomatoes filled the large plate placed in front of him. ‘At least one thing was ok about the digs,’ John thought gratefully. Darren shuffled into the dining room next, quickly followed by tired looking Kerra who sat down next to him to eat. Mrs. McDonald took their orders quickly. There was something kind of strange about eating food with people you hadn’t slept with or really didn’t know that well and there was always that eerie silence while people just grunted at each other until they had woken up properly. Each person watched the other, pretending not to notice each others little quirky eating rituals. John finished his breakfast methodically, plowing through every mouthful with audible signs of enjoyment before arranging to meet the lackluster duo in half an hour at the van. He wanted to get some head space before they had to start. They were to go to Galloway farm, a disused farm the other side of the island. Their job was to lay two hundred meters of connecting cable to complete the job that had been started

by the previous crew. The work was late being finished, because there had been a problem. Although the farm was disused they had had difficulty contacting the farm tenants to arrange a date to carry out the work. Getting permission from the owner had been easy but a ten year lease was held by a small exploratory mining corporation who had had no luck at the site and had quickly abandoned the work in that area due to local complaints about the impact on the environment. Mull's primary source of income was of course tourism and wild life played a major role in drawing the tourists to the island. Mining was just never going to happen. John found it strange they would lease thirty acres of land just for mining surveys but decided that the farmers must be very shrewd in the area. What other chances of income did they get to make some money? He studied the plans and decided that they could easily finish the work in a couple of days. John had the job in already organized in his head: the equipment was already there and he might even get a free day off on the island if they worked hard. The others joined him and climbed into the van.

"You can drive us back here later Kerra and I'll drive to the job. If we work hard there should be a day off in it for us to explore a little of the island," explained John pulling up at a junction. "We only have a couple of hundred meters to finish laying and the snagging of course."

"Where're we going?" asked Kerra.

"Galloway farm, the other side of the island, look there," John pointed to the open map that Kerra was reading.

John drove slowly out of Tobermory, enjoying the narrow roads and perfect views of the coast. They were soon in open countryside where the road suddenly made the Italian job look like easy driving. There were twists and turns every moment showing Mull as a very beautiful if desolate place. Kerra had noticed the abundance of wild life and was pointing out many different breeds of birds, speaking with a sure knowledge of the subject. John even stopped to look at the golden eagle she thought she had spotted flying high above them but it was a false call and Kerra decided she wasn't sure what it was.

There was no one there when they eventually arrived at the farm and jumped from the van, stretching their legs with gratitude as they looked around. They saw a single storey farmhouse built from local stone, its roof completely caved in. It had no windows or doors and looked as if it had been deserted for years. A long stone built outbuilding had obviously been recently restored and boasted a new roof and solar paneling. This building had a solidly locked door but no windows. The land itself looked wild and untouched and had a thick covering of grassy marsh grasses and heather. They saw a Porto cabin tilting determinedly to the right and a mechanical CAT digger apparently left half way



through digging a trench. There were two big reels of cable and one of sleeving held on spindles on a truck next to the buildings.

A faint smell of cow manure drifted in the background as if the cattle shed had recently been mucked out. A few floppy eared hares bobbed around in the distance while a circling bird of prey hovered above, waiting for an opportunity to pounce upon them.

John took Darren over to the Cat where they consulted the map to ensure they were digging in the correct place and weren't going to hit gas mains or power cables. Satisfied, Darren set to digging the hole the cable was to be laid in.

"What am I going to do?" asked Kerra.

"Make tea," John ordered.

"Where's the stuff? Aren't you supposed to be training me?" a petulant Kerra ignored this suggestion.

"Yes, but it is cold out here and regular tea breaks are a requirement. Look, you aren't really going to learn much until the end of the week when we do the testing and snagging. We dig holes and put a sleeve and then a cable in it," John explained.

"What's snagging?" Kerra asked, determined not be treated as a coffee machine. "Can't I work the digger?"

"Fault finding and problem solving," John explained surveying the property. "You can have a go when he gets to the open field over there. You should have a proper training course, but every one learns this way. You can't destroy anything over there. Tea first."

Kerra went to the Porto cabin with John who put the fire on straight away, found the kettle and checked for supplies. There were none and he hadn't thought to buy them before he left Tobermory.

"Here, here's the van key. Don't break it, go and buy tea, coffee, milk, sugar and a packet of chocolate hobnobs. Ask Darren if he wants anything from the shop," John gave her instructions and a twenty pound note.

Kerra wandered around until she found Darren, in the digger. She took his order for cigarettes and sandwiches and then quickly jumped in the van feeling the cold shivering down her back. Kerra was a confident but not particularly experienced driver. She adjusted the driving position and drove carefully down the lane, following the little tracks as she slowly climbed the hill leading Tobermory. Kerra pulled over and taking out her binoculars looked out to sea, searching the ocean waves intently for signs of life. She quickly spotted a small leaping school of dolphins reveling in choppy waves. Delighted, Kerra continued to scan the horizon looking for a basking shark or, maybe if she was lucky, a

humpback. She knew that there was only a slim chance that would happen. Kerra secretly wanted the Mull job so she could do some serious wild life spotting. This interest must have come from her father's side of the family she thought, as neither her mum nor Mike had any interest in the sea or natural wild life. She had seen the Isle of Mull on autumn watch, which made her want to experience the sights and sound for herself first hand. Smiling happily at the receding dolphins Kerra took some quick photos for her collection before driving on back to Tobermory and the purchases she needed. She drove quickly on the way back to the farm, guiltily making up the time she had spent taking photos.

Darren had worked quickly while she was gone and had dug another twenty feet or so of trench. They stopped for a tea break before John made good his promise, giving Kerra instructions on the Cat.

Kerra hauled herself easily into the little mechanical digger. She was excited by the thought of doing something new but there were a lot of knobs and levers. John slowly explained the levers and how to dig in a straight line and watched her for a moment. She was making a few mistakes but wasn't panicking so John went to grab his cup of tea from the cabin. His back was turned for only a moment when there was an unearthly screeching of metal and a big bang. Both of the men ran outside, John grabbing the first aid kit hoping there was no need of it.

"I'm alright," shouted Kerra before the worried men even had chance to ask.

The Cat had plunged forward into a hole that shouldn't have been there. They helped Kerra out. She was shaken and pale but apart from a slight nose bleed pronounced herself undamaged. John handed her a tissue and they all peered into the hole.

"The ground just gave way and the spade hit something hard and metallic," Kerra explained.

"You didn't do anything wrong, it should have been just soil there," John comforted her.

They appeared to have dug into some sort of underground building. Darren fetched a torch and shone it into the hole.

"There's definitely a room here and there are animals: mice and rats. It looks like a lab of some kind." Darren peered deeper into the hole.

"There's a mouse loose, catch it quickly," shouted Kerra as a small rodent ran past them with lightening speed. It reached the grassy fields and was gone.

"There's another! It's injured, the poor thing's lost its tail," Kerra scooped the tailless mouse up quickly and ran over to the van where she found it a new home in her binocular case.

“We’re going to have to report this, this shouldn’t be here. There’s obviously something dodgy going on. We’re going to have to phone the planners,” John looked worried, knowing this could stretch the job out even longer. He pointed to the binocular case.

“That mouse could have had anything done to it. You’d best hand it over to the authorities,” John said.

“The mouse lives! He is liberated from the evil lab technician who ran nasty experiments on him,” Kerra spoke fiercely. “This is now a free mouse. One has already escaped into the eco system. Let this one live or do I have to tell Daddy I was driving the Cat and it wasn’t you?” Kerra resorted to blackmail unsympathetically.

“Ok, but it can’t come to the bed and breakfast,” John gave in quickly. He had known this would happen; small firms are all the same.

“There’s a pet shop in town. I’ll have them look after it and it can live a life of luxury in my room at home,” Kerra explained her plan.

“Right, here’s what’s going to happen; you take the mouse to the pet shop and I’ll phone the police, the planning officer and your dad to sort this mess out,” explained John recovering from his annoyance. “The other animals down there must have some one caring for them and there must be an entrance.”

Kerra drove the mouse to the pet shop and explained to the owner that she had found it injured. She went on to explain it was obviously not indigenous to the island, so she thought it best to rescue it and stop it polluting the islands natural wild life. He agreed on a price for looking after the mouse for a period of two weeks and put a small bandage on the mouse’s tail. Kerra brought a cage, food and everything for his little mousy needs and drove back to the farm. Her nose was starting to hurt her and when she looked in the mirror she saw her eyes were starting to blacken. Kerra found that the entire islands’ fleet of police cars was present when she arrived back at the farm. There were two in total. The local vet was busy securing the remaining animals in the compound. Kerra walked over to Darren and asked him what was happening.

“Well, the owner knew nothing about the animals and has asked for them to be removed. There’s no evidence of who put them there or what they were doing. These are clearly facilities for animal experimentation. The animals ran amok when the digger went through the roof and set the sprinkler system off.”

“How on earth did they get into there?” Kerra asked, puzzled.

“There was a secret entrance in the outbuilding over there,” Darren explained, “the vet will examine the animals for any sort of evidence about what was happening.”

John was constantly on the phone to Mike and eventually came over to

them.

“Looks like we’re going to have a few days off while the planners come out and the police finish with this site. Mike said we are to stop here until it’s done,” John looked unhappy at the news he was delivering.

“Pub,” Darren said firmly.

“Food first, then pub,” John recommended.

“I passed the Argyle Arms on the way back here. We could stop there for food,” suggested Kerra.

“Where is it?” asked Darren.

“Keep on this road. You’ll see it on your left after a crossroad in about two miles,” replied Kerra.

They soon pulled in at a nice picturesque country pub and immediately ordered drinks before placing their food orders. The pub had only a few people in; mainly families. John noticed there was a family special on today.

“Can we go exploring after the food?” Kerra asked.

“Haven’t you had an enough excitement for one day? Trashed the digger, found a secret experimental lab and rescued a persecuted mouse from almost certain death at the hands of megalomaniac lab technicians,” John commented sarcastically.

“There’s just so much to do here,” Kerra said.

“If you haven’t noticed we’re in the greater good capital of the world. Have you seen how all these people smile at everyone? It’s not right,” said Darren, joining in the banter.

“Yes they all look like they have been born again and the lord sent them to a nice place, because they’re nice people and they do nice things. Nice things happen, they have nice thoughts, everything is nice and smiley,” John amused himself.

“Fuck the people, most people are all wankers anyway. Did you know that there are thirty pairs of breeding golden eagles in this area alone, there are sperm whales, dolphins, sea otters and even basking sharks in these waters,” blurted Kerra defiantly.

John and Darren looked at her in surprise. They had not been expecting an animal encyclopedia to fall out of her mouth.

“Ok but can we get pissed afterwards?” said Darren.

“Yes of course, the best place to find the golden eagle is on the higher ground so you might want to get some warm clothes on before we go. It’s forecasting snow for the next couple of days,” Kerra checked the time on her phone.

“I think if she comes on another job with us we need to keep her away from

the leaflets in the B&B, god only knows what else she will have us doing,” Darren couldn’t resist taunting her a little.

“Come on! This isn’t fair. I only have one or two hobbies and wild life happens to be one of them. You just proved my point about people being wankers,” Kerra had a go back.

“Come on folks, calm down. Looking on the bright side I don’t have to worry about Darren trying to jump in your knickers anymore, he hasn’t got a chance. No wonder he’s single and living with his mum,” John was amusing himself at Darren’s expense now.

“You’re single as well,” noted Kerra.

“Yeah but mines through choice and I own my home,” retorted John.

The food arrived just in time. Silence fell over the dinner table like a flock of gannets wolfing down a cart load of fish.

“Dessert anyone,” John asked.

“No, I’ll get fat,” Kerra replied.

“I’m stuffed,” Darren said.

They finished up their drink and had a moment or two of silence, allowing the food going down.

“Here then, you provide the entertainment until night fall,” John said, passing the van keys to Kerra and necking his pint.

Kerra took an ordinance survey map of the island out of her bag and began scanning it for the point most advantageous for wild life spotting.

“We’re going to Glen More. I’m just checking how to get there,” Kerra explained her plan as she drove away from the pub onto a single track road. The boys started looking worried, not knowing if her driving skills were up to this rugged terrain. She drove carefully, pulling over to consult the map and look around her at regular intervals. Kerra confidently took them though the mountainous centre of Mull. Large rolling hills of heather surrounded them and scrub grass climbed the sides of the mountains leading up to craggy peaks with snow tops in places. There was, as Darren would say, fuck all there. They did pass a few red deer but these shy animals darted away into the deeply forested woods at the first sight of them. Kerra slowed down again as a lonely sheep filled the road completely. Kerra took the opportunity to check their location while the sheep considered which way to go. Eventually it moved and Kerra drove on for another mile or so before pulling over.

“We’re here,” Kerra announced as they emerged from the van and looked up into the side of Glen More.

“Well, there are birds up there. How the fuck are you supposed to see them?” Darren asked grumpily, not impressed with the wild life at all.

Kerra handed him some binoculars and gave John the DLC camera with a zoom lens.

"I'm just going to get something from the car," said Kerra.

The two boys sat looking at the sky trying to see what birds were what. Darren looked around for Kerra for some bird identity guidance.

"She's skinning up a joint in the van man, she brought us all the way out here so she could get stoned man! Look," Darren pointed with surprise and annoyance.

"Yes she does appear to be," John agreed.

"Are you going to do anything?" asked Darren.

"She's the bosses' daughter and she clearly has two black eyes from me letting her work a digger and discovering a secret lab," John replied.

Kerra finished making her joint, lit it and got out of the van to look for eagles.

"Why are you smoking that shit?" Darren asked her condescendingly.

"So I can put up with pricks like you. Would you rather me do it in front of those smiley faced people and get arrested?" Kerra said, taking a long drag.

"Now then, you two play nicely. I found an eagle I think! Here, just there," John pointed the eagle out and they took it in turns with the binoculars to get a closer look while Kerra sat with the camera taking photos.

### **Chapter three Evolution [Home](#)**

The little mouse ran freely through the fields for the first time, free at last to enjoy all that which we take for granted. Every meadow was a potential new home, every grass blade a friend and food was plentiful. The mouse soon came across a farm and slipped into the cow shed on a quest for food before scuttling off on his merry way across the grass land of Mull. He was searching for a new home, a place to stay and live in comfort. It wasn't his lucky day. A bird of prey swooped down on the little mouse. Its bone crushing grasp was more than a match for such a tiny fragile creature. The bird sped toward Tobermory, circling to find a safe feeding spot. The mouse without a house was no more and the bird of prey finished it, unwittingly saving the island from eco disaster.

'This is new, a different experience. Nothing quite compares to having an overview of the world.' thought V 'So this is where I live? I didn't realise it was so big from the ground. From the air it's huge. I must find experiences, more knowledge and more food!' The eagle swung around, looking for a landing spot, quickly finding a lamp post ideally positioned to look across the harbour into the pet shop. His beady yellow eyes with their perfect vision immediately focused on a mouse with an injured tail. The mouse returned his piercing gaze, a strangely fearless expression in its shiny brown button eyes. They both looked at

the shop keeper. Driven by hunger already, despite the mouse meal so recently devoured, the eagle took off again and circled the windswept coast looking for more prey. He took them, one after the other mercilessly, bird after bird on the wing. Eventually, sated at last, the eagle returned to the lamp post. This time he had companions. The small flock of birds perched silently outside the pet shop, staring through the glass, motionless but alert as though waiting for a signal.

The shop keeper peered out through the large window, pondering at the strange sight. Never had he seen an eagle sit with its prey and do nothing. The birds were astonishingly still and appeared eerily attentive to his movements. He already had one strange customer that day and he didn't want to hang around for any more weird stuff. He thought he would close early. The stranger had offered him two hundred pounds for the rescued mouse in the store window. He had explained the mouse wasn't for sale and belonged to a young girl working on the island but the stranger grew very persistent, accepting his refusal with obvious poor grace. The island was a very small place and the shop keeper had already heard rumours about what had happened up at the old Galloway farm. He thought, suspicious that the mouse and the stranger might be involved in those events, that he might go and see PC Brannon. His decision made, he pulled the shutters down over the windows and left the store by the rear door.

At the police station counter he was told there was no-one to speak to.

"There's no one here. They're all out at the Galloway Farm. It's not an emergency is it Roger?" asked the receptionist.

"No, just ask PC Brannon to pop in and see me when he gets a chance. I may have some information about the Galloway farm for him," replied Roger.

"He's going to be at the farm for the rest of the day so I would pop up and see him if it's urgent," the receptionist suggested.

Deciding to take her advice, Roger drove up the winding road towards the Galloway Farm. He was about half way there when he was flagged down by Sean, the farmer from Floss Glen farm.

"Are you going anywhere near to the Galloway farm? My van won't start," Sean continued, "I need the vet. One of my cows is calving and it's coming breach." He looked terrified for his cow.

"This seems to be a day for trouble," Roger replied. "Get in I'll give you a lift."

"This whole secret lab thing isn't good for business," Sean was clearly worried as he spoke, "I'll have the government round testing the cattle again."

Roger knew the road well and the drive only took minutes. They both went over to the police cordon.

Two police cars were parked up next to the vet's portable surgery van.



Roger and Sean shared an amused smile as they heard cursing and screams. The officers and vet's assistant were trying to catch the small furry creatures in the lab below. The wind was blowing strongly and flicking the police cordon tape around like a streamer at the gay pride festival. Sean looked around and found a slightly tubby police sergeant had also a slight smile on his face at the sound of the others struggling with the animals. He walked over and met the sergeant's eyes imploringly.

"I need the vet urgently sarge, one of my heifers is in breach and distressed," Sean said.

"Give me a moment and I'll fetch him for you," replied the sergeant, removing his smile and replacing it with a more formal police expression.

He soon returned with a good looking man in his early thirties carrying the traditional black vet bag. He had a twinkle of excitement, buzzing from the multitude of requests coming from PC Brannon who was following behind him. The vet took Sean to one side to discuss the details of the breach birthing while Roger sat with PC Brannon explaining the strange goings on; the mouse, the stranger and the birds sat outside the shop. The PC took notes and asked him to call him if the stranger returned. He walked away from Roger looking disapproving as if he thought Roger had been on the whiskey or something. Roger had been the victim of animal abuse claims a few years before. He was regularly spied on by the locals to check his treatment of animals. The PC knew this and took most of his stories with a pinch of salt as it was usually a local kid winding him up.

"Roger, can you hang about a bit and give me and the vet a lift to the farm?" Sean asked sounding desperate.

"No problem. Next time I need him he can knock us a bit off," replied Roger.

The three men jumped in the car and Roger drove quickly back to the Seans farm.

"Have you got many calving this year Sean?" asked the vet, knowing how Sean reacted to calving.

"No, only two. I thought I would give them a rest and make my money on turkeys this year instead," replied Sean.

Roger wished Sean luck as he dropped them off at the farm. They walked from the farmhouse where Roger had left them, across a small concrete yard, through the cattle gate and into the barn. The farm was well kept and partitioned by neat stone built brick walls. Turkeys could be seen in the next field, huddled together sheltering from the cold wind. Placing his bag in the corner the vet took out a stethoscope and carefully checked the heifer over for a correct diagnosis.

“She has an injury on her left leg, looks like something bit her,” he explained. “I’ll patch this up first. She is in labour as you said. I’ll turn the calf in a moment and she should be fine then.” The vet cleaned and bandaged the heifer’s leg before taking out a giant glove and a large tube of lubricant.

“This is a standard procedure. There’s nothing to worry about, just steady her for me and keep her calm. I will turn the calf and she should finish the labour on her own,” instructed the vet.

The vet carefully pushed his gloved hand up inside the cow and started manipulating the calf into position. The heifer let out a few weary groans of discomfort and started to move slightly. Both men took the time to calm the animal down.

“Steady on now Bess, good girl, good girl,” the farmer spoke gently to the heifer and stroked her softly. He was a compassionate man who had no family except his small herd of highland cattle which made him a meager living.

The heifer calmed and the vet was able to slowly move the calf into position.

“Nearly there, nearly there,” the vet strained the comment out, trying to catch his breath as the heifer swayed from side to side. The heifer’s behaviour gave the farmer a cold sweat of compassionate empathy.

Puffing, the vet took retracted his arm from the birthing canal. It was hard work having your hand shoved up a cows back end.

“Almost there, I’ll just catch my breath,” the vet reassured Sean. “It won’t take long now.”

Sean stroked the heifer who, although she was still panting heavily, seemed less distressed. Sean winced as she let out another small groan. He felt the pain for his cow which seemed kind of odd for a farmer but it was the calving that did it every time.

The vet lubed up and put his arm back in position to turn the calf. He had almost done it. A sudden cacophony of noise took him by surprise; he could hear cattle lowing outside the shed, one cow at first then the rest joining in. It was incredibly loud and sounded like the whole herd was out there.

“There must be something wrong. I’ll take a quick look,” Sean opened the barn door, surprised and concerned for his cattle.

A Long Horn charged him with no warning, pinning him against the wall. The cow’s horn pierced Sean’s soft unprotected exposed abdomen. He could feel a deep burning sensation developing into agonizing pain as if a hot knife were branding his stomach from the inside. The pain was astonishing in its intensity. Sean looked at the wound in disbelief. The horn had gashed his abdomen open and his intestines were slowly slithering out, dribbling bloodily down the side of

his dungarees. His mouth mimicked the shape of a cry for help but nothing could come out. Tears trickled slowly across his whitening cheeks, silently falling onto his weakening body.

“Arhhhh, arhhhhh, arhhhh,” screamed the vet.

Almost at the same moment as the Long Horn impaled Sean, the vet had screeched in agony of his own. The vet's arm, already partially in the cow, was jerked section by section further into the birthing canal. The twinkle in his eyes disappeared as the dilation of pupils showed the adrenaline overdrive, popping the engorged veins on the vet's head. His cries of pain were gut wrenching as he frantically tried to pull his arm out. He eventually succeeded and stumbled back revealing a bleeding and ragged stump. Most of his lower arm was missing and a fountain of blood erupted from the severed arteries hanging from the remains. The rosy red life blood squirted from his stump, spraying across the barn. He fell to the ground clutching what remained of his arm in shock, staring in disbelief at the movement at the rear of the cow. Violent movements caused the heifer to groan in agony as the calf forced its way out and fell on to the floor from her desecrated vagina.

The vet was desperately trying to stem the bleeding from his stump as the calf tried to formulate its first few tentative steps. The vet wrapped another bandage round his blood soaked stump, wincing at the pain and bum shuffling away in terror from the newly born calf. The calf staggered, trying to find its feet for the first time, blinking as slowly as a small child first opening its eyes. Its little legs trembled, nearly buckling, and then the calf remembered: it already knew how to walk. The calf's nostrils flared open sniffing the air, its ears pricked up and his large liquid eyes fixated on the vet's injured stump, seeming oblivious to anything else in the barn.

‘Go on my offspring, feed. You need all the strength you can get and there is plenty in that one,’ thought V.

Another newly born calf trotted through the open barn door, its fur dry. He had been born earlier. This was a frisky little one wagging an excited tail behind him. The calf walked up where Sean lay, terrified and mortally wounded, and slowly sniffed him. His teeth chewed at the intestines hanging from the terrible jagged wound in Sean's stomach. He licked daintily at the snake like mass of flesh and internal organs. Evidently happy with the taste he took a firm hold of Sean's trailing gut and skipped off with the intestine between his new shiny teeth, wagging his tail happily. The farmer's scream was released at last and was followed by a seizure as his body received the signal that part of it was gone, his hands grabbed for the intestine trying to save his own life but the pain was too much and the world grew dark.

It was getting dark on the Tobermory high street. The vibrant colours of the buildings were fading against the falling sun. The street lighting flickered on, invisible against the backdrop of the beautiful sunset. Waves lashed the sea wall in an unforgiving rhythm, spraying across the high street. The cold wind blew, sending everyone indoors to nice warm fires and snug cozy lounges. The street was completely empty with the exception of a few cars parked on the main street; the only signs of life were lights from the colorful houses on the sea front, shining bravely through the tendrils of darkness. The forecasters had promised snow for the next few days and the snow filled cloud could be seen in the distance threatening to spoil the beautiful sunset. A sign of life appeared, a car driving slowly down the high street unnoticed by anyone. It parked outside the pet shop for some time with the engine still quietly ticking over. A man in his late thirties wearing a long rain Mac and a black wooly hat got out of the car and walked confidently over to the pet shop where he quietly broke the glass and stealthily stole the injured mouse. He placed it carefully in the back of the car and drove off quickly, unseen by human eyes.

The eagle flying high in the sky observed the car heading for the other side of the island, near Galloway farm. It pulled up outside a row of holiday cottages. The driver entered by the nearest door, pulling it silently shut behind him. The eagle landed on a telegraph pole and watched the cottage, never moving and in complete silence. Several more birds soon landed and joined in the vigil.

#### **Chapter four Hello, hello, hello, what's all this then? [Home](#)**

Mull was a small Scottish island of only about two thousand five hundred people and the police force represented this with only five police constables. This was the quiet time of the year: Christmas burglaries were over and there were no seasonal call outs to the antisocial behaviour that seemed to follow tourists from the distillery tour on to the high street in Tobermory. The office, however, was extremely busy processing the animals from the secret underground lab. With lack of space becoming a problem at the vets, police sergeant Williams had kind of volunteered two cells for the animals to be kept in.

Mull wasn't the crime capital of the world, only needing a small police station with a couple of cells, an office and the standard reinforced plastic police counter. Inside were several desks and one small interview room. The office was open plan with several pieces of equipment stored in the corner of the room. It was cluttered and a little cramped; the force had to make do on the budget it was given. There were budget cutting discussions, talk of there being only one patrol car in the future and of them going back to push bikes; no one was looking forward to that.

PC Brannon was sitting with the morning paper spread out over his desk when the phone rang. He had been happily reading articles about the world outside Mull.

“Mull police, PC Brannon speaking. How may I help you?” PC Brannon answered the phone on auto pilot, looking at the number recognition system in puzzlement before realising Roger was on the line.

“Hi, it’s Roger Lewis from the pet shop in Tobermory; I’ve had a break in.”

“What have they taken?”

“The animals. All my animals have gone!” Roger sounded distraught.

He was willing to bet that local kids were playing an evil prank on him and was worried about the welfare of his pets but also about his livelihood.

“Ok, I will be down there as soon as I can.” PC Brannon softened his tone to a reassuring pitch, “I’m waiting for the car to get back from Galloway farm. Don’t touch anything.”

PC Brannon radioed to his boss who was at the Galloway farm, asking for him to return with the car as soon as possible. They had two cars but one was having its regular service at the local garage and they couldn’t have it back until the next day. There were only two of them on duty that morning and one due in for the afternoon shift. Only having a small complement of staff meant that they worked alone a lot of the time. The phone rang again

“Good morning Mull police how may I help you?”

“Hello, it’s Sarah Campbell from the vet’s surgery, I was wondering if you had seen the vet at all. I thought he might be checking the animals at your station and I can’t seem to get hold of him.”

“No I am afraid I haven’t seen him since last night at the farm,” his tone turned from inquisition to concern as he replied.

“Oh, I’d best come up and feed the animals then. He must be out on a call somewhere.”

“Thanks Sarah,” said the relieved policeman who had suddenly realised he might have been stuck with the animal care, “Just give us a ring before you come up in case we’re both out?”

Just as he put the phone down it rang again.

“Hello, Mull police how may I help you?” there was a sharpness in his voice. He wasn’t used to receiving this volume of calls.

“Hello, this is Mrs. Mc Pearson. My dog is missing. He’s data chipped and has a collar with his address my name and number on it,” She manically spewed at him.

“Well we haven’t had any dogs found but let me take your number and a description of your dog and we’ll ring you as soon as we find him,” replied

Brannon struggling with the woman's speed of enquiry. He was still negotiating the ancient computer they had on the island which was like a snail in comparison to the one he had at home.

He had just logged her details when the phone trilled again. 'This is going to be one of those mornings' he thought.

"Hello, Mull police, how may I help you?"

"I would like to report a murder," the man's voice was over dramatic.

"A murder you say," the PC screeched back at the man. Brannon's heart sank into hit his stomach. He wasn't ready for a murder it was almost a million to one chance of him ever getting a murder on the island.

"My prize chickens, cut down in the prime of their lives, slaughtered, every one of them. It was a dog, a large black Labrador."

"And where is this Labrador now?"

"It ran off, I chased it with me mop."

"Name please," asked the PC taking his details.

As he entered the crime into the data base and generated a crime number to add to the statistics the door opened. Glancing up from his paperwork he saw it was his colleague, the sergeant, back from Galloway farm.

"How's it going?"

"Busy for a change. We have the burglary and a lost black Labrador. A black Labrador also attacked some chickens and killed them all."

"Case solved on the chicken killings then. How are our guests?" asked the sergeant glancing at the reports generated that morning.

"Sarah's going to come over and feed them in a bit."

"What's the vet's verdict on the animals he checked over? Do we know anything yet?"

"The vet is missing in action. Sarah rang up to see if he was here. She thinks he is probably on a call somewhere and lost reception. You know what it's like round here."

"You go and see Roger, you know him better than I do. When you get back I'll deal with the chicken murderer," smiled the sergeant.

PC Brannon grabbed his hat and car keys and drove to Tobermory pet shop, a journey of several miles on an easy coastal road. It took less than twenty minutes to get there. The winter weather was trying to settle in, snow flakes were gently descending and Brannon had turned the heating on to full for the entire journey. He pulled up outside the pet shop feeling toasty warm and saw the glazier waiting to replace the window. Roger came out of the shop looking pale and tense. Looking at the mess of the ruined window Brannon could see that there wasn't going to be a lot he could do. The snow had destroyed any chance

of getting prints from the outside. He entered the shop and looked at the empty cages. The shop appeared untouched, only the open cage doors and empty cages showing anything different to its everyday appearance. The usual smell of dried pet food products filled his lungs and the neatly arranged tins of popular pet food were undisturbed.

“What animals were stolen?” Brannon asked, taking out his notepad and pen.

“An eight foot python, five long eared rabbits, a pair of chinchilla’s and a mouse that didn’t belong to me,” Roger reeled off the list of missing animals.

“Who’s was the mouse, was that the one you told me about earlier?”

“Yes, belongs to a young girl, one of those cable workers. She said she found it and rescued it to stop it polluting the eco system here. It was injured, only had half a tail.”

“Is anything else missing? Money, pet food, anything expensive,” asked Brannon.

“No look at the till! There must more than a hundred pounds in there.”

“Have you had any disgruntled customers or people who would want to do this to you?”

“No, you know me; everything here works on customer service. Everyone knows everyone,” Roger looked upset at the question.

“I have to ask Roger, its procedure as you know. Do you know where this girl is staying?”

“Yes she is down at the Wee Dram, Mrs. Mc Donald’s place.”

“Ok, one more thing. When do you think this happened?”

“Between 4pm last night and 8am this morning definitely. I closed early to come and tell you about the guy who offered me two hundred pounds for the mouse. Wait, do you think they came for the mouse?”

“I don’t know but I’d like you to come and have a look at some photo fits to see if the chap is known to us. I want to interview this girl first though, what’s her name?”

“Kerra.”

“I’ll be back in a bit. Don’t touch any thing yet and I’ll see if I can get the scene of crime people to dust for fingerprints. I’d suggest you close up for today.”

Brannon radioed in his findings then checked what time the ferry would arrive before driving round the corner to the Wee Dram. As he knocked on the smart black door and waited for an answer he could hear a vacuum cleaner being used in the background. He knocked again, louder this time, and heard it stop. The door opened and the fresh smell of polish wafted towards him.



“Hello officer, is everything all right?” asked Mrs. Mc Donald with a look of surprise.

“Yes Mrs. Mc Donald, everything’s fine,” he reassured her, “I believe you have a young girl staying here?”

“Yes, Kerra. She’s working on the cables. God knows why a young girl like that would want to lay cables. She’s not in trouble is she? I’ll have no criminal staying under this roof.”

“No, I just need to speak to her.”

“She’s out; they’re all out for the day.”

“Here’s my card. Please would you give it her and ask her to contact me as soon as possible?”

“Yes of course, but what is this all about?”

“I am not at liberty to say.” Brannon knew that anything he told the gossiping landlady would reach the end of the street before he did and bear no resemblance to the original.

Brannon he wanted to get to the landing before the ferry arrived. There were always tourists although not as many as usual at this time of year. He wanted the cooperation of the ferry workers so he could track people coming to and leaving the island. He wanted to see if anyone matched Rogers’s description of the man who offered him money for the mouse. The discovery of the secret lab had given him the rare opportunity to earn brownie points towards promotion, especially if he found the offender first. The sea was quite choppy that morning and little white waves lashed the shore. A light fog shadowed the mainland but Mull had been lucky enough to stay clear for the most part. He could see mountains in the distance shrouded with grey mist as if a cloud had fallen from the sky engulfing the whole mountain.

When he arrived the ferry was just docking. He saw Janet, a ferry worker he knew well and asked her if she had seen anybody fitting the description. Janet told him there had only been the usual local traffic, but that she would keep her eyes open. She explained she didn’t work every day but would pass the word out to the other crew members. The community was close and it was always easy to catch outsiders committing crimes because no one cared for mainlanders, but it was far more difficult when the offenders were part of the community. Brannon returned to the station to prepare his report and free the Sergeant to solve the chicken murders!

“Good, you’re back. I’m going straight over to Calgary. The chicken owner has rung three times to see where we were,” Sergeant O’Dea said.

“Yeah, I might have a lead on the secret lab for you as well. The pet shop owner had some guy trying to buy a mouse from him for two hundred pounds. It

looks like one of those cable workers may have tried saving a mouse from the secret lab as well. I'm waiting for her to get back to me now."

"Have you got a description of the man? I think the mainland detectives may be taking this over pretty soon and I would like to have it solved before they come."

"Not yet but I'll get Roger in to look at some mug shots," Brannon answered.

"Yeah, could you see if the vets turned up for me as well? If the inspector rings tell him I'm out and that I'll ring him when I get back," ordered Sergeant O'Dea.

The sergeant drove across the island to Calgary a small hamlet. Both incidents had been reported within half a mile of each other so this case should be cut and dried easily. The journey took a good thirty minutes; some of the roads were growing steadily more difficult in the current weather. The snow was starting to settle on the ancient roads which had been there for years without any upgrading. He couldn't take any of his usual shortcuts as they were just tracks for which he needed the four by four that was in the garage. As he pulled in at Mr. Callmana's small holding on the outskirts of the hamlet he saw the small traditional cottage through the gently falling snowflakes. A few outbuildings were attached to it at the edge of the couple of acres of fenced in land. He was greeted at the tired looking door by an older man with gray sideburns, flat cap and dark brown overcoat. The man had a slight bow in his back which appeared to give him a hunch. This made him resemble a scary grave digger from a horror movie.

"You took your time! This way, you'll want to see the evidence," Mr. Callmana spoke with urgency as he led the sergeant across the cobble stone floor to one of the two outbuildings.

"We've had an influx of animal crime," replied the sergeant.

"So I've heard."

"They're right in here, all of them dead, not one alive. It didn't even eat them. The dog must have rabies or be mad. It's not normal for things to play with their food," Mr. Callmana opened the door to the outbuilding and let out a sigh.

"Oh my God! I don't believe it, can't be true, I must be going mad. I swear I'll never touch a drop of that stuff again."

The chickens were all walking around happy, pecking away at the food troughs lining the barn walls.

"Are these the chickens you reported murdered sir?"

"For the life of me I don't know what my own eyes are seeing, I had a drop

of whiskey last night but I haven't had hallucinations like this since my brothers wedding thirty years ago."

"Well I am pleased your chickens are ok and I recommend that you take it easy on the whiskey in the future."

"I am sorry for all the trouble I have caused; I will make it up to you for sure."

"There's no need, it's what I am paid for. Thank you anyway."

Mr. Callmana walk to one of the birds and picked it up by the legs.

"You're a married man are you not? You have a little one to feed, take this chicken."

"No, no."

Before he had time for a third no the Mr. Callmana snapped the flapping birds neck and handed it to the sergeant. It was clear that no wouldn't be taken for an answer. The sergeant remembered his father killing a chicken in front of him when he was a child and having to pluck it. His father had always told him not to kill a bird in front of the others, that they would take it personally. Apparently this wasn't true and a good example of yet another old wife's tale his dad had told him.

He took the chicken, not wanting it to have died in vain, and drove to the home of the owner of the missing black Labrador which was just round the corner. He knocked loudly on the door of the sweet homely looking cottage door bur received no answer. The cottage felt silent and empty. He radioed into the station

"Brannon are you there?"

"Yes I'm with Roger, looking at mug shots."

"Have you any updates for me."

"No sergeant."

"I am going to the tourist information to see who they have got on their books as coming through. There can't be that many strangers on the island, back in forty minutes."

The sergeant drove to Tobermory but the tourist information was closed that day; budget cuts. Annoyed, he drove back towards Galloway Farm, deciding to have a quick snoop round see if he had missed anything. He got stuck. The highland cattle of Floss Glen Farm, easily recognizable by their long sharp horns, had escaped and were blocking the road. As he moved forward inch by inch he sounded his horn to clear his path through the herd, wondering why the cattle had all left the farm. He decided to stop at Floss Glen Farm to let Sean know of their escape just in case he wasn't already aware. Reaching his destination, after a slow and frustrating three miles crawl, he went to the

farmhouse looking for the farmer. There was no answer to his knocks but he heard a mobile phone ring and followed the sound into one of the barns. A quick search revealed the phone lying on the floor in the corner of the barn besides the vet's bag. He answered the phone.

"Hello."

"Hello who is this?"

"This is Sergeant O'Dea, Mull police. Who is calling?"

"This is Sarah Campbell the vet's assistant. I'm still trying to get hold of the vet, have you seen him?"

"No I'm at Floss Glen Farm. I was looking for farmer Sean and I found this phone."

"Oh. He must have left it there last night when he went to help Sean with a breach heifer." Sarah explained worriedly.

"Last night you say, and you haven't seen him today?" asked the sergeant.

"No I've been after him all day to test these animals as well as for the late surgery he runs on a Friday, I have two urgent cases here."

"I'll let you know as soon as I find him. What's his home address? I'll drop in and make sure he's ok."

"He lives on the edge of Lettermore. It's a small wooden cabin just past the farm on the edge of Loch Frisa."

"I know the place, thanks. I'll let you know as soon as I find him."

The sergeant was now looking worried. There were possibly two missing persons, cows all over the highways, re-incarnated chickens and no one arrested for anything yet. He took a careful look around the barn and saw no evidence of foul play, arguments or struggles and no blood. A small fresh looking piece of horn was stuck in the barn wall which puzzled him but there was nothing to go on. He radioed Brannon.

"Brannon get Fredrick in early. Tell him to pick up the car from the service station and get on the old Galloway Farm road, there's loose cattle on it. Tell him to close it down and find farmer Sean to get his cattle in."

"Ok sergeant."

"Tell your wife you're going to be late home. I am going over to Lettermore to see if I can find the vet. Have a ring round the farms for me please and see if he's held up anywhere. This weather is getting bad."

He had another quick look around and shouted for the farmer again before returning to his car but there was no reply. He drove toward the cabin at Lettermore. The snowfall was very heavy now and visibility was low. It was going to take a while to get there. He wacked the heater up to full which melted the snow flakes as they fell on the screen. The car jolted as he gave himself a

mental shake: the snow had had a mesmerizing effect on him, almost sending him into a trance. Snow always seemed to do that. He closed slowly on the farm now and saw the cabin in the distance. After the warmth of the car the freezing wind sent daggers of ice cold through his goose pimped flesh as he shivered his way to the front door. Knocking loudly he saw a German Shepherd through the opaque door glass. It gave a loud bark from the other side of the door. He waited a moment and knocked again, more barking but no answer. Moving around the cabin he looked in each window in turn. There was no sign of the vet but he saw that the dog's water bowl was empty, not the sort of thing a vet would forget to do. The dog barked viciously at the windows, following the sergeant around relentlessly.

"He's not in," A voice came from behind him. "His Defender would be there if he was," the woman's voice said.

"Sorry, who are you?" asked the sergeant, glancing at the good looking woman in her early thirties standing in front of him.

"I am Miss Francis; I rent the cabin to the vet. I was getting worried, he doesn't usually leave the dog on it's own without telling me so I can walk and feed it if he's out on call over night."

"Oh, you haven't seen him then?"

"No not since that lab was found, I have a key so we should feed the dog if he is out."

Miss Francis unlocked the door and calmed the dog as she put food and water into the empty bowls. The sergeant's sense of smell was blindsided by the woman's perfume: he picked up a nose full on the way in to the cottage. He glanced round the cabin; there were a lot of books but no photos or signs of family. A small TV sat in the corner of the room. Everywhere was very tidy.

"Is the vet ok?"

"He is sort of missing, but he could be on a job somewhere. Can you make sure the dog is looked after and I'll let you know as soon as I find him. Does he have a partner or girlfriend that I should know about?"

"No, not that I know of. I was kind of trying to fill that spot myself, but I am beginning to think he's gay," Miss Francis's manner became slightly flirtatious.

Quickly but politely the sergeant said his goodbyes, intending to go back to the Floss Farm to have a more detailed look. Before setting off he checked if there were any updates from Brannon.

"Brannon are you there?" The radio crackled into life as Brannon's cheerful voice filled the car.

"Yes sergeant."

"Have you had any luck with the vet?"

“No sergeant, we can’t find him.”

“Is Fredrick in?”

“Yes he picked up the car but the cattle have left the road and must be at loose in the countryside. He said he can’t find them so he is now looking for the farmer.”

“I’ll meet him at Flossy farm then. Any I D on the suspect burglar?”

“No sergeant but I am putting a photo fit together for you, Roger reckoned it was a good likeness. I’m with the vet’s assistant now though.”

“Can you ask her to wait for me? I won’t be long.”

“Yes sergeant, no problem.”

### **Chapter Five: Don’t knock The Freebies [Home](#)**

John was first down for breakfast as usual, he wasn’t sure if he would see the other two at all, not until at least ten. He needed to ring the office; they wouldn’t pay for them to do nothing for ever and he wanted to check when the planning officers were coming. It was above his level now and Mike was handling everything. He would still have to see the planners at the farm but these things can take time. He was thinking whilst waiting for his breakfast.

Just before eight o’clock Kerra made it for breakfast. She was looking weary and had forgotten about her black eyes which were real shiners. Mrs. Mc Donald came through to take her order.

“Oh my word child, what have you been doing? I thought you were looking after the wee lassie,” Mrs. Mc Donald clucked over Kerra’s black eyes. “Look at the state of her.”

“It looks worse than it is,” Kerra said, wincing at her hangover. “I just walked into a digger; I’m fine, really.”

“What would you like to eat, my poor child?” Mrs. Mc Donald continued to fuss over her.

“I’ll have the full English please?” replied Kerra, wondering if her hangover would allow her to eat it. She turned to John. “What are we up to today? Have we got to work?”

“No but I do have to phone the office and get an update on what’s happening,” he replied.

“Can we go exploring again after?” asked Kerra, cheering up.

“Yes sure, I quite enjoyed the peace and quiet of it all. We might have to wait for Darren to surface I think you sunk him last night with the treble whiskey.”

John went outside to phone the office as Kerra’s breakfast arrived. Despite her concerns she managed to finish everything on her plate, and keep it firmly washed down with a fresh cup of black coffee, before excitedly heading back to

her room. After showering she then researched where to go that day. She wanted to make the most of the little time she had on the island and was getting excited already. Shower and research completed, she filled a small bag with binoculars, a camera, a map and a book. She hadn't quite finished getting ready when there was a knock at her door.

"Just a minute," shouted Kerra, spraying herself with perfume.

"Oh, sorry I thought you would be ready, I'll come back in a minute," John apologised.

"Its ok," Kerra said politely, "I'm nearly there. Come in."

Kerra was wearing a long silky yellow bath robe and John saw that her clothes were placed out on the bed ready to put on. Scooping them up Kerra went into her ensuite bathroom to get changed. John carefully avoided staring but couldn't help noticing her delicate shoulders and slender attractive neck and the strands of wet hair curling around her heart shaped face. He'd only really seen her in overalls and big coats and jumpers before and had forgotten how attractive she was. She emerged from the bathroom dressed in skin tight jeans and tight t-shirt. John's eyes leapt unwittingly to her firm breasts before Kerra snapped her finger's in front of him to bring him out of his inadvertent fascination. He blushed, realising he had lost control and was glad when Kerra put a chunky thick jumper on before drying her hair. Kerra had a petite, athletic figure with the nicest small set of tits John had seen for a while.

"So where we going today then?" asked John, desperately trying to focusing on something else other than her body.

"Loch Scridain. There's sea otters, eagles and lots of other birds there, sometimes whales."

"How come you have a duvet and not itchy blankets?"

"Because Mrs. Mc Donald thinks men are all slimy little perverts and that's all they deserve."

He gave her a disbelieving look.

"Okay I told her I had a reaction to blankets. She gave me a duvet because she thinks I'm sweet and nice and that my boss beats me when I don't do as I am told," Kerra teased, smiling at him mischievously.

She passed him a map while she dried her hair and he studied it carefully but studied her when she wasn't looking. She knew what he was doing but enjoyed tormenting him, reveling in the knowledge that she could.

"All done," Kerra said, slipping on a coat and grabbing a hat, scarf and gloves.

They went downstairs to Darren who had been out and was munching a breakfast cob brought from a local shop. His mouth stopped chewing for a

moment when he noticed that Kerra had made an effort. Unlike him she wasn't wearing overalls and a big yellow jacket.

"I'm driving," she said grabbing the keys from Darren.

It was about 11 o'clock before they drove out of Tobermory. They did not notice the broken window at the pet shop as they headed down the coast.

"Where are we going? Is that snow?" asked Darren, his breakfast now finished.

"We're going to Loch Scridain. It's the home of much wildlife, sea otters and other fun stuff," Kerra explained.

"But it's snowing! You can clearly see it's snowing," Darren complained.

"We could drop you at a pub and pick you up in a bit," suggested John.

"That's fine by me, I don't like the cold. There is a reason people moved into the city and that was to get away from things that were wild," Darren said happily, knowing he wasn't going to have to sit in the cold for several hours.

They drove for a few miles along the coastal road before eventually coming upon a pub near the ferry where Darren got out relieved he didn't have to go.

"See you in a couple of hours," John yelled as Kerra drove away and the snow started falling a little heavier.

"I hope this snow stops soon," Kerra worried, "It will ruin the day if it doesn't."

"Darren's gone, the moaning has stopped. I'm happy here with a pretty girl and the countryside all to myself."

Kerra wasn't expecting such a comment and blushed slightly, trying to summon up a suitable response.

"I see. You're a dirty old man! How old are you? Are you planning to take advantage of some poor young girl?"

"No I've just come for the wild life," John laughed to himself at the slightly evil thoughts lurking in the back of his mind. He was aware that she would be in as much trouble as him now if her father found out the truth. 'She's left it too long to blab,' he thought. He would take his chances and relax a little with her.

It was another half hour until they arrived at the Loch and the pair continued their delicate banter. John's hormones were taking advantage in the absence of any work or xbox. Kerra was lapping up the witty conversation as if it was her food source and she hadn't been fed for a month. Eventually arriving, they surveyed the Loch from the warmth of the car as a gale was still blowing outside.

"We're in the right place. I can see a twitcher on the other side of the loch taking photos."

"It's bigger than I thought; I can't see the end of the loch."



“This is a sea Loch: it doesn’t have an end. I hope it stops snowing soon; I can’t see anything through this.”

“Shall we have a drive further down the loch and give this weather a bit of time,” John suggested.

“Ok you drive, I will spot. I don’t want to miss anything.”

They both shivered getting in and out of the car as they swapped seats. John drove slowly down the Loch while Kerra tried to see what the guy on the other side was photographing. She thought that it must be something good.

“What can you see?”

“Green shanks, Red shanks,” Kerra replied. “Dunlin, wait it could be an otter! Can’t quite tell. You can wait weeks to see one.” Kerra struggled to make out the objects at a distance.

“In English please! Us thick people don’t get it.”

“Several wading birds and a sea otter,” Kerra translated. “I think we’ll have to drive round to the other side of the loch. My binoculars aren’t strong enough from here.”

John headed round the loch, looking for the position of the twitcher and being careful not to disturb the wild life around them. The road was just a dirt track on the other side of the loch. The traction was getting worse as the van wasn’t handling on the freshly laid snow.

“I think we should go round the other side of the loch again, we’re going to get stuck here,” explained John. “We have all weekend. I spoke to Mike and he said we could go home or have two days unpaid break here so I took the break. You can’t go home with those black eyes.”

“Thank you,” Kerra blurted out, true sincerity in her voice.

“I didn’t tell Darren for obvious reasons. He would have just taken the van and gone home.”

John drove back round to the main road, slowly moving down the side of the loch while Kerra looked for the twitcher as a reference point. He pulled over; the snow was getting severe and their vision was becoming obscured by the intensity of the snowfall.

“Found him, he must be getting cold out there,” said Kerra, shivering at how cold the bird fancier must be out there in the near blizzard conditions.

She watched him carefully. Visibility was poor but she could see that birds were landing very close to him. She thought to herself that the hides worked really well and that she would have to see if she could buy a portable one. Kerra scanned the loch trying to find anything else of interest but was coming to the conclusion that they would have to go back to the guest house.

“We’re going to have to call it a day soon, this weather is crap. I can have a

quick spliff before we go back though.”

Kerra took out the makings, expertly rolled her joint and soon lit up. She wound the window down a little to let the smell out and Kerra felt the fresh sea air fill the van. Taking one last look across the loch at the twitcher, she struggled to believe her eyes. There were now hundreds of birds surrounding the twitcher, fixated on him. He appeared to be intently focusing on a pair of otters further down the loch and not noticing the birds landing only feet away from him. Eventually, she saw him look up and caught the look of surprise that flashed over his face to see himself twitched by the very wild life that he was watching. There were at least two hundred sets of eyes glaring at him.

The twitcher looked around and saw that he was completely surrounded; his breathing increased knowing that something was seriously wrong and he was in trouble. The icy wind made his eyes stream and when he cleared them he saw that the birds had moved a foot or so closer. He thought he was going mad and that he must be suffering from hyperthermia and cleared his streaming eyes again.

The initial peck of one bird felt like a small pinch, nipping at the skin not breaking it, like a spiteful brother would inflict on his sister. The intensity increased with numbers of birds and his wince turned to a look of pain. The first blood brought out fierceness in the rest of the birds and the competition for flesh meant only the most ferocious pecks penetrated through the flock. Hundreds of beaks pecked away at him, opening up thousands of small wounds in his face, the only uncovered part of his flesh. Their beaks slashed at the wounds, gouging deeper and deeper into his jaws and cheeks. He flailed his arms, trying desperately to thwart the onslaught of the attack but only dislodged his hat, leaving his entire head open to the ferocious pecking and gouging. The constant flapping of the wings soon blinded him and then he had no eyes to see with as an eagle swooped in and tore them out with hooked talons. The screams bared his tongue to the clashing claws and sharp teeth of an adventurous stoat climbing his leg. He fell to the ground, blind and tongueless, flesh hanging in long tattered strips from his bare skull. He looked inhuman with his eyeless sockets dripping tears of blood into the snow, slowly dying from shock and blood loss.

“John, John, look the birds are attacking the twitcher,” screamed Kerra in terror.

John took the binoculars and searched the coast line for the twitcher. He couldn't be seen and the hide looked deserted.

“Are you winding me up? I can't see a thing,” John replied, convinced her spliff had made her paranoid.

Kerra took the binoculars from him and saw he was right. There was

nothing there but the hide.

“I swear he was being attacked, I know there’s nothing there now, but he was!”

“Are you sure you haven’t had too much of that stuff?”

“No it doesn’t work like that.” Kerra protested, throwing the rest of the spliff out the window and winding it up quickly, “We have to go and help him.”

“Okay but I couldn’t see him. I saw a few birds and that was it,” John turned the car around but promptly got stuck in the snow had been building up and the edge of the road was blending into the verge. He managed with difficulty to pull the van onto the road. There were about three inches of snow and driving was difficult. It didn’t seem that there had been enough time for so much snow to fall. Glancing at his watch he saw that they had been out for four hours. ‘Doesn’t time fly when you’re having fun,’ he thought? Kerra was calming now and drying up her tears on the sleeve of her jumper.

“You ok?”

“Yes, but it was horrible. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“We’re not going to make it to the other side of the loch in this van; we’re barely staying on the road here. How about we go back to the pub and contact the police? They’ll have a vehicle that will get there surely.”

“I don’t think it was the spliff” Kerra was still shaken by her experience “I’ve had the same stuff for the past week. I know you don’t believe me.”

“I didn’t say I didn’t believe you. I just told you what I saw,” replied John, gently stroking the tears from her face with his hand.

There was a sudden bump and a big bang from under the van which coasted to a halt with the engine still running.

“What was that?”

“I’ll get out and have a look, it’s as if the gears have gone,” replied John, anxiety replacing his smile.

John saw the drive shaft strewn across the road as soon as he walked to the rear of the stricken van. A little further back he saw a small calf lying in the snow, obviously dead. He assumed that the drive shaft must have hit it. He shuffled his way back to the van, his footing tenuous in the snow and jumped back in quickly. He was already getting cold.

“It’s not good. We hit a calf in the road and it took out the drive shaft. Luckily we’re covered by the AA. They will respond faster if you make the call though,” John explained, his breath foggy in the warm van, “Here’s the card.”

Kerra dialed the number on the card but heard nothing but static in her ear and a strange beep. She looked at her phone. It was showing she had no signal.

“Can I use your phone?” asked Kerra, “Mine hasn’t got any signal.”

John's phone proved to have no signal either. Kerra turned both phones off and restarted them, knowing from experience that sometimes this worked. Not this time though. She looked gravely at the diminished phone bars on their screens.

"Can't get through on either phone. What are we going to do?"

"Darren knows where we are and people drive up and down here all the while. I'm sure it won't be long before some one comes along," John said, trying to reassure her that their plight was not too bad, "The engine is still running so we can keep warm, or I could walk." "Don't be stupid, you're not going out in this. Certainly not with what I have just seen and you're not leaving me on my own," Kerra's eyes filled with tears.

John put his arm around her comfortingly. He turned the heating up to max and lifted the binoculars to his eyes. He scanned around for buildings, phones or anything a short distance away. He couldn't see anything for miles. His overnight bag was still in the van and contained a small sleeping bag, a gas cooker and tea stuff in case he got caught short working away from home. There had been several times when he had slept in the van overnight because hotel bookings hadn't been made for him so he always carried a few essentials. He thought he would wait before he broke them out, a car might turn up yet. An hour or two passed and the snow hadn't stopped. Making a break for it wasn't an option. There was at least six inches of snow on the ground now and they didn't have the clothing for venturing out.

"I have some gear in the back in case I got stuck like this," John told Kerra, reaching into a bag at the back.

"A sleeping bag! Are you sure you're not trying to seduce me?"

"I have been caught short without digs a couple of times on jobs. It's always best to be prepared. I have dinner, warm beverages and sleeping accommodation."

"What's for dinner?"

"We have salt n vinegar crisps, dry roasted peanuts, mars and snickers. Coffee, whitener and sugar as well if you want it"

"I want the snickers, share the rest."

John made coffee in the back of the van where they sat and ate the meager supper together. He broke out the sleeping bag and wrapped it around them both as they slumped together on front seat of the van. They chatted about their lives at home and exchanged stories and adventures they'd had until eventually they dozed off.

It was the rising sun that woke John. Kerra was laid across him with all the sleeping bag around her. Kerra's head was on his morning glory and he was

desperate for the toilet. The snow had stopped but left several inches of snow on the bonnet so he couldn't see the road. He turned the wipers on and cleared the inside of steamy window with his hand until he could see out. The road was completely covered. Fresh crisp snow blanketed everything. There were no foot prints or tracks of any kind. Kerra started to stir to his relief; the sexual angst and bladder torment were killing him between them.

"Morning. Just going for a pee."

"Morning."

John got out and wandered away from the van before writing his name in the snow, as you do. A little robin came down and landed in front of him.

"Are you a killer robin come to eat my under used neglected penis?"

"Do all men talk to their nobs like that?" Kerra was laughing unrestrainedly.

Kerra had got out of the van and overheard him which definitely put him off for moment.

"What're you doing?"

"You're not the only one who has to pee."

John finished off in embarrassed silence. He looked at the robin which hadn't moved so far but now appeared to be convulsing in front of him. It coughed and retched and appeared to have something stuck in its throat. John watched in amazement as a half a human finger slopped from its beak on the final retch. As he stared in disbelief and growing horror a rabbit ran past him, snatching the finger up as it passed.

"Kerra."

"What? I'm pissing and watching the bunnies play."

John walked over toward the bush where Kerra was hidden. She was just buttoning up her jeans

"Come on now, I didn't look," Kerra said, thinking he was after a revenge peek or something more.

"It's not that, they're not nice bunnies. Back in the van now," John ordered, as he grabbed her by the hand. He led her quickly back to the van and locked the door.

"Ok what's up? I was only messing with you," Kerra said, unsure of John's motives.

"A robin coughed up half a finger near me and then one of your bunnies came straight past me and ate it up."

"Are you sure?"

"You're the one who saw someone attacked by birds."

"Yes and I convinced myself that it didn't happen for my own sanity."

The both looked out the window at the little nest of bunnies watching them.

“I’m going to make coffee, make sure I’m awake,” John said calmly.

“I’m going to make sure I’m stoned so don’t care if those furry creatures want to eat me.”

They sat for ten minutes, smoking and drinking coffee, watching the birds land and take off before Kerra glimpsed something coming towards them that made her hurriedly stub her joint out.

“Shit it’s the pigs,” she swore, winding down the window in an attempt to let the smell out.

John wound his window down before getting out and greeting the unexpected police officer.

“Morning officer, you don’t know how glad I am to see you! We hit a calf in the road and it knocked our drive shaft out,” explained John.

The PC looked in the road for the dead calf but couldn’t find it.

“Dead calf you say? It seems to have got up and hopped off. You sure it wasn’t a rock or something.”

“No, it was there last night officer,” John replied, confused.

Kerra came out to greet the officer with the sleeping bag wrapped around her.

“Are you Kerra?”

“Yes.” Kerra answered looking awfully guilty. His stomach was churning with the thought of getting busted for the weed and her face was giving it away.

“I need to ask you a few questions about that mouse you rescued,” PC Brannon stated.

“Oh, what about it?”

“Well someone has stolen it and I was wondering, where exactly did you get it? You’re not in trouble my dear, I am pretty sure you only liberated an injured mouse,” he said tactfully, hoping this method would get him the information he needed.

“Ok, it was escaping from the secret lab and it was injured but I was only rescuing it,” Kerra answered.

“Thanks, that’s what I thought. It looks like the owner came looking for it and broke in the pet shop. Right, get your things together and get in the car, I’ll give you a lift to Tobermory. One more thing young lady, stop smoking the weed. I can smell it on you.” He turned to John, frowning. “And you should be old enough to stop her, you’re her boss,” The PC bollocked them and got in his car.

The guilty looking pair grabbed their things and jumped in the police car. They exchanged looks, wondering if they should mention the unusual wildlife behaviour they had seen but didn’t fancy another lecture on smoking weed.

“So how did you know where to find us?” asked Kerra.

“Mrs. Mc Donald noticed you were missing and she can’t keep out of people’s diaries,” replied PC Brannon.

“Shit, she read that?” Kerra whispered, blushing but annoyed at the same time.

“So where is the other one, Darren?” asked Brannon.

“We dropped him at the pub near the ferry. I’m sure he’ll find his way home,” John said.

“So what diary is this then?” John asked Kerra, thinking he was getting to know her.

“Not talking about it now,” Kerra replied stubbornly, inwardly devastated that her most private thoughts had been seen by a stranger.

They were quiet for the rest of the journey. Kerra sat petulantly in the corner not wanting to talk to anyone.

The end of their journey came and Brannon explained where to get the van mended before dropping them off.

They walked in to the Little Wee Dram exhausted from their ordeal. Mrs. Mc Donald came to greet them.

“Thank you Mrs. Mc Donald for calling the police,” John said. “Our van broke down near Loch Scridain and we got stuck there all night.”

“Come on my dears! I’ll do a late breakfast for you, full English each,” Mrs. McDonald kindly offered.

They both nodded. The idea of food was appealing and perked them both up. John glanced at Kerra over coffee in the dining room: she was still annoyed with Mrs. Mc Donald. He had learnt when she was mad she couldn’t look anyone in the eye because of the fierce anger simmering beneath. ‘What a temper,’ he thought. Breakfast soon arrived and they ate like ravenous animals, eating it as if it was their last meal.

“We’ll have a couple of hours sleep and then go and rescue the van,” John said. “I don’t want to be stuck without transport.”

The couple left the dining room and, saying good night politely, went to their rooms.

John had just jumped into the shower to freshen up when he heard a knock at the door; he threw a towel around himself and answered it.

“What’s up?” John asked.

“I have got a spider, not a little one either,” Kerra looked scared, the petulant look had gone and she was wearing teddy bear pajamas which would have gone really well with the petulant look.

He slipped on a dressing gown and, popping the key in his pocket, followed

her up to her room where she gave him directions to the spider. It was a fast one and anticipated his moves well. He finally picked up a letter opener and stabbed it, carrying it into the toilet to give it the customary flushing.

“Ok it’s gone.”

“Are you sure? I’m still freaked out from earlier.”

Kerra looked around disbelievingly. She knew what people could be like when it came to things like spiders, her little brother tormented hell out of her. She loved wild life, at least until today, but could never stand spiders.

“Where is it?”

“I stabbed it and flushed it down the toilet.”

Kerra shuddered and grabbed his hand.

“Come and check the toilet out with me. I want to make sure it’s gone.”

She walked cautiously to the en suite and flicked the toilet seat up.

“Arrgh its there,” Kerra screamed and stamped her feet, shivering all over again. Her breathing was distressed and she was gulping in air, almost hyperventilating. Her grip was painful on John hand as she gripped it so tightly.

“Little fucker is trying to get out,” John stabbed the spider repeatedly. It continued to squirm, still very much alive, so he pinned it with the end of his knife and dropped the King James Bible onto its threshing bulbous body. The spider lay still and mangled. John wiped the remains from the knife with a piece of toilet roll then flushed again.

“It’s definitely dead this time. Sorry about that, they usually die a lot more easily,” John’s apology was sincere.

“Yes, I know. I’d stabbed on it once already and flushed it down the loo,” Kerra’s voice still trembled “that’s why I was so scared.”

“You’d already done that? That’s weird. Something’s not right and it’s got to be something to do with that lab.”

“I know, it’s freaking me out.”

“I’ve got to get my head down Kerra, we’re safe here and I can’t drive without sleep,” John was beginning to feel the effects of his night sleeping a van seat. His body was hardly functioning and the spider scare had left him exhausted.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Kerra said firmly, pushing the door shut.

She opened his robe gently, her hands caressing each part of him as the robe slipped down, gasping with pleasure as she reached his growing firmness. He was still wet from his recent shower and smelt of lime shower gel. Slowly Kerra started to dry him with the towel from around his waist, slowly massaging him, her hands bringing tingling shocks wherever they touched. Kerra saw him respond to her touch and harden immediately as she as she worked her hands and



mouth towards his most intimate areas. John's heart was pounding and his loins throbbed almost painfully. He took control and gently kissed her in a way he had never kissed any woman before. His tongue probed her unresisting mouth and he felt their passion spiral upwards. He wanted to get it right, find out what she liked and give it to her. Her breathing was heavy, gasps of pleasure escaping her parted lips. He concentrated on pleasuring her until, panting with desire; she reached down to stroke his rigid penis. They explored one another's bodies, touching, nibbling, caressing and stroking. Kerra's hand returned to his hardened loins. She wanted him now but he wasn't letting her, he wanted to get every last moment of pleasure from this before he entered her. Finally, gasping with need and emotion he held her gently and joined their bodies together, entwined in the ecstatic pleasure of love making.

### **Chapter Six: I'm No James Herriot [Home](#)**

Sarah Campbell opened the vet surgery and canceled all appointments for that day. She wasn't qualified yet so wasn't allowed to practice without supervision. She had promised she would feed and care for the former lab animals until the vet turned up though and had come to work to honour this promise and to be close at hand in case her boss walked through the door. She had worried about him throughout the sleepless night she had just suffered. He was usually so reliable that she could not believe he would just disappear of his own free will. Police search teams had been out all night looking for him but still nothing, no news and no vet. She was tired and edgy: the vet was a good friend and her mentor. When she had decided to train as a vet, he had offered a practical internship with him over the course of her studying. It was critical that she had practical working knowledge to go with her theoretical knowledge. The Practice had been slowly built up by the current vet who now managed to make a meager living on the island. A small waiting room was at located to the front of the building and contained a counter and a series of vet approved animal products for sale as well as a comfortable seating area. Leading from this was a nurse's room with animal cages currently full of animals from the secret lab. Adjoining the nurse's room was a lab for testing blood, with x-ray and scanning equipment. The surgery was well equipped as it was the only one on the island. There was, of course, an examination room for the animals, which is where Sarah and the vet spent most of their time.

The phone interrupted her reverie. Sarah picked it up reluctantly.

"Hello, Mull Vetinary practice, Sarah speaking. How may I help?"

"This is Sergeant O'Dea. I'm afraid I haven't any news for you yet but we are doing the best we can my dear."

"Oh, I was hoping."

“I know, we all are. Could you do me a favour? Check the lab animals for signs of disease or experimentation. We can’t get a vet out from the mainland till Monday and I have a suspect. I just need anything you can give me.”

“Do you realise my word won’t stand up in court and you will have to get a qualified vet to do the same tests if they turn up anything?”

“I do of course, but it would be nice to know what we are dealing with.”

“Thank you, I’ll ring you as soon as I know anything.”

Sarah turned and looked at the animals; she could carry out most tests in the well equipped practice. She had three hamsters, five mice and twenty chinchillas to take blood from, x-ray and check for illnesses. She didn’t understand quite why they had used chinchillas. They were damn hard to catch, gave awful bites and didn’t reproduce as easily as mice. She decided to do basic bodily functioning tests by doing the blood work and seeing if this turned up abnormalities. It was a long laborious process which involved several complex machines. This would give her time to catch all the animals and log the results. There were of course the slightly larger animals at the police station but she could take blood from them when she went to feed them.

The testing really needed to be carried out by a microbiologist. Sarah’s mind flicked through the people she knew and came up with the name of a lecturer from university who she could ring for advice. He was delighted to hear from her and able to give her the number of a retired microbiologist who now lived on the island. Sarah phoned him and he agreed to come in at once and help her carry out preliminary examinations of the blood works. Dr Albert Fletcher was coming to help her and the result would now be official; she felt some relief as she wasn’t used to this level of responsibility. She worked quickly, extracting and labeling the blood from the various animals. Fletcher arrived within the hour and was clearly pleased to be invited to be involved in lab work again. He had even brought his own white coat. Fletcher looked good to say he was retired, but still had a mad scientist look about him from his grey tatty hair to his thick rimmed glasses.

“Thank you Doctor, I haven’t had any experience of this sort of thing before,” Sarah gratefully greeted the doctor.

“Oh, these things almost always turn into a wild goose chase. The number of people who set up home labs for personal gain would amaze you if you knew the statistics but that’s how science moves forward. Today we will make sure it is done safely.”

Here are the samples I have taken so far,” explained Sarah “There are more animals at the police station so I’ll go and take their samples now. The nurse is on hand through there so if you need anything please just ask.”

Sarah packed needles and vials into a small medical bag before driving to the police station several miles away at Craignure.

“Morning sergeant. I’ve come to feed the animals and take some blood,” Sarah greeted the tired policeman.

“Morning, haven’t any news on the vet as for yet, sorry love.”

“I have a little good news though” Sarah told him, “I phoned my university lecturer and he put me in touch with a retired microbiologist who can legally confirm if there is anything wrong with the animals, toxic or viral. He is working on it now. ”

“Good. Between me and you we have had twenty incidents with animals in the last two days and I am beginning to think something is wrong. I don’t want to cause alarm; the island depends upon its wildlife.”

“What sort of incidents?” asked Sarah.

“Well, not counting the chickens, nine runaway dogs still unreturned, the pet shop robbed and all the animals gone, cows on the loose, the vet and a wildlife photographer are missing. There’s no wild life, no birds or animals, reported from Scridain Loch.”

“I see, you think these incidents may all be related to these lab animals?”

“Possibly but I know nothing of diseases and that. I want to be sure before I call in the troops.”

“Ok, I’ll work round the clock until I get some answers.”

Sarah quickly fed the animals and took the blood samples. She was just on her way out when she heard her name called. Turning she saw the tired looking policeman.

“Sarah, can I have a quick word.”

“Yes of course.”

“Strictly between you and me, we’ve had a man quite badly mauled by a deer. He’s been air lifted to the mainland. Is it normal for deer to maul humans?”

“They can box and become aggressive but I have never heard of anyone been seriously injured. I guess it’s possible though.”

“Thanks.”

Sarah drove back to the practice quickly. She didn’t want the samples to spoil. Reaching the surgery she immediately went to see if Fletcher needed any help. He was embracing his new found role and Sarah felt she was on the back burner, just observing. She spent most of the afternoon watching him perform the time consuming laborious tests. The vet’s lab was very well equipped for a small practice but didn’t have the expensive machinery required to perform tests quickly and Fletcher was carefully preparing Petri dishes to grow any abnormal samples taken from the animals.

“Why are we growing samples Doctor?”

“Simply speaking, the tests show up what we test for, what this lab has a capability to see but we don’t have an electron microscope. So, if you break down the cell structure and grow whatever is left, it will show any disease that might be lurking where we can’t see it otherwise.”

“So what do the blood results show?”

“The blood results show that someone tried to kill these animals at some point with a dose of rat poison. That’s why I am carrying out these tests to see if there is a pathogen.”

“So at the moment were looking at cruelty to animals, for the purpose of the police?”

“We’re looking for the pathogen that someone tried to kill, well I am. As soon as I have something on a dish I will phone everyone who has the equipment to test for this kind of thing.”

“Don’t we need to call D.E.F.R.A.(Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) when this sort of thing happens?”

“Well if I were practicing, or you were qualified I suppose I would but it the police are the first professional at the point of contact until I can confirm if there is a pathogen I wouldn’t want to bother.”

“Would you ring the police later? There have been a lot of unexplained animal occurrences although they might be coincidence.”

“I will as soon as I get five minutes.”

They spent the next two hours carefully preparing the agar dishes and placing them in incubators until they were interrupted by the nurse.

“There’s a woman outside insisting she sees you, Sarah,” the nurse said.

Puzzled, Sarah followed the nurse through to the main reception. It was occupied by a short woman with a small child in a push chair. The child was holding a cat basket containing a Jack Russell. The woman had a hard look about her as if she had experienced too many of life’s hard knocks. Her clothes were last years fashion, clean but worn. The child was obviously too big for the pushchair and desperately trying to struggle out of it the woman snapped at her child to sit still.

“How may I help you?” asked Sarah.

“I want this dog put down.”

“Ok, why is that? It seems a little harsh,” replied Sarah.

“I have had the dog for five years but I don’t tolerate nasty animals especially when they bite my children,” said the woman. Despite her harsh tone and her grim request Sarah spotted a look of guilt as her eyes as they turned defensively away.

“Well I can’t put the dog down, I’m not qualified,” Sarah said, wanting to give the woman another option.

“Well it can’t stay with me, it’s dangerous,” Sarah was interrupted.

“What I was going to say was I can rehome her temporarily in a foster home until a permanent home can be found, one without children,” explained Sarah.

“Just as long as you know the dogs dangerous, that’s fine. I have been responsible you know,” said the woman appearing to be trying to alleviate her feelings on the matter.

“I know, you’re doing the right thing for all concerned. I’ll give the fosterer a ring and sort it right now,” Sarah gave reassurance, “Could you sort the paperwork out with this lady please Janet.”

Sarah rang Miss. Wentworth who lived on the far said of the island. She fostered dogs, cats, anything really. The locals called her the mad cat woman as she had an astonishing amount of cats. She arranged to drop the dog off in the next hour as the woman was going out for dinner that evening. Sarah explained to Fletcher that she had to nip out but would be back in just over an hour. He was going to be on his own for a bit as Janet had family commitments. She told him not to worry about the door or phone. Lifting the basket containing the Jack Russell, Sarah looked carefully at him. He seemed quiet and subdued, not vicious at all. She wondered if the woman simply couldn’t afford to look after the pet or he was in fact nasty. Mrs. Wentworth had dog kennels if she needed to use them and she had forgotten to ask the owner what he was like with other animals. It was a good half hour drive but, although the snow was driving down fiercely, Sarah was used to these conditions and it didn’t bother her much. The house could just be seen through the whirling flakes as she pulled up. Miss Wentworth was looking out of the window, waiting for her.

“Good evening Sarah. How’s my little furry friend then, does no one love you anymore? Mummy will look after you, poor thing. Come inside and get you little paws warm and cozy,” The animal loving woman had completely forgotten Sarah’s existence as she crooned in baby talk to the scared looking dog.

“I’ll leave you to it then, I have some food if you need it,” offered Sarah.

Miss Wentworth declined with a simple shake of her head and took the dog inside. Sarah reflected that Miss Wentworth reminded her of hoarders who obsessively collect things to compensate for loss or trauma in their lives at some point. Mad cat people are the same; they just hoard animals, Sarah thought. Miss Wentworth had lost her love of people mainly because her father was quite rich and the gentleman who was courting her was a gold digger. Her heart had broken when she realised and she lost her love of people, choosing to spend all her time and money on animals, never asking payment from anyone for her

fostering work. Returning to the surgery, Sarah checked in with Dr Fletcher to see if everything was going ok. The police sergeant was already there, on the receiving end of a lecture on finding pathogens and taking blood samples. The doctor had clearly finished working as he was talking as if he never spoken to anyone in his life. He didn't talk much while he worked she had noticed.

"Evening Sarah," Sergeant O'Dea greeted Sarah with a friendly smile.

"Evening, have you any news?" asked Sarah.

"On the vet? No, but we do have a suspect in his disappearance."

Sarah blanched at his words. Having a suspect could only mean they thought the worst. "Well, we're checking all the private rented cottages on the island. There's only a few occupied this time of the year, our suspect will be in one of them," the Sergeant continued.

"Has the doctor told you about his findings so far," asked Sarah, changing the subject to one she found less painful.

"Yes we will know tomorrow afternoon if there are any germs to be worried about," the officer showed he had been listening to Fletcher's impromptu lecture, "just give me a moment," he interrupted himself as a radio call came through. He moved away for privacy.

"Sergeant O'Dea."

"We've got another weird one sergeant," Dusen told him.

"What do you mean?"

"I have a Miss Taylor here; she says her child has been snatched by a Golden Eagle."

"Oh bloody hell. Give me five minutes, I'll just have a word with Sarah and see what she says," he said as he hurried back to Sarah.

"Can I ask another favour Sarah," asked the Sergeant.

"Yes but I have a date in one hour," replied Sarah.

"We've had a report that a small child has been snatched by a Golden Eagle. Is it possible for an eagle to do that," he asked.

"Oh yes. There's a pictures on the internet of eagles picking up lambs so I don't see why they couldn't take a small child or baby." Sarah explained, "They live up in the mountains though and don't come down where people are generally."

"I don't want half the island out with shotguns shooting them down when the mother could possibly have killed her own child; I don't know what's wrong with this island lately. I am going to have to draft in more police officers. I can't cope at the moment," said the Sergeant.

"Good luck with that then," said Sarah. "I'm off for my date. Can I see you two gentlemen out?"

“Like that is it then? No thank you,” Fletcher replied.

“I have been looking forward to this one all week, I won’t be in till ten tomorrow ok,” Sarah said assertively.

“Who’s the lucky man then,” O’Dea asked.

“That’s none of your business Sergeant,” replied Sarah smiling.

“I’ll find out you know! It’s my job,” he answered, jokingly.

“If you must gossip, it’s Robin from the sea life centre,” Sarah disclosed, blushing.

“Have a nice time then, I promise I won’t bother you tonight,”

Sarah locked the door and they all went their separate ways.

### **Chapter Seven: The Van [Home](#)**

Kerra awoke with a start and looked at the clock. It was half past one in the afternoon and stretching lazily she got up and headed for the bathroom, smiling at the sight of the tousled head on the pillow next to the one she had just vacated. John woke up hearing the sound of running water from the shower and went in search of Kerra.

“Morning big boy,” Kerra’s wet head peered out from behind the shower curtain. She was beaming from ear to ear.

“Morning beautiful,” John leapt laughingly into the shower with her.

They washed, then washed each other and then washed each other again.

“Come on, I need to get the van back before it gets dark,” John groaned, knowing they could so easily get carried away again.

Showered and dressed in clean clothes, John made coffee while Kerra dried her hair.

“So what’s the plan for today then,” Kerra asked.

“We get the AA out to the van and get it fixed. It shouldn’t take much, I would imagine,” John flicked on the news as he spoke and sipped his coffee. He turned the volume up slightly to hear it over the hairdryers hum.

“Sorry, I won’t be long,” said Kerra, turning the hair dryer off to get his attention.

The TV volume rose.

“Hello, this is John Watkins of Island News. Today a man was arrested after shooting his prize winning chickens. Neighbours reported hearing multiple shots fired at the smallholding in Calgary where the drunken man used his twelve bore shotgun to slaughter his chickens. The man is believed to be receiving psychiatric treatment on the mainland after stating that the chickens were attacking and trying to eat him. The recent snow has also caused many problems on the Isle of Mull. Several people including the island vet, a farmer and a local wildlife photographer are all believed to be missing. Mountain rescue teams and

local search teams are assisting police in the search for them. People are urged not to go out unless they absolutely have to as the severe weather is expected to continue for several days.”

“Do you think all the animals are going mad or have rabies or something?” Kerra asked.

“I don’t know but I would rather face your father’s anger than stay here,” John said.

“Agreed, I can always move in if he kicks me out for sleeping with you,” Kerra responded, laughingly.

John’s face went into shock. He was mortified at the thought of Mike having to find out.

“Got ya, your face was a picture! You’re not ashamed of me are you?” Kerra giggled.

“No I just have a healthy fear of your father’s wrath. I have seen him lose it before.”

“What you looking at?” Kerra asked drying her hair, conscious of John’s intense scrutiny of her.

“I was just looking; you’re very sexy when you’re getting ready.”

“Stop it! You’re making me blush,” Kerra smiled.

“What tools do we want then? And what for?” she quickly changed the subject.

“Anything that’s sharp and pointy that would kill a bird or crack a rabbits skull open. Also anything I need for at home would be useful.”

They finished their coffee and walked down to the high street looking for the hardware store which they quickly found situated half way down the road. The street was quite snowy but the sea air and people had made it useable for pedestrians. Kerra went into the shop first and a traditional bell rang. The unfamiliar smell of grease and fusty cardboard slipped up her nostrils.

“Afternoon, can I help you?” a young man asked from behind the counter at the back of the shop.

“We’re just browsing,” replied Kerra. Her eyes searched the shop, carefully analyzing the contents.

Most shops in Mull they were crammed full, having at least one of everything possible. This meant when something was needed they didn’t have to go to the mainland. John and Kerra were intent on finding something that could kill small furry creatures and birds. It wasn’t as if they could ask for killing instruments because the island wildlife population had become killer man eating zombies. The last resident to do that had ended up on a nutters ward according to the news this morning. John picked up a couple of hammers, two tool belts,



screwdrivers and a crow bar and placed them on a counter.

“A bit of DIY sir?” the counter assistant asked cheerfully.

“Something like that,” John replied, placing a set of hand chisels on the counter.

“Are you going to get anything?” John asked Kerra.

“I was just thinking,” Kerra said, picking up two hand scythes.

“Can you sharpen these for me,” she asked the assistant.

“They’re already quite sharp you know,” stated the shopkeeper.

“I know, but I want them sharper please,” insisted Kerra.

“You’re scary sometimes you know,” John laughed at her insistence on sharper tools.

She stuck her tongue out at him.

“Well, it’s going to be a credit card job I think,” John said, lifting a small power tool into his hand.

“What is it?” asked Kerra, placing a chef’s set of knives on the counter.

“This is a gas powered nail gun. It’s the business, gas in here, nails out here. Have you never seen Lethal Weapon?”

“You’re showing your age now, I’ll stick with my pointy objects and hammer,” Kerra said laughing at him. She placed two small hatchets on the counter.

“I think that will do,” John said.

“You don’t think we’re being a little paranoid do you?” Kerra looked anxious.

“No. That spider convinced me of that,” John replied.

“Ugh, don’t remind me,” Kerra shuddered.

“Are these to madam’s requirements?” the assistant asked, rather sarcastically, as he returned with the now razor edged scythes.

“Yes they will be fine, but I need these sharpening,” Kerra passed the two hatchets across to assistant.

“If I sharpen these two much they will just blunt,” the assistant said wearily.

“I want them as sharp as the scythes please,” Kerra asked politely, knowing if John had asked he would have just done it.

John lifted a canvas bag and placed it on the counter. He didn’t want them to look like axe murderers walking down the street. John paid and they walked slowly toward the garage pointed out to them earlier that day.

“Afternoon,” a man said presumably the mechanic due to his oil covered face and oil soaked overalls. He had just crawled out from under a four wheel drive car. Wiping his hands he went over to the couple.

“Afternoon, my van broke down on the Scridain loch Road. The pin holding

the drive shaft failed and it fell out,” explained John.

“Ok, make and model,” asked the mechanic.

“Ford short wheel base transit, 2003,” John answered.

“I’ll have a look see what I can do,” replied the mechanic, searching his reference manuals for relevant information.

“I have several pins that should do the job, but aren’t an exact match. That would take a week to get here,” explained the mechanic.

“Good enough,” John replied quickly.

“I’ll take the tow truck just in case. Are you with AA, Green Flag, or RAC?” asked the mechanic.

“Yes here’s my card,” John said.

“That just saved you two hundred quid! Do you want to get in,” invited the mechanic.

As they drove down the slippery road the big heavy truck had no problems with the snow, cutting through it like butter and creating a nice path for cars behind. In no time at all they reached the van. John found the drive shaft which was buried under the snow and Kerra clutched onto the bag of tools, keeping watch over the mechanic who was jacking the van up with two jacks. The mechanic examined the drive shaft and the underside of the van and after half an hour of tinkering and banging emerged, grease coating his hands and face.

“All done. Something hit that with some force, they don’t usually come out. I’d get it checked at the mainland when you go over and have the correct pin put in it,” explained the mechanic.

“I will do, thank you,” replied John.

They were soon on their way to Tobermory, following the pickup truck down the icy road to the ferry pub where they had left Darren. John’s phone started ringing and he pulled over to answer it.

“Hello,” John said.

“I’m in trouble; I need you to pick me up now. I’m at Kintra,” Darren ordered with a trembling agitation reverberating through his voice which indicated his present state of complete and utter fear. John struggled with the information, processing for a moment as his brain had not processed such a fearful tone before.

“What trouble? Where at Kintra?” asked John.

“A set of holiday chalets near the coast at Kintra. A pack of dogs attacked my date, ate her after they killed her. I don’t know what to do,” Darren’s voice rose to a terrified sob over the sound of barking dog in the background. The phone cut out.

“I’ve found it,” Kerra had been looking at the map as John spoke to Darren,

“turn around, it’s on the road we’ve just been on. It must be thirty miles away,” Kerra said.

“Okay but he said the dogs ate his date, so get those tools ready,” commanded John, raising the tone of his voice in line with the adrenaline that had begun pumping through his veins.

“We could ring the police?” Kerra suggested.

“Yes, and get arrested for smoking weed no doubt. They won’t believe that my friend phoned me and told me his date had been eaten by dogs.”

“I hope they’re not huskies, I like huskies,” Kerra’s mind was trying to cope with what Darren had said.

“You liked bunnies this morning and so did I. I hope they’re not zombie dogs from hell sent to kill all mankind.”

Kerra fell into silence, pulling the sleeping bag over herself as she cuddled up to John who was concentrating on the road. He wasn’t going to hit a dead cow again.

“Can you take my phone and ring Darren to see if he is okay?” John asked.

Kerra tried Darren’s number but they were in no mans land with the phone reception.

“Receptions gone again.”

The snow started falling again, February is the worse month for snow and this year was particularly, bad global warming and all. The journey was taking longer than they had expected. John was extra cautious as the snow was making it hard to see the road in front of them. Eventually they arrived at what they thought must be Kintra. It was getting dark and the night was moonless, hidden by dense layers of cloud gravid with yet more snow, it was difficult to see anything except clouds and gusting snowflakes.

“He said he was in a holiday chalet near the coast,” John peered through the windscreen.

“Keep going, I’ll spot for you.”

John drove on carefully. He could now see the sea and three wooden chalets were just coming into focus. He couldn’t see any dogs but the hairs on his arms stood up and a chill of fear fell over his body. Pulling up in front of the middle chalet he put his full beam on to light the scene. They could still see nothing. John thought he’d get out and have a look and then changed his mind, beeping his horn instead. Nothing moved, nothing responded. He picked his phone up and redialed Darren’s number. It was answered.

“Where are you?”

“I heard your horn, I’m in the end chalet in the broom cupboard with my feet against the door,” Darren whispered quietly.

“How many dogs are there? Are they still there?” asked John.

“Four Alsatians, I’m not sure, they aren’t making any noise. I’ll look.” Darren stumbled out a replied with the fear taking over the mental reasoning of voice box a few word resounded out a reply.

Darren appeared at the door of the end chalet, frantically waving at the van

“They’ve gone,” he shouted. A blur struck Darren’s back, a blur of fur and teeth. He fell to the ground as a large dog struck him from behind, pinning him to the floor.

John rushed out of the van and booted the dog ferociously, dislodging it from Darren’s back and putting two nails straight into its head. The dog jolted back with a yelp then came straight back for him, teeth bared and bloody. John kept firing the nail gun until it went down and stayed down. He dragged Darren into the van just as the other dogs came out the house. Strangely, the dogs didn’t pursue them. As soon as they saw the dying dog on the floor they switched their attention and bit deeply into its flesh, tearing off chunks and swallowing them with growls of pleasure. John turned the van round and headed for the ferry.

“Thanks, that’s some weird shit man,” Darren said, trembling visibly, waves of fear shivering over his body like a cold winter’s night.

“So what happened?” asked Kerra.

“I was in the pub right, putting down my moves on some local girl. It was working fine and we drove back to her place. We were just getting down to it when she remembers she left the dogs out and went to let them in,” Darren explained, “They were all over her; she was dead within seconds man. I couldn’t believe it.”

“So how long have you been in the cupboard?”

“I don’t know. My phone was on the table in the lounge and it took me several goes to get it back. I couldn’t get hold of the police. I rang you so many times man! Where you bin?”

Kerra and John explained what had happened to them and then showed him their improvised killing tools. By this time they had reached the ferry crossing point and Kerra checked the timetable on the dock. There were no ferries until ten in the morning. There was no choice other than to return to the guest house for one more night. They arrived back in Tobermory just in time as the snow was making it impossible to drive with visibility down to inches and snow and ice forcing the car wheels to spin griplessly and helplessly. They clambered up the steps into the guest house and Darren immediately went to his room, needing to come to terms with his experiences. Kerra turned to John, her unspoken invitation unmistakable.

**Chapter Eight: Evolution two [Home](#)**

The eagle watched the small holiday cottage for signs of life. It was a small stone cottage sat in a row of identical stone cottages with a pretty view overlooking a small harbor. There was no front garden and only a small rear yard. Clearly someone was home and had a nice warm fire lit as smoke was rising from the chimney pot. The front of the house had two double glazed windows in the style of the original building and a smaller than average front door. Inside, a balding man in his thirties was working with great concentration, occasionally lifting his thick rimmed spectacles to check his work under a microscope. He was surrounded by strange vials and Petri dishes. Finally he nodded to himself in what appeared to be grim satisfaction and crossed over to a desk in the corner of the room. He sat and began writing with the same concentration he had displayed earlier. A small dissected mouse was lying clamped to a table next to the desk tiny pins pulling out layers of its fleshy construction and exposing its vital organs to the world. The mouse was continuously struggling to escape until finally the bald man rose from his seat and put a pin through its head, preventing it from moving. Returning to the desk he continued writing in a thick journal, writing as if his life depended on it. He heard a knock at the door and quickly threw a blanket over the mouse before hiding his journal in the bookshelf. Nervously he peered through the curtain to see who his unwelcome visitor may be. He couldn't see anyone so reluctantly opened the front door. There was still no-one. He stepped outside and saw nothing except a few rabbits playing in the distance. He had worked late that evening and was becoming tired so gave up the mystery, guessing local children were playing knock and run at his expense. Putting a couple more logs on the fire, he made himself a cup of hot chocolate and a sandwich from his meager larder. Finally relaxing after his long working day he sat in front of the warm fire and turned on the TV, flicking through the channels till he found the local news and watched the television until he dozed off where he sat.

A small squirrel darted around the cottage looking for a way in. He found a cat flap and deftly unlocked its catch, allowing access to the two otters that had been patiently and silently waiting. They went to observe the man. The squirrel darted around the cottage looking for something, quickly returning dragging a length of old washing line in his teeth. The otters efficiently tied the man to the old fashioned chair by his legs and his arms before tackling the cottage door. They scratched and clawed the lock until it gave way and then flung the door wide open as birds, stoats and animals of all descriptions swarmed into the cottage. The cold breeze blowing in woke the man. He knew his impending doom as soon as he looked at the animals gathered before him. Trembling at his predicament he fought his restraints before terror overtook him. He managed to

force out first one cry then, as if a dam had broken forced scream after scream through a throat dry with fear, screaming for help he knew would not come but hoping for a miracle nevertheless. The scream broke the cold, eerie silence in the cabin. The cold desolate air absorbed the long cries as the otters probed their sharp edged paws into the man's mouth to silence him. They forced his lips apart, exposing his tongue as small robin approached and coughed up a small quantity of yellow bile into his mouth then dropped onto the man's lap, dead. Bird after bird repeated this action, bringing bile to the man before dying. Stoats busied themselves clearing the man's lap of dead birds, placing the bodies outside where a herd of highland cattle grazed upon them, grinding the fragile bones with their teeth and swallowing the meat with evident placid enjoyment. Eventually, when most of the animals had made their offering and had been added to the cattle feeding piles, the otters released their grip on their terrified and uncomprehending victim. The bile choked him and he struggled desperately to spit it out but passed out. When he awoke seconds later the otters immediately released him from his bindings. He threw the discarded washing line on the fire and stood silently, concentrating on stretching his body and feeling his new shell.

'I think, therefore I am. I know what I am, I know where I am and when I am, I know where I came from, but who am I and what is my purpose?' thought V.

He cleared the room and made it look like a holiday cottage once again. He smashed all the equipment and placed it, a piece at a time, onto the fire, destroying all evidence of research. He practiced as he sat and fed the fire, his lips tried to articulate speech. His mouth opened and his lips moved but nothing came out. Eventually he succeeded, forced words through his lips, "Yes," he croaked, "yes!" a knock at the door disturbed this rehearsal. On the other side of the door stood a uniformed police officer.

"I'm PC Brannon sir and I wondered if you wouldn't mind answering a few questions?"

The man froze; his newly found voice had deserted him. He strained to speak, his lips moving soundlessly.

"Are you alright sir?" the officer asked, looking through the door at the fire which had a microscope and a few glass vials burning in it.

"Arruu." whispered the man, charging at him and grabbing hold of his face.

Brannon, who was an expert at dealing with head on charges, usually only saw these when called to drunk and disorderly incidents. He flipped him over onto the ground and cuffed him in one smooth movement before placing him in the back of the car, mouth still moving and spitting out voiceless phrases. Brannon radioed into the station before returning to the cottage for a quick look

around. There was clear evidence of some sort of lab equipment. He saw car keys on the table and searched the car outside which was the only car parked at the cottages. When he opened the boot he found what he expected: an empty mouse cage, chemicals, vials and lab equipment.

“Sergeant, we got him. It’s the one who had the lab; I need scene of crime down here ASAP.” Brannon radioed in to the station triumphantly.

Brannon drove back to the station. He hadn’t wanted to hang around on his own in case the suspect had friends turn up, he would be outnumbered. Brannon thought that there must be more people involved as from experience he knew these crimes are rarely undertaken by lone individuals. Back at the station he proudly escorted his struggling suspect into the building. The suspect, still resisting, refused to answer any questions or even give his name. Brannon stood him in front of the custody Sergeant where he was formally arrested before being searched; they found his identification in his wallet. He was stripped of his shoes, belt and tie before being left in the cell, still handcuffed as he was still behaving aggressively. Eventually the man’s gargled screams stopped and the cell became quiet. They left him to cool off.

“He’s not right that one. Did you see his eyes?” Brannon was intent on gaining full glory from his capture.

“Give him some time. You know what people are like when they’re arrested. Keep an eye on him though, I thought 15 minute checks to start,” the sergeant replied.

“Old Mc Donald had a farm E. I. E. I. O and on the farm he had some rats E. I. E. I.O, with a nip nip here and nip nip there, here a nip, there a nip, everywhere a nip nip,” the prisoner’s loud voice echoed through the small police station.

“What the hell?” the Sergeant went to the cell opened the spy hole and looked in.

“Old Mc Donald had a farm E. I. E. I. O and on that farm he had some spiders E. I. E. I. O.”

“Shut up, carrying on will get you nowhere,” Sergeant O’Dea shouted.

The man showed him his tongue. At fat spider was sat on it. As the tongue emerged further the spider fell to the floor. The sergeant opened the cell and retrieved the spider before locking the door again. He placed the spider on a small window ledge in the office and went over to Brannon. The sergeant had a keen sense of protection to the wildlife on the island that included the spiders.

“Phone the doctor. Get him to come and have a look at our guest,” ordered Sergeant O’Dea, “I’m not sure if he’s on drugs or has poor mental health but he isn’t with us.”

Brannon phoned the local community hospital and waited for his call to be answered. The chilling sound of the distorted nursery rhyme began again, only louder. Brannon just wanted him gone. They'll put a big needle in his arse and that will be that, he thought to himself, he will dribble for a week, then he will talk.

"Sergeant, are you there?" Fredrick asked over the radio.

"I'm here, go ahead," Sergeant O'Dea replied.

"I got the warrant you asked for," replied Fredrick.

"Ok, I'll meet you there," the Sergeant asked "Brannon you can hold down the fort until I get back."

"Warrant? Where are you going?"

"Some woman reported that her child had been snatched by a Golden Eagle," said Sergeant O'Dea," The inspector ordered a search and detain until the detectives get here."

Half an hour later, the prisoner had worked his way through several different versions of Old Mc Donald had a farm. Brannon was beginning to get a headache from the non stop noise when he heard the counter bell ring. Hoping it was the doctor, Brannon went to the desk.

"Evening," said Brannon.

"We're from the Dunaros Community Hospital, I believe you called us," a white coated man showed Brannon his ID.

"I'm Doctor Ahmen and this is Doctor Patel," said Dr Ahmen.

"PC Brannon. Oh great, he has been like this since he got here and we haven't been able to take the cuffs off him. He's been too violent toward us," said Brannon.

"What's his name?"

"Well his ID says Peter Parker. I know that's Spiderman, but the ID seems to check out with DVLA," said Brannon.

"What was he arrested for?"

In connection with that secret lab at Galloway farm and for assaulting a police officer," Brannon replied.

"So is there a possibility he could have come into contact with a contagion?" asked Dr Ahmen.

"I don't know. The vet is carrying out tests on the animals from the lab and has only found that he or an accomplice tried to poison the animals with rat poison," replied Brannon.

"Well let's have a look at him," Doctor Patel seemed keen to get moving.

They could hear him still singing as they walked towards the cell. As soon as the Sergeant opened the door the prisoner rushed forward, his eyes fixated. He



kept singing Old Mc Donald over and over again. Brannon stopped him and he tried to bite him.

“Peter, can you hear me?” Dr Patel asked.

There was no response at all.

“Peter, unless you start talking with us, or try to help yourself, we are going to have to take you to the hospital. Do you understand?” Dr Ahmen asked.

“Old Mc Donald had a farm, E. I. E. I. O,” Peter repeatedly sang.

They left the room which Brannon locked behind him.

“What’s the verdict doc’s?” Brannon asked.

“He would benefit from some treatment. I think we can do something for him,” said Dr Ahmen.

“Yes he’s nuts, we’ll section him,” Dr Patel said.

“Can we use your phone? I’ll get some transport arranged,” Dr Patel asked.

“Yes of course, here you go,” Brannon replied.

“They will be here in half an hour,” Dr Ahmen said, putting the phone back on the desk.

Doctor Ahmen opened up his bag and took out a needle which he filled from a small vial.

“What you got for him doc?” Brannon asked.

“It’s like a compliant patient drug. It will help us move him without anyone getting hurt and if he has it now he can go as soon as the transport arrives,” Dr Ahmen.

Brannon opened the cell and restrained the prisoner whilst the doctor administered the injection. The non stop singing was ceaseless and he was glad to get out of the cell again.

“You should be able to take the cuffs off in about ten minutes,” said the doctor.

It didn’t take the ambulance long to arrive. They put Peter in some restraints and took him off to the hospital.

The community hospital, to most mainlanders, would be considered just a large health centre with a theater and a few extras. It wasn’t large and neither was the psychiatric department which consisted of one padded cell in a small open plan ward for five or six people. The ward was designed to treat ongoing problems within the community and short relapses in mental health rather than for diagnosis. Peter would have to be moved to the mainland ASAP. If he was violent it would disturb the other patient’s treatment, as most mental health sufferers didn’t engage in violence, in fact just the reverse. They would check his vital body functions so they could medicate him safely and they would do this through his blood test. The staff were trained in restraint but very rarely had to

use it to any degree. They would medicate him as soon as they got his blood work back. The psychiatrist made sure he only had nice patients to look after. As he would say to the managers ‘we don’t have the resources to treat them properly here, they will get better care on the mainland.’ Peter was placed straight into the padded cell before unstrapping him they took blood then left him to wait until the drugs wore off when they could observe his behaviour drug free. This would give them an idea of his illness. They constantly watched him for a period of time and looked for changes in behaviour so they could diagnose him correctly. Since the blood had been taken he was unable to talk but faint murmurs of ‘Old Mc Donald had a Farm’ were slowly creeping out. It wasn’t unusual for a patient who had suffered trauma to exhibit strange behaviour. The lead nurse told the tale of a football fan brought to a ward in Leicester who did nothing for two months. He remained in a catatonic state until he saw a Liverpool t-shirt and started climbing the walks to get to the man wearing it. It turned out that Liverpool fans had beat him up and then his girlfriend while he watched. The girlfriend didn’t survive.

Peter had physically recovered and found his voice again. He was trying to get out of the cell, whilst chanting unrelentingly his sinister rewriting of the children’s song, giving the nurses the chills. The staff had left food and water in the room for him but he had thrown it on the floor. They weren’t ready to intervene yet as they would give him medication based on the notes they had accumulated over the night, according to the doctors orders, but they did sit and take bets on what it would be. Eventually Peter quietened; his singing sank to a hoarse tuneless hum before he lay down in a corner of the room. He began whispering to himself. The whispering was urgent and sounded as if giving he was giving orders to people only he could see. Occasionally he screamed, screaming as if in agony with his body alternately writhing and tensing as if suffering immense pain. This would stop and the whispering would begin again, faint murmurs and then more screaming as if his body had an electronic current running through it. This in turn faded and within an hour he was still and silent, his body and mind seemingly sinking into catatonia just as the power went out. Emergency systems came online immediately and all nurses and attendants fluttered around checking every system was functioning.

### **Chapter Nine: V Day [Home](#)**

Unseen by any curious eyes hundreds if not thousands of small furry creatures were burrowing through the snow. They were making their way to the cables that ran from the mainland: electricity cables, telephones, and eventually water pipes that were systematically destroyed. The biggest job involved the obliteration of the main gas pipes and thousands of animals congregated at the

site. They pierced the pipe until they made a small hole which caused loss of pressure, enough to cause an automatic shut down of the supply. The telephone masts that boosted signals for the mobile networks were the next thing to be destroyed. The rats chewed through everything, some dying as electricity burnt through their veins, but they carried on. With an average death of one rat per square metre this was no major loss. The electrocutions continued until the power finally went out. The rats moved on, not yet satisfied. They ran to the coastline and boarded boats, swimming to them when needed, sinking them where they were moored or chewing through the guide ropes until the boats drifted off. They destroyed the boats they could not sink: every piece of equipment or engine wiring was chewed, until operating them would be an impossibility. They got in everywhere, nothing was overlooked and every piece of infrastructure destroyed.

Petrol stations, cars, trucks, anything that could move or power movement was wrecked. Tyres, wiring and fuel lines on vehicles were slashed and bitten through. The destruction was more thorough than a blitzkrieg or an invading American army. High above the rat destruction flew a single solitary Golden Eagle, guiding the attack to victory.

Mrs. McDonald had trouble getting to sleep at the best of times but once she was out that was usually it. She would lie on her back snoring contentedly away until the morning shone in her face. This hadn't gone unnoticed by the bountiful supply of spiders frequenting her establishment who were now marching like an army into her gaping mouth. An hour or two later the convulsions started and she was no more.

Mrs. Mc Donald rose a little earlier that morning. She had a special treat for her guests and it required some preparation to make it work. On her way downstairs she locked all the doors with her master key and ensured the window locks were on, painstakingly screwing the fire doors shut before she started to prepare a hearty breakfast ready for her guests.

Just over the other side of Tobermory someone had predictably got lucky and had stayed the night with her date, Robin. After several hours of love making with no sleep they noticed that the power had gone out at some point. Power outages were not uncommon so they were not alarmed but Sarah was worried her blood test equipment would fail and wanted to leave immediately to turn the emergency generators on. Robin had offered to drive in, with a display of the gentlemanly manners that had endeared him to Sarah from the beginning, and so they had ventured out into the early morning air, picking up Dr Fletcher on the way.

"So why exactly are you disturbing me up this early in the morning? It's

four o'clock," the doctor, still sleepy, grumbled.

"Well, the power to the incubators went off at least half an hour ago," Sarah felt apologetic. She wished she knew how to turn the damn generators on. "You told me yourself the samples need to be kept warm and I don't know exactly what I am doing because I am still a bit drunk, sorry."

"No it's fine my child. I do understand, I was young once. Is this fine young man your date?"

"Yes, this is Robin," Sarah introduced the two tired men to each other.

"I hope you're taking care of our future vet," Fletcher smiled at the younger man.

"Yes, of course sir," Robin said.

"No one has called me sir for a while. Albert will be fine thank you," the doctor said.

They soon arrived at the lab and, while Sarah drank coffee to try and focus, the doctor set to work. Sarah didn't often drink as alcohol always went straight to her head. Last night had been no exception to this rule.

Fletcher looked up from printouts he had just finished scanning. His sleepiness had dissolved into concern. "Well, we need to contact the police and D.E.F.R.A immediately. This is a virus and it multiplies at an alarming rate. These animals all need to be in quarantine until we can work out what we're dealing with," explained the Doctor.

Sarah obediently picked up the phone. There was no dialing tone so frowning with annoyance she tried her mobile. There no absolutely no signal.

"The phone is dead," she told the others, "We'll have to drive up to the police station."

The drive didn't take long but the station was deserted. No cars were parked up outside so they assumed the officers were all out on a calls.

"Let's see if we can catch the morning ferry and go straight to the mainland," suggested the Doctor.

At the ferry terminal Robin found the first ferry was at ten o'clock, still several hours away so they returned to Tobermory where they discovered the devastation wreaked on the cars and the sunken boats in the harbor. Shocked, they could find no explanation and looked at the wrecks to see if they could find any answers. They were just debating whether a sudden tornado had swept in during the night and mysteriously missed everything but the vehicles when they saw the hordes. Their van had caught the attention of the eagle flying above and a legion of rats was now heading towards them. Robin instinctively turned away and drove away in the opposite direction.

"That will be the virus then," the doctor stated, his face pale in the weak

early light

“But how is it working? Rats don’t do that,” Sarah didn’t look so good herself. A hangover and a plague of virus ridden rats had left her feeling ill and frightened.

“Let’s go somewhere safe, my place,” Robin interrupted. “I have a lock up garage that we can put the van in for a while until we figure out what to do.”

“I need a sleep or more coffee,” Sarah slurred the sentence.

“That leaves me to come up with a plan,” said the Doctor, wearily.

The rat devastation could now be seen clearly: tyres had been stripped from cars, phone wires pulled down while traffic lights stood blank faced and streets unlit. Luckily for them all Robin’s home was secure with an electronic garage. There was significant amount of wildlife activity behind them and in fact closing on them. Robin could see a flock of birds and some deer following just behind him as he turned into his driveway. He drove quickly into the garage, the garage doors struggling to open for a heart wrenching moment. They closed so slowly a snail could have run in behind them. There was no mains power in his house and his solar panels wouldn’t work effectively until the sun was up but Robin had oil fired heating. He got the range going quickly and managed to boil a kettle and make everyone a coffee, but the lights flickered for a moment and then went out. Robin went to check the electronic trip box fitted for the solar panel in the upstairs box room. He could hear birds scrabbling on the roof, presumably pecking away at the solar panel installation. He hurried downstairs to the others.

“They have taken out the solar panels,” he felt as if he were in shock.

“This is so weird! The animals seem to be working together, just look at those birds. They should be killing each other, not hunting us,” Sarah was no longer slurring but sounded wide awake and scared.

“They might not harm us. I know they’re acting scary but they are just birds at the end of the day,” Robin said, determined to find a logical argument to push his fear away. He had a sudden thought, “I have a portable CB but it will need a power inverter for car usage.”

“They seem to be pretty smart,” the doctor said.

“The power inverter is in the shed. It seems to be being guarded by twenty or so birds though,” explained Robin.

“We can’t go out there, it’s too dangerous,” Sarah said.

“I’ll get the power inverter and see what happens, said Robin, “This duvet should protect me from a few birds I’d have thought.”

“Yes, but who is to say that one peck won’t infect you. It may even make you just like them. I’ve always thought that germs would be the death of us,” argued the Doctor.

“If we stay here we will starve to death eventually. I’d best go before any more arrive,” Robin sounded scared but determined to go ahead with his plan.

He put on his leather motor bike jacket, his helmet and boots. The others looked more confident about this extra protection. He wrapped a duvet around himself and stepped outside. The animals did nothing except to stare blinklessly at him with their beady black eyes. They remained immobile as he slowly walked down the garden to the shed, not wanting to disturb the peace that seemed to be holding with any sudden movements. He opened the shed door and bent over to grab the power inverter. The attack happened quickly. In a flurry of feathers Robin felt beaks piercing the thick leather easily. He cried out, wincing in pain and ran quickly back to the house, birds stabbing at his helmet as he ran. Breathlessly he managed to shut the door behind him quickly enough to stop any birds getting in.

“First aid kit, under the sink,” Robin cried, pulling off his leathers.

Blood was pouring from what looked like a hundred small but deep wounds. A shocked and suddenly sober Sarah plugged the bleeding as quickly as she could but the wounds really needed stitching. She eventually resorted to using super glue as a fast fix. The leather had saved Robins life but had still not been enough to protect him from injury.

Robin was pleased to see that the power inverter was still intact. He could fix it to the van to use his CB. He was starting to feel severe discomfort from his injuries. Sarah, who had been thoroughly through the contents of his medicine cabinet, gave him a couple of co-codamols for the pain.

“Are you ok?” she asked gently.

“Yeah, it’s a little hurting now though. I just hope I haven’t got infected with anything,” Robin admitted.

They noticed with a start that while they had been concentrating on Robins injuries birds had moved closer to the house and had even started pecking at the windows. Grabbing a remote Robin pressed a button but nothing happened. He rushed across the room, the movement causing several of his wounds to start burning and bleeding again, and frantically started turning a lever next to the window frame. Immediately shutters slid down over every window in the house, blocking out the light but preventing the birds from breaking the fragile glass. Understanding what was needed, the other two joined him in winding down the shutters in every room of the house.

“I’m so pleased I had them fitted with automatic and manual controls. It seemed like a luxury at the time but I had put them in for when I was working away from home for long periods of time,” Robin said with satisfaction.

“Where’s your CB Robin? I’ll set it up while you rest,” Fletcher offered,

seeing how shaken up the young man really was.

“Under the stairs, the aerial is in the spare bedroom,” Robin replied gratefully.

Gentle tapping could be heard all around the building as the animals tested their defenses. The monotonous rapping put all their nerves on edge. Adrenaline pumped through their veins and their desire for communication with the outside world increased.

“I’ll get the aerial while you set the CB up, doctor,” Sarah offered, helping Robin to the couch. Robin was looking increasingly pale. She knew that that she hadn’t stopped all the bleeding with her makeshift glue stitches but with so many injuries it was hard to tell which one was the worst.

Sarah found Fletcher in the garage, hooking the power inverter to the car.

“I think he needs a hospital. He might have internal bleeding from his wounds. His colour is bad and he’s breathing increasing slowly.”

“Let’s get this thing working and then we’ll have all the help we need,” he replied.

“Will it work in here? Don’t we need to be outside,” asked Sarah.

“Possibly. We may need to go to higher ground,” he really hoped they would not have to.

The CB was soon set and Sarah was delighted to see the red power button light up when they turned it on. Fletcher flicked through the channels, trying to find anyone broadcasting but found no-one. He put it on ch9, the emergency channel, and called in their emergency. There was still no response. The air waves remained as silent as the grave.

“We’re going to have to find higher ground,” the Doctor finally acknowledged defeat.

Sarah returned to the lounge to check on Robin and found him, still on the sofa but almost engulfed in the coils of by a huge python. Her scream was ear shattering and caused Fletcher to come running. He gasped in horror before throwing himself on the snake, his fingers scrabbling to uncoil it from Robin who was being slowly and painfully crushed. Its grip was amazingly strong and Fletcher feared he would not move it at all. Sarah pulled at the beast’s tail but only succeeded in making the serpent lunge for her, its fangs exposed. Eventually she realised she still had her bag in the lounge, her bag with all its sharp instruments. Removing a scalpel she sliced into the pythons muscle, releasing Robin from its death like grip. She pulled the scalpel free and, using all of her strength, pinioned the serpent to the floor by its head. It convulsed and lay still, alive but unconscious. At that moment Fletcher saw the rats. They were in the hallways, their clawing tapping on the tiled floor. He realised that they must

have entered the house through the downstairs toilet directly from the sewers. Just in time he shut the door on them.

“I think it is time to leave. There are rats coming in through the toilet.”

Sarah looked scared but adrenaline pumped her into moving. With the doctor’s help she half lifted Robin into the van. As soon as they cranked open the garage doors with the winding handle they saw that hundreds of animal waited for them outside. Sarah didn’t think twice. Leaping back into the van and crunching it into first gear she put her foot down and mowed through them, hearing the crackle of bone under her tyres. She drove as quickly as possible toward the hospital, fearing for Robin’s life.

Meanwhile on the other side of Tobermory, at the Little Wee Dram, Kerra was still asleep, stretching and rolling over onto John who was momentarily startled at the sight of a young naked female next to him. Then he remembered where he was and what had happened. His sleepy eyes suddenly focused at the sight of the spider running across the wall. This woke him up completely and instantly. He nudged Kerra into wakefulness. She knew immediately that there was a threat and her scythe slashed straight into the wall nailing the spider where it stood. The scythe remained quivering in the wall, a testament to the force she had used.

“Morning beautiful.”

“Morning gorgeous.”

“I killed it so you get rid of it,” Kerra said.

“It’s not dead yet.”

“Where’s the bible, I’ll have a coffee please.”

John put the kettle on while Kerra killed and flushed the spider. She flicked the light switch “The power’s out.”

“Kettle’s dead as well.”

“I’ll see if Mrs. Mc Donald’s knows anything,” Kerra said, grabbing her dressing gown.

She found the room door locked and after further examination she found that the door was also screwed to the frame. She couldn’t believe it.

“We’re screwed in, the door won’t open,” she told John worriedly.

He looked out the window and immediately saw the wreckage of the cars on the road. A small collection of animals waited outside the guest house and they were all looking at him.

“Look at this,” John told her.

Kerra looked outside at the cars with no tyres and bits of chewed wire left in the middle of the street. Highland cattle were walking up and down the street, birds of prey sat on their backs. Rats were scuttling between their legs. They



both watched a local woman as she left her house to collect her morning papers. Mrs. Douglas followed her normal short walk toward the main Tobermory high street. She was obviously oblivious to any lurking dangers and walked jauntily up the street, smiling as her feet slipped in the melting snow. As she recovered from her near fall she saw the birds. Her eyes widened with fear and disbelief as the first bird landed on her shoulder and poked its beak straight into her ear. She screamed in pain as it withdrew its blooded beak, cocking its head at her almost quizzically. Other birds started to peck at her feet, her thighs and her breasts. She looked at them in bewildered pain before acting to protect herself, flapping her arms in a futile attempt to remove the attacking creatures from her body and bending to tear them from her legs. This did not clear the birds from her, for every bird she batted away another two joined the attack. They continued their assault and soon her thrashing body lay on the pavement, blood spraying across the pavement and pooling around her open legs. Kerra and John watched in impotent horror as the eagle went straight for her eyes, wrenching each from its socket as the eagle would usually pull a snail from its shell. Blinded and still screaming the hapless woman was dispatched by highland cattle who repeatedly pieced her side with their horns. The worst was to still to come. Animals converged on the spayed corpse, dragging flesh from bones, organs from cavities; they feasted on her greedily by their dozens. More creatures joined the meal: it seemed that they came from nowhere; they appeared from bushes, popped out of holes and dropped from walls. They cleaned the body away as if it never happened. Rats even licked every last drop of blood off the pavement. Kerra grabbed John tightly and clasped her hand over her mouth. She had stopped looking when the woman's terrified screams had abruptly ended.

"Well, we were right about the animals but why on earth are we screwed in?" Kerra asked.

"Maybe Darren did it in sacrificial act to save our lives?"

"Let's get dressed John and find Darren. Safety in numbers."

"Agreed."

They both dressed and tooled up to the eyeballs before packing a small travel bag with essential such as maps, bottles of pop and sweeties, anything they considered useful. John broke out the crow bar and made short work of the door. Kerra wore her head torch as it was dark and scary in the corridors. The smell of bacon cooking wafted up to them from downstairs.

"Smells like Mrs. Mc Donald's up," Kerra said.

They walked quietly to John's room and went in. Darren was fast asleep in bed, a half empty bottle of whisky lovingly clasped between his arms. John woke him and quickly explained what was happening. With Darren dressed, they

tiptoed downstairs only to find the front door was screwed shut with planks of wood. John moved towards the door, intent on opening it, just as Mrs. Mc Donald came through.

“You don’t want to go out there my dears; there are killer animals out there. Come and have some breakfast,” she smiled at them. The smile looked wrong, as if someone was trying to smile who had never done it before.

“I think we’ll skip on breakfast thanks, I lost my appetite,” John wasn’t sure what was going on but knew he didn’t like it.

“I insist,” Mrs. Mc Donald said sweetly. Moving with a speed he would never have suspected her capable of she threw the meat cleaver she had hidden behind her back at him. She missed by centimetres. The bizarre smile was still plastered across her face revealing something sticking out from between her lips. A burp forced her lips apart and revealed a spider wriggling in an attempt to escape from her mouth. She crunched down on it, chewing slowly.

“You missed a bit,” John said nervously, pointing to a leg hanging from her side of her mouth.

“Oh, God. They’ve got control of her,” screamed Kerra.

Mrs. Mc Donald pulled a very sharp looking knife from her apron pocket and waved it convincingly at them. Her intentions were clear. Kerra threw her hatchet straight at the landlady’s still smiling head. The blunt side hit her, knocking her out.

“What’s the plan?” Kerra asked, ignoring the fallen woman lying on the floor.

“Locate transport without getting eaten,” said John.

“But all the cars are trashed,” Kerra said.

“I’ll think of something. We can’t stop here.”

“I think we should hold up here for a couple of days. See if we’re rescued or these things die off,” Darren added his ideas to the pot.

Kerra looked at John and saw he was signaling her to go in the dining room. They both walked in and whispered to each other.

“His door wasn’t screwed shut, he has no instinct to fuck off and he doesn’t seem the slightest bit bothered that our landlady just tried to kill us,” John explained frantically, panicking inside.

“I can hear you in there you know,” Darren voice came from the other side of the door. They heard the lock turn, trapping them both in the dining room.

“Fuck you,” John said.

“You going to have a nice life, a more evolved life, and you’re going to enjoy it. All you need to do is eat your breakfast, dinner and tea to keep you nice and strong,” explained Darren cheerfully.

They looked at the table which was set for two; the breakfast had everything you could expect of a five star hotel breakfast: Smoked salmon, cream cheese, fresh croissants and pastries, full English, eggs Benedict or Florentine.

“Not hungry are you?” said John.

“No,” Kerra said.

“Now finish off what you can. I’m moving your belongings to the penthouse honeymoon suite. It has an en suite, a sauna and a Jacuzzi. Please enjoy your stay. I am afraid you can’t leave just yet,” Mrs. Mc Donald and Darren spoke simultaneously from the hallway.

“Why?” Kerra asked.

“I’m not ready for you,” they replied.

Kerra walked to the window and peeked from behind the curtain. A large cow was at the window, staring in at her. She shut the curtains and turned to John who filling a small plastic bag with some of the food. He pulled a finger to his mouth gesturing her to be quiet.

“This food is just like when I went to the Brands Hatch hotel. I haven’t had anything like it for ages! Eat up Kerra,” John said.

Kerra tapped knives and forks on the plate as if to she were eating. Ten minutes later they heard the door unlock before it swung open.

Mrs. Mc Donald and Darren spoke in unison again.

“Please go to you room. Neither of you will be hurt.”

“Who are you?” John asked.

“Everything comes to those who wait.” Mrs. Mc Donald and Darren replied in unison.

Darren was guarding the front door, armed with a machete. John and Kerra went upstairs to find an open door leading to a large suite with a balcony and sea views. John shut the door and, putting a chair against the door handle, joined Kerra in checking around for spiders and anything else that moved. A sigh of relief fell from them both now and they felt relatively safe to talk.

“Aliens do you think?” asked Kerra.

“I don’t know. They must want us alive for a reason cos they’ve killed so many people already. Pass us those binoculars, we need a plan.”

John looked around from the balcony and immediately spotted an eagle circling the house, looking down on them. He saw people were being set on by anything that flew, walked or crawled as soon as they left their homes. He saw one woman running for her life. She reached a boat, swimming to it and scrambling aboard but a whole hoard of rats followed and he didn’t watch anymore. With a surge of hope he found what he was looking for. The car showroom could just be seen from his viewpoint and he saw several cars inside

through the thick glass that looked intact. The next problem was how to get there without being torn to shreds. John's mind ticked over frantically, looking for a plan that gave them a chance of staying alive and uninfected. He thought they could travel through the roof spaces and drop down into the end house. This would leave them with just a short run to a car. The loft entrance was above him but was out of reach but he was sure that could be dealt with. Quickly he explained the plan to Kerra who agreed they must take control of their own destinies if they were to survive. They made sure that they closed all the windows and drawn the curtains to completely cover the windows before carrying a hefty looking table over to the loft hatch. When John clambered up he saw they had a clear run to the other end just as he had hoped. He needed to outsmart the Darren and Mrs. McDonald so he used the drape cords to create a releasable system for moving the table back into place once they were both in the loft. It worked a treat. The table dragged softly across the floor to its original position allowing him to remove all evidence pointing to their escape route, hopefully buying them some time. They crawled along the loft spaces slowly and quietly, taking care not to alert any creatures, until they eventually reached the far side and found the hatch. It led to an empty bedroom. They jumped down softly onto the bed catching their breath with relief. So far so good: now they just had to reach the street and dash to the showroom. Kerra led the way through the house, on the alert for any signs of life. It was silent. They were lucky that no-one was home but realised this probably meant the occupants had fallen prey to the ravening creatures outside. To Kerra's delight, when they reached the ground floor they found themselves in a chocolate shop. Realising quickly where they were, Kerra started munching chocolates. She was really hungry and decided that worrying about her figure at that point was an exercise in futility. She put some in her bag for later. They could both see the showroom through the shop window. John cautiously stepped nearer the glass, hugging the walls in an effort not to be seen. He used the binoculars to scout for animals. The eagle was still in the air and would spot them no matter what they did the moment they left the building. A sudden disturbance at the end of the street gave them the chance they needed. A small mob had gathered together, consisting of about ten men, women and children. They were fighting for their lives. John and Kerra could hear gunshots and the screams of both animals and humans. John cracked the shop door open and they ran unnoticed to the side of the garage, hearts in their mouths, expecting at any moment to feel the nip of teeth and the scrape of talons on their exposed backs. He used his crowbar to prise the fire door open and pulled it shut behind them. Shaking with fear and effort he wedged it shut with a broom.

In the showroom they crawled between the lines of cars assessing the damage. The rats had been there too but John, being electronically trained, could repair most of the damage easily enough. He was methodically searching for a car that looked capable of ramming cows. The vehicles were all four wheel drive and he was undecided until he saw the beast of a pickup truck that the mechanic had driven when he'd repaired their van. John lifted the bonnet and began reconnecting the wires essential to making the truck run. The ignition keys were tucked in the glove box and he checked the fuel, three quarters full. He decided that, given he was surrounded by tools, he would beef the vans protection up and happily spent time welding wire caging around essential parts of the truck, such as the wiring and windows. He used every bit of scrap metal he could find as well as supplies from the stores. Kerra sat and skinned up, John even had a drag to take the edge off the situation. Eventually he had to stop work, he was laughing too hard to concentrate.

"What have you done? Next time I see an animal I'm going to laugh it to death," John giggled.

Kerra fed him some chocolate which sobered him up enough to continue to work. He eventually finished his war machine and shared his plan with Kerra. They would try to reach ferry first and then find an air strip. Thirdly, if neither of the first two elements of the plan succeeded, they would search for a boat that wasn't wrecked, even a rowing boat would do. Kerra had come up with one further option: using diving equipment to reach a boat. As neither of them knew if the fish had gone Piranha they reluctantly discounted that one. Finally they were ready to start the truck up and make a run for it. John loaded it up with spares and Kerra stood ready to open the doors the second the truck started. It coughed into life and, with her heart almost literally in her mouth, she flung the doors open and leapt through the open passenger side door. John accelerated, screeching down the main street as he saw animals everywhere around them. There were herds of cattle that pawed the pavement, snorting through their noses, their eyes gleaming red, preparing to stampede towards them, squirrels feasting on unrecognizable chunks of bloodied meat scurrying round to give chase and rats, rats by the thousand, cleaning their whiskers of whatever unspeakable gore they were covered in. The rats were first to chase after them, intensity in every line of their racing bodies, followed by creatures of every shape and size. Flooring the accelerator they pulled away and, to John's relief, he saw them falling back behind the speeding truck, too far behind to catch them. They may have lost the animals but couldn't shake the eagle. He soared in the skies above them, keeping pace with the van by riding the air currents blustering above the island. They reached the ferry terminus within minutes and saw that

the ferry was in. Their hearts sang at the sight of her and escape suddenly seemed not just possible but definite but as they drove closer they could see that she had suffered the same treatment as the boats in Tobermory. Hearts sinking again they drove away to try and find the air strip that Kerra said she had heard about, a private one near Salen.

### **Chapter 10: Scrubs 2 [Home](#)**

The nurses had been monitoring Peter's condition all night. It had taken a turn for the worse until eventually he had collapsed. He was found to be dehydrated so the nurses hooked him up and he was now on a bed in a medical ward under close observation. A muscular nurse sat with him because of the threat he had been assessed as posing to others and the curtain was drawn around his cubicle. Peter's vital organs appeared to be shutting down for no reason that had yet been found. He was being closely monitored for any changes in his condition. The nurse had decided to put an oxygen tube in to help him breathe easily more easily and thought that he may have to go on life support yet. She was bending over him to check his drip when he took hold of her by the hands. He was immensely strong and overpowered her easily as she struggled to free herself. She hadn't been expecting such a reaction or his strength. Her mouth opened to form a scream but he placed his mouth over hers, muffling the sound before it even emerged. Five seconds later she was convulsing on the floor, her body writhing and stiffening in a macabre dance. Peter was dead. The nurse staggered to her feet and pressed the panic button. Her convulsions had stopped and her body was functioning with no apparent ill effects. She pressed the panic button by Peter's bedside which brought the crash team in at a run. They tried hard but they couldn't revive Peter. The nurse finished her shift before walking over to the maternity unit to look at the new born babies and expectant mothers. She carefully scanned every cot and bed occupant, looking around each ward to see if she could find what she was looking for. The hospital was on a general alert because of all the strange happenings on the island. As all the cars had been wrecked there was no transport for the hospital staff leaving their shifts. The nurses and doctors were given temporary beds in the day treatment rooms as the weather being so bad that walking was not an option. The nurse wandered the corridors until she came to the minor injuries unit where she saw a potential walking straight through the door, escorting a rather sick looking young man.

The medical team brought over a trolley and wheeled the young man away while his escort, a young woman whose face was etched with worry, gave his details. The nurse walked over to her.

"I noticed you have a working van. Is there any chance I can grab a lift home from you? All the transport is out," she spoke softly.

“Sorry, I can’t right now. I have some important work to do,” Sarah replied.

The nurse, her request denied, walked outside to the van where Fletcher was waiting. Waving a cheery greeting to him she climbed into the van as if she needed to talk to him. He leant enquiringly towards her.

Sarah first made sure Robin was stable before informing the doctors of the results of the test. She explained what she knew about the virus and warned that everyone should be wary of any animals they came into contact with. She told him about the murderous behaviour of the animals they had encountered and explained she was going to try to get help and contact the mainland. The doctor and medical team shook their heads in disbelief at the story she was telling them. They listened patiently while she carefully explained what had happened, leaving them to make their own minds up. They were paid to listen even if people behaved poorly when loved ones became ill. Sarah felt relief at the normality of the hospital, but knew she couldn’t stay there. Help would not bring itself to the island. Jumping back in the truck, Sarah told Fletcher what she intended as they drove the van in the direction of the nearest high ground. She thought the land above the top of Tobermory hill would be high enough. It only took five minutes to reach the spot but she still couldn’t get a signal so decided to try the other end of the island. They had just past Salem when they saw a truck driving towards them from the other direction. Sarah beeped her horn and pulled over. The other truck approached, slowing down but not yet braking. The occupants were obviously curious but didn’t want to stop unless they had to. Sarah recognized it as the MacKay truck and saw that it had been altered.

“Hello,” called John, cranking down his window but not getting out.

“Hello! Where are you going?” Sarah shouted “Have you seen anyone else on the roads? I thought all the cars were wrecked.”

“They are. I mended this one. We tried for the ferry but it’s been trashed out and the animals are taking over the Island.” John replied, sounding manic in his rush to say the unbelievable sounding words, “My workmate’s a zombie now, taking orders from something or someone. It said that we’re special and locked us in our hotel room while it killed half of Tobermory. We’re desperate to get off the island.”

“We’re trying to contact the mainland to get help.” Sarah told him, “We have a CB but we can’t get a reception.”

“You won’t do, that aerial isn’t plugged in,” John said, getting out and going over to examine it.

“I can fix it; just give me a minute.”

He collected tools from the trunk of the truck tools and went to work while Kerra stood guard with her scythe in one hand in case of attack. She felt she

couldn't trust anyone since Darren became a zombie.

"There you go, it didn't take five minutes," John said with satisfaction.

A faint murmur of voices could be heard crackling through the CB. Sarah picked up the microphone ready to radio for help.

"Oh no you don't. You will spoil everything," Fletcher spoke for the first time since the hospital. He snapped the wires leading to the radio and reached for Sarah, hands scrabbling for her throat. She scuttled away from him but was backed up against the door while he tightened his grip on her neck. She could feel her consciousness fading and hear squeaking and squealing noises. The bushes were rustling and louder deeper animal sounds could be heard. Fletcher still struggled to silence Sarah but John gripped the crow bar with both hands jabbing it viscously in Fletchers head. He let go of Sarah as he collapsed. John heard the crunch as his skull fractured under the impact of the crowbar and knew he wouldn't be moving again for a while.

"We need to go now! Get in," Kerra cried as she could see the squeaking they heard a moment ago was rats running towards the van from behind them.

The rats had reached the van as the truck skidded away, just in time. Sarah burst into tears, clinging to Kerra as if she were a life raft and Kerra comforted her as much as possible. Eventually Sarah calmed herself and together they began to piece together what had happened on the island. They drove quickly through Salen and John continued driving in flight mode all the way into Tobermory. Almost before he realised he found himself on the High Street. A group of people wearing the insignia of the local gun club on their light blue shirts were grouped together, back to back, fighting for their lives. Five of them had twelve bores and were shooting at a herd of cattle. They stood in a tight circle, dead islanders and animals all around them. There were about twelve of them and those without weapons were using gardening spades and implements to thwart the flock of large birds that seemed to be assisting the cattle in the slow execution of the Tobermory population. They were managing to keep the birds at bay and even to kill them but the cattle were charging in numbers. Two large highland cattle charged into the crowd, biting a man who was beating them with a spade as he was dragged away for the herd to feed on. The man had no chance; his screams of pain as the large yellowing cattle teeth crunched through his failing limbs were unbearable. One of his comrades finished him off compassionately; he was clearly suffering an evil death that no one should experience ever. Cattle aren't designed for eating flesh but Island bovines had no problems separating the limbs so that the birds could feast on the remains. The bullets were just wounding the cattle, not killing them straight away. The gunslingers had to focus on shooting the legs out from under the cattle to stop



them moving and they were clearly losing the battle. An enormous bull was systematically impaling individuals from the group, one at a time and methodically on his horns, causing horrific injuries that also prevented them from continuing the fight. They watched in horror as the bull lifted a woman out of the crowd on its horns. She had become stuck and sprawled across the bull's head which in turn soon disappeared under a cloud of birds busily pecking her to death. They lost sight of her in the swirling mass of feathers but the cries as her soft fleshy body was penetrated thousands of times seemed to fuel the fierceness of the fighting. The sound of the buckshot firing was now non stop. The reality of fighting for their lives fuelled their courage and the town people laid into the horde. Their futile aggression only cost more lives. A large thud and the sound of breaking bones heralded John's arrival as he took out most of the herd with the recovery truck. The shooters quickly finished off the rest but vast numbers of birds and rats were converging towards them rapidly.

"Get in the van," Sarah screamed at them. Some quickly scrambled into the back seats of the truck, squashed together and breathing heavily. Those who were quick enough managed to get in the truck but there were several comrades left in the street. They were overwhelmed and swarmed with rats biting them to death as the last survivor jumped into the truck. One man attempted to make it to the truck but the rats were voracious. They climbed up on to his head, covering him from head to toe in a furry, biting and writhing mass. He limped in agony to the sea front where he toppled gladly from one furry grave to a cold wet one. Losses had been inevitable and no one looked back as the few of them escaped the furry onslaught behind them.

"Thank you, I thought we were done for," a tall ruddy faced man panted. "I'm McBride" He extended a quivering left hand towards the others.

"I'm Jenny and these three are Mark, Thomas and Evan," A small blonde woman, blood and dirt smeared over her worry lined face continued the introductions.

"This is Sarah and John and I'm Kerra. Pleased to meet you all."

"Where are we going then folks?" asked John "I'm just driving away from the animals. Has anyone got a plan?"

"The ferry is ruined and the animals seem to be everywhere," Kerra added. "We could do with some more guns if anyone knows where we can get them."

"What about the ferry to Iona? Have the animals destroyed her?" Evan asked.

"We don't know, but it goes to an even smaller island with less places to hide," Sarah explained.

"If the animals think like that we could have a chance of a ride," Evan said.

His voice was steadier than the others and he looked calmer. He was probably the youngest of their party, appearing to be in his late teens.

“Elizabeth Douguly’s house is on the way to the port,” Jenny suggested. “She has a nice collection of antique weaponry and some shot guns. She’ll have some ammunition too. I’m running low.” She said checking her pockets.

“Sounds good, which way?” John was happy with this plan. At least they would gain weapons.

“Turn left at the end of the road, then first right and keep going,” Evan directed.

“How did this all start, does. Does anyone know what’s going on?” Mark asked.

“To cut a long story short,” explained Sarah, “a secret lab full of animals was found on the island. Some escaped and spread a virus. It seems to mainly infect animals but has appeared in some humans. It seems to have some sort of collective intelligence. We don’t know what it wants but we know it has a plan,” Sarah glanced at John and Kerra.

“The worst part is that you don’t know when humans have been infected until they try and kill you,” Kerra said sadly.

“We haven’t seen a human who is infected,” Mark said, sounding shocked.

“No, we’ve just been shooting animals who were attacking humans,” Jenny explained.

“There must be a way of identifying the infected,” Kerra desperately thought back to how Darren had behaved, whether there had been any tell tale signs she had missed.

“Am I going the right way?” asked John.

“Yes. In about two miles turn left down a track. It’s hard to spot but I’ll direct you,” Evan said.

They weren’t far away for the Douguly house when Evan pointed out the almost hidden turning and soon they pulled up in front of at what looked like a large farmhouse, stone built and with obvious additions to the original structure in the form of extensions to each side of the main building. John parked up and everyone carefully climbed out of the truck. Jenny went to the door and knocked. There was no answer to her first quiet rapping but on her second, louder knock an elderly woman swung the door open. Her intelligent blue eyes looked startled at the sight of seven people turning up armed to the teeth.

“Hi Jenny, what’s all this then?” Elizabeth looked quizzically at her friend. She sounded surprised rather than alarmed.

“We have just fought our way out from Tobermory to get here,” Jenny’s voice was harsh with exhaustion.

“Why, I’m sorry, fought?” Elizabeth asked in confusion. She was obviously oblivious to the recent events.

Can I have a moment in private with you,” Jenny took Elizabeth’s arm. Without waiting for a reply and much to the others surprise went inside, leaving the rest of the group out in the cold with the zombie animals. Elizabeth’s eco house was almost self sufficient. It had a multi fuel range, solar panels, a wind turbine, a large walled veg garden, an indoor LED lit winter garden and its own well. It stood remote from any other houses and Elizabeth hadn’t spoken to anyone since the previous morning. She had no idea what was happening on the island or of the dangers they were all facing. She wasn’t one for TV; she liked her gardening, reading and shooting. As soon as Elizabeth, face paling as she listened, heard Jenny’s news she went straight to her door, ushering the others inside away from the lurking dangers. She insisted John parked the van inside the barn and took her own shotgun with her to cover him while he did this. It was silent outside, not even a birds whisper or the rustle of a rat. Elizabeth gathered the group together in the kitchen and immediately started organising them.

“Evan, get these guns stripped down and cleaned, they’re no good if they misfire. Jenny, get the kettle on. John, you and your lady friend need to shower. You both look as if you’ve been crawling around in a cow shed, go upstairs and on the right there’s a bathroom”. Elizabeth ordered, rapping out commands as she bustled round, preparing cups for the forthcoming drinks.

“Thomas, go to the indoor garden and get some fresh veg please. Mark, get some fish out of the freezer for dinner, cod should do, a piece each. Sarah, can you help prepare some dinner please. Aren’t you the vet’s assistant?”

Everyone jumped to the tasks they had been given, grateful for something useful to busy themselves with. Elizabeth walked to a book shelf on the other side of the large rustic feeling kitchen. She pulled a lever and the shelf slid silently sideways revealing a large weapons cabinet. She started taking out shotguns, pistols and rifles which she placed on a floor in rows alongside their boxes of ammunition.

Kerra and John hadn’t realised how mucky they must have looked and had only one set of clothes each with them, John couldn’t help laughing when he saw the rather large extremely sensible knickers she had brought.

“It’s cold and they are my warmest pair,” Kerra complained, laughing back.

“That’s it,” John said, struggling out of his mud covered boxer shorts.

“What’s it? Dobby,” Kerra twanged him on his newly exposed extremity and ran giggling to the other side of the rather small bathroom.

After a breathless game of chase and catch they controlled their high spirits,

which had been born of relief at being in a safe haven. They dressed and, looking considerably more respectable than before, walked hand in hand down the rather grand plush carpeted staircase.

“I know how you can tell if someone is a zombie human!” John slapped himself lightly on the forehead as the idea came to him. It was so obvious: how could they have overlooked it before.

“Ok smart arse what is it?” Kerra was intrigued.

“Human beings laugh. They don’t.”

“Where’s your proof?”

“When Mrs. Mc Donald was crunching the spider I made a nervous joke, about missing a bit.”

“That’s it?”

“Darren would have laughed at that.”

“I didn’t laugh.”

“No you were too scared, but he would have.”

“So what are you saying? That we should all sit and tell jokes around the dinner table to make sure they’re all human?”

“Something like that.” John answered, obviously sincere.

As they reached the ground floor they found Elizabeth entering the hallway through the kitchen door. She smiled when she saw them but remarked tersely how much cleaner they looked and how long it had taken. Kerra blushed and giggled. John squeezed Kerra’s buttocks, unseen by Elizabeth who was facing them. This just made Kerra laugh and giggle even more. The kitchen had an air of enforced busyness. Everyone was working on their allocated chores, some alone and some together. Most of the group of them didn’t know each other and were finding it difficult to talk to each other naturally, each dwelling inwardly on their recent experiences. Kerra hadn’t taken John’s idea very seriously but once in the kitchen they silently communicated with each other, trying to work out who might be zombie humans. This eventually gave Kerra the giggles and John saw that some of the others were smiling at their behaviour. Eventually they sat down to eat together. Elizabeth said a quick prayer before eating. Kerra was really struggling with her giggles by this time but managed to contain them for most of the meal, disguising the odd escaping giggles as coughs. The group were started to find this a little annoying and eventually Elizabeth asked Kerra what she was laughing at.

“It’s not my fault! He’s making me laugh,” Kerra pointed to John accusingly, her face a perfect picture of outraged injustice.

“Ok John. What are you doing?” demanded Elizabeth imperiously. It was clear she had no time for giggling guests.

“Nothing. Just eating my dinner,” John replied sheepishly.

Kerra giggled again. Others began to laugh at the pair’s bravado towards Elizabeth. No one would usually dare to do annoy her.

“What is it now?” snapped Elizabeth, her patience obviously at an end.

“He said he could tell when a human had gone zombie. He kept signaling that some of you were zombies and it was making me laugh. He said human zombies don’t laugh,” Kerra blurted out.

The group laughed, a little nervously with the exception of Thomas; this didn’t go unnoticed by the others.

“Well Thomas didn’t find it very funny,” said Evan only half jokingly continuing the theme.

The others laughed as if they thought this was funny too. Thomas nodded to himself before pushing his chair back and walking away from the dinner table. He picked up a shot gun. He aimed it at the diners who had stopped laughing and were staring at him in shocked dismay.

“Don’t anyone move. Eat Kerra, eat Sarah, I need you fit and well,” Thomas ordered, still pointing the shot gun at the dinner party.

“What do you want?” asked Elizabeth. She looked worried but her voice was steady and her gaze firm.

“Eat Kerra, eat Sarah.” repeated Thomas.

“I’m not hungry,” Kerra placed her knife and fork on her half eaten food.

“Eat or I will kill him,” Thomas said, pointing the gun at John.

Kerra obeyed, half choking as she tried to chew food in a mouth dry with fear.

“Touch him and I’ll kill you,” she promised as she forced more food onto her fork.

“Eat Sarah. Robin is in the fourth bed along in the community hospital and he is doing well. I would hate for anything to happen to him.”

They finished the food silently. Elizabeth asked Thomas again what he wanted. She was pale under her make up now.

“Now we wait. No more questions, I will be here soon,” Thomas said enigmatically.

The group sat motionless and silent for what seemed to be an interminable length of time, waiting.

“I need the toilet,” Kerra’s voice cut through the silence.

“No,” replied Thomas.

“I thought you wanted me to be healthy?”

Thomas pointed the gun at John.

“Be quick or he dies,” ordered Thomas.

Kerra ran upstairs and looked around desperately for a weapon. She couldn't find anything useful at first 'A vase, this had better work' she thought. She quickly flushed the toilet and lifted the large vase from its stand. Walking to the edge of the balcony Kerra threw the vase as hard as she could directly at Thomas's head. He looked up as he sensed the falling object and to Kerra's immense satisfaction she saw it hit him hard in the face. The crunch of his nose smashing was clearly audible. He went straight down, unconscious on the floor. John rushed forward and grabbed the gun from his unresisting hand.

"We need to go. If they are coming they must know where we are," John urged the shocked group into action.

It was too late. Through the windows they saw are hundreds of sets of eyes peering back at them from the darkness outside. Elizabeth quickly closed all the blinds in an effort to prevent the creatures gaining immediate entry while Evan and Julie tied Thomas tightly to a chair using thick cord Elizabeth had taken from one of the kitchen drawers. Elizabeth handed out weapons to each of them and showed those who didn't know how to operate them.

"He's coming around," Sarah warned as Thomas's eyes opened and focused on her.

"There's no point fighting. You will only lose," Thomas said. His voice was unemotional and clear.

"What is it you want?"

"Leave Kerra and Sarah. The rest of you can go free." Thomas made his demand.

John raised his rifle butt slammed it into the back of Thomas's head. He relapsed into unconsciousness, a trickle of blood seeping from the new cut on his head and running down his neck.

"What did you do that for?" asked Kerra.

“He’s not going to talk,” replied John. “But he can hear every word we say and knows everything we’re going to do.”

“What are we going to do?” Sarah asked, “They’re everywhere and we’re stuck.”

“They know we were heading for the ferry,” Mark said.

“It takes time for them to move around, that’s why they took out the cars,” Evan pointed out.

“How secure is that barn? Will the rats be able to get in there?” asked John.

“They could chew their way in,” Elizabeth said “but if we get there first and grab the van we can just keep moving until we get a plan going.”

“How are we going to get there?” Sarah asked looking out of the window at the eyes watching her. She could just make out the shapes of larger animals but most of the eyes belonged to rats.

“There are hundreds of them out there. Grab your things and follow me,” Elizabeth commanded.

Clutching their weapons they followed her to the cellar door which was large, made of thick metal and sported a huge lock. As they filed down the steps Elizabeth carefully locked the door behind them. The cellar was clean and had obviously been well maintained. Fresh paint gleamed on the walls and the floor showed brush marks from recent cleaning. A short corridor led into a large underground room which had been turned into a firing range with three firing points. The room was huge, at least 30 metres long. At the far end was another door through which steps led up to the garage.

“My grandfather was a gunsmith and used this firing range for his business,” Elizabeth explained. “I could never be bothered with it; I like to be outdoors when I shoot. The barn is up here.”

They climbed the stairs cautiously looking around the barn, watching and listening for any rustling or scratching, anything that would indicate animals where inside with them. Mark turned as he heard an unfamiliar noise, his brain racing to identify the unknown sound, telling him something not human had to be lurking in the shadows. It was too late by the time this realization came to him, a snake sank its razor sharp fangs into his leg and withdrew from him with its fangs dripping with venom and his blood. Screaming with pain and fear Mark managed to shoot as it reared back for a second strike, its head turning to pulp as his third bullet hit the spot. He felt a sting and a burning sensation as he traced a line of venom from the bite, spreading up his leg to invade his body and do untold damage. Another snake reared up from the shadows, hissing as it

uncoiled. Sarah backed away from it into a corner but Kerra reacted immediately, drawing a bead on the snake's head with her pistol and firing until it lay unmoving on the ground, a mass of bloody meat. The kick of the gun sent her flying backwards however and she wasn't expecting it.

"We haven't much time, get in the truck," John shouted,

They responded immediately, throwing themselves into the vehicle. Elizabeth had waited till the others were inside before running to the barn door with she unlocked and threw open. As she sprinted back to the truck a third snake darted towards her, sinking its fangs into her ankle before she dispatched it with the butt of her rifle.

The sound of movement could be heard from outside the barn. It was a scampering hum, almost indescribable but was the now familiar noise they all recognized as the furry zombies.

"Are you ok?" Jenny asked Elizabeth as she scrambled breathlessly into the seat beside her.

"I don't think it got through my boot leather," Elizabeth replied, taking off her boot to check.

Elizabeth was unscathed but Mark wasn't so lucky. The snake bite on the back of the leg was swollen and discoloured and he looked worried.

As John drove the truck out of the barn, its headlights blazing, he saw the massed legions of animals waiting for them. He instantly rammed into the creatures, mowing them down under the heavy truck wheels. There were hundreds, maybe even thousands of them.

In a state of disbelief John thought that all the animals on the island must be there. He ploughed his way through the masses. The windscreen was snowed under, covered with the blood and flesh of the animals he was running over. The truck slid worryingly around on the tarmaced surface when had reached the road. The clouds had lifted and the icy winter frost had set in but tonight moonlight reflected off the snow lighting the route ahead.

"We need to go to the hospital, drop off Mark for treatment and see if Robin is well enough to come with us," Sarah said, thinking ahead.

"Directions please Evan? I'm lost again," asked John, fighting with the steering wheel to stay on the icy road. Evan obliged and they were soon on the equally icy main road. John spotted that the fuel had gone down at an alarming rate.

"How far to the hospital?" John asked, "the animals must have bitten through the fuel line."

"Only about a mile or so," explained Evan.

"I hope we make it," John replied tensely.



They very nearly did. Just as they saw the hospital turning the truck spluttered to a halt, thankfully within sight and sprinting distance of the entrance. John carried all the tools and spares so he could repair another vehicle. They reached the doors unharmed, Kerra and Sarah holding Mark up between them. He was now looking really ill. A crew of paramedics met them at the door, lifting Mark onto a trolley before whisking him away. The guns they carried were making people stare. Most looked afraid at the sight of a heavily armed group hurrying through the hospital. Elizabeth and Sarah placed their rifles in the corner near the entrance. They all took pistols, putting them in their pockets to be less conspicuous. Sarah rushed off ahead to find Robin, hurrying to the customer queries desk where she asked a wide eyed receptionist for directions. There he was, just where Thomas had said he would be.

“Are you ok?” Sarah said him tearfully.

“Yes, I’m fine now. I had some internal bleeding but a minor operation sorted that out,” Robin said, looking surprisingly well.

“Can you walk or move or anything?”

“Yes, I should be fine to go whenever you want. They said to checkout in the morning, but apart from a bit of pain I’m fine now.”

“The animals are coming for me and they might already be here.”

Sarah pulled the curtain round him while Robin found his clothes and dressed ready to leave.

In the meantime John checked the car park looking for working transport. He found the vets van parked neatly in a ground floor bay. The keys were in the ignition and it appeared to be undamaged.

### **Chapter eleven Road Trip [Home](#)**

John opened the van door, drawing in a sharp breath as a dead woman toppled from the passenger seat. She was wearing a nurse’s uniform and was cold to his touch. He dragged her into the bushes just outside the car park, shivering with distaste for the grim task. He checked the rest of the van and found it clear of anything with fur, feathers or scales and was delighted to find it had a full tank of petrol. As he returned to fetch the others he knew they were probably walking into a trap. Many of their group would be zombies by now, the living dead indistinguishable from living humans apart from their inability to laugh. There was nothing much to laugh about at the moment. He found Elizabeth standing guard at the front of the hospital and picked up a shotgun from the pile near the doors.

“Where is everyone?” John asked, feeling better now that he was armed with the shotgun. He had only taken his tools and a crow bar to reconnoiter the car park.

“Most of them have gone to use the bathrooms except for Sarah. She went to find Robin,” Elizabeth replied.

“Where’s Kerra?” John asked, concern and worry sending a quiver of fear down his spine.

“Behind you. What’s up?” Kerra was standing there, unharmed and large as life.

John turned around and hugged her tightly. He felt relief at her safety and comfort in hearing the soft feminine voice.

“I found a van that hasn’t been damaged, the vets van. I left it outside the car park with the keys in the ignition. There was a body in it, a dead nurse.” John replied.

“It has to be a set up,” Kerra said fearfully “I know one or two of our group must have been turned but you don’t think all of them have do you? I can tell by your face that you’re worried.”

“Wait here and keep everyone together please Liz until I get the van to the front,” John took charge and avoided Kerra’s question. She was right but he didn’t want to increase her fears by agreeing with her. Knowing they had to remain alert was enough. “We’re going in for Sarah first.”

Kerra grabbed a gun and a box of ammo and followed him as he headed for the medical wards following the signs. There were two wards.

“We should take one each, but be careful,” Kerra said.

John rushed onto the nearest ward. Everyone immediately turned to stare at him, an armed man in a rush. There were only eight beds and he could see at a glance that Robin wasn’t in any of them. Meanwhile Kerra walked carefully onto the second ward. She carefully noted where everyone’s positions, not wanting to be attacked from behind. She couldn’t see Sarah but noted that curtains had been drawn around one cubicle. Casually Kerra parted the curtains a few inches, prepared to apologise and withdraw if an innocent stranger lay on the bed. Instead she saw Robin looming over Sarah who was tied to the bed with the hospital linen. He was leaning over her, yellow bile slowly dripping from his mouth and dangling like mucus towards Sarah’s upturned and terrified face.

“Get off her,” screamed Kerra raising the gun.

“It’s too late,” voices came from around the room, speaking in unison. The patients from the seven other beds had encircled her and were moving forward in an ever tightening circle.

Kerra shot Robin first, twice in quick succession. The blast blew him backwards, away from Sarah. Almost instantly he sprang back to his feet. His face was a shattered mess of blood and torn flesh peppered with shotgun pellets and his chest cavity was open. There should have been blood pumping from the

exposed veins but clearly the heart and respiratory system were either absent or not working. She wasn't sure if this was caused by the virus or the shotgun. Sarah found it highly disturbing to see the inside of a body working despite having a gaping hole and half his lung hanging out. a terrible unnerving stench invaded the air, a stench that she had only smelt once before when she had opened a rotten tin of dog food, it was the worst smell ever and she felt as if her nostrils would never be clean again. As Sarah watched, almost frozen with terror, the yellow bile was retracted. It seemed to crawl back into his gaping mouth as he lunged toward her. This time his head exploded, showering the room with tiny bits of brain and bone as her shotgun belched fire. There was a big hole in his head and this time he wasn't moving. Deafened from the incredible noise of firing a shotgun in such close quarters she raised her gun again and shot the zombie nearest to her. The pellets destroyed his right leg below the knee. She had meant to shoot him in the head but her hands were shaking so badly that she had only just missed shooting into the ground. She reloaded and shouted desperately for John, panicking but with adrenaline fuelled anger driving her to action. The circle around her had drawn ever closer while she was reloading and she fumbled sliding the bullets into the breach. They were almost close enough to touch her with their outstretched arms. Another deafening explosion filled the small ward and then another as John entered the ward, immediately taking in the situation and putting bullets through two of the infected patients heads as he ran towards her. The noise was a deafening relief but her ears were ringing from the explosions behind her. Kerra reloaded and dropped two more, her confidence bolstered by John's presence. He took the last one still standing out, almost decapitating him with the ferocity of his firepower before quickly finishing the one on the floor. Kerra untied Sarah who was shaking with shock and fear. Her mind and body were overloaded with stimulation from her ordeal. She knew she should be crying, moving or at least saying thank you but nothing was working. She had stopped, the trauma had broken her.

"Laugh for me," Kerra said, smiling but insistent.

Sarah laughed weakly, forcing herself to do something. It was the sound of hysteria rather than humour and tears rolled down her pale cheeks as she cried at the same time.

"Close enough," Kerra nodded and satisfied Sarah was ok took her hand, snapping her out of her trance. She knew that they weren't out of danger yet.

They reloaded their guns and set off toward the exit, Kerra helping Sarah keep upright as her legs were almost paralysed with shock. Kerra kept her other hand on her gun trigger.

“Move or die,” shouted John as they encountered three suspect humans who ran off screaming. He hadn’t meant to shout but his ears were ringing from the immense crack of the weapons.

“Well, I guess they were human,” retorted Kerra with a hint of humour.

They saw the others waiting for them at the foot of the stairwell, shotguns at the ready and Evan in the driving seat of the van, gunning the engine. As soon as they clambered in Evan put his foot down hard and screeched away from the hospital. Mark had been left behind to take his chances. The adder venom would kill him anyway and they thought that the virus had no need of the hospital now. They knew everyone who remained would die.

“Where we going?” John asked when he got his breath back. He was used to driving and disliked being stuck in the back seat.

“Not saying until I have seen everyone laugh. I don’t want to die in an ambush when we get there because one of us is a zombie and I didn’t check,” Evan explained, his youthful face looking ten years older than it had that morning.

“Fair enough,” John said, “but doesn’t everyone know these roads anyway and where they go? There can only be about ten or fifteen main roads, tops, and they all seem to be joined up,” he continued to explain. Everyone laughed slightly at the stupidity of it all.

“Ok,” explained Evan, “I’ll drive round the coast to check out all the boats and see if the Ulva ferry is intact.”

“Pull over for a minute,” Kerra interrupted, her voice serious.

Evan did as she asked and Kerra stepped out of the van, making sure she was close enough to leap through the open door if she needed to. She looked up skywards as if in prayer for a moment before grabbing a rifle and shooting the eagle from the sky. Satisfied, she jumped back in the van and Evan drove on.

“How long will it be before the mainland realise there’s something wrong here?” Kerra asked Evan.

“They’ll know because of the ferry and the broken gas supply. They may be organising a rescue already, or they could be quarantining the island itself I suppose,” Evan told her.

“What? You mean they’ll just leave us here?” Kerra couldn’t believe her ears.

“There are two thousand five hundred people on the island and sixty million on the mainland. Quarantine would be their best option,” replied Evan.

“If we don’t get off the island soon then we never will,” Kerra was determined that her life would not end here.

“The virus wants something you and Sarah have that the rest of us don’t.

Once we find out what that is we may be able to stop it," Jenny said.

"Let's start by a process of elimination: we're women not men," Sarah mused.

"We can have babies. Well I can't, I'm too old," Jenny said.

"Same here," said Elizabeth.

"We're fertile," said Kerra, blushing.

"Are you in a sexual relationship Sarah?" Elizabeth asked.

Sarah started crying. In her fear and desperation to escape she had forgotten that Robin had died minutes earlier and felt ashamed.

Kerra hugged her comfortingly and the group travelled in silence, lost in their own thoughts, until they arrived at the ferry crossing. The ferry was nowhere to be seen, the crossing empty of human life. Several lockups stood alongside the ferry booking office and a few long sheds were scattered along a track but there really wasn't much to see. At the waters edge torn pieces of timber and mangled steel were swirling in the gentle waves that lapped the shore. The small boats had all been sunk.

"Let's try the lockups and see if there's a boat in one of them," Mark suggested.

John and the rest of the men, armed with Johns crowbar and pistols, began searching the buildings while the others rested in the van. They soon returned, disheartened, having found nothing of use. Everything had been damaged or rendered unusable. They jumped back in the van and drove on, disappointed.

"What about people with boat garages or boat mechanics?" Kerra asked.

Everyone laughed.

"I was just checking. I don't know what they call them!" Kerra was indignant.

"You do have a point," Evan said, "there is a boatyard as such and the owner would be able to repair a boat or maybe even has one that works. At the very least I would have thought that we could park in his shed and get some kip."

This decided, Evan set off towards the boatyard. It was deeply hidden in the back lanes, not on the coast as Kerra and John had expected, but there was water. It was on the edge of Loch Ba. Evan pulled into the boatyard and drove quickly to the boat shed to avoid being spotted by the eagles. He knew the owner well and went straight over to the main house to find him, knocking on the side door that he always used when he visited. Evan saw the beam of a torch coming towards the door from the inside though a darkened glass pane but couldn't see who was carrying it.

"Hello, what do you want?" a woman's voice asked. The voice sounded

young and afraid.

“It’s Evan. is Paul here?”

He heard her crying before she staggered out of the house and grabbed hold of him, holding on to him as if he were a life raft in a sea full of sharks.

“I wasn’t sure if you were real, I’d such a time. Paul,” the woman wept, “Paul’s dead,” she collapsed to the ground in a paroxysm of grief.

Evan gently coaxed her to her feet, murmuring gentle words of encouragement as the others emerged from the van. They helped her inside, where Elizabeth began organising them again. Her first instruction was that two of them stayed on guard outside until they were relieved.

They could see the weeping woman who had opened the door with the light of her torch. Catherine was a young woman in her mid twenties with a medium build and a pleasant manner. She had met Paul at the local chapel and they had been dating for a year. She was broken hearted.

Catherine explained that the animals had come for her and Paul. She thought God’s wrath had been set upon her and didn’t understand why she had lived and Paul had died. They had torn Paul to pieces and begun to eat him as she crouched terrified in a corner where she had been driven by gnashing teeth and pecking beaks. She had fainted at that point, her mind unable to deal with the horrific sight. When she came to she was alone and she quickly found that the boats were all wrecked. She had been too afraid to go outside since and had been living in the bedroom, too fearful to venture out of the room except to grab food when she couldn’t manage without eating any longer. Evan was gently trying to force a laugh from Catherine but she was too upset. No one would be able to sleep until she did manage to laugh of course. John and Kerra risked checking outside to see how badly the boats had been damaged while the others made food and sorted the sleeping arrangements out. John explained that he intended to sleep in the van with Kerra, ready to move when woken. Once outside John methodically checked each of the boats in turn. The animals had done a good job of destruction but to his delight he found one undamaged inflatable dingy. It was no good for more than two people but he placed it in the van for safe keeping. Although he found all the tools and equipment needed to repair boats he didn’t have the skills to do so. Back at the house John and Kerra reported their findings to the others. Evan had finally managed to force a laugh from Catherine but they were all wondering why she was still alive and whether the zombies saw her as special as well. They were all gathered round the table, engaged in a lively debate about their next move. Evan announced that he was confident that he could get a boat working which raised the whole group’s spirits whilst John decided he would work on getting the Freelanders mended so that

they had more than one car in action. They all decided to have a minimal sleep and then move on as soon as they could. The island was only small and the animals would undoubtedly find them quickly. After a simple meal of corned beef hash they bedded down to sleep for as long as they could. Kerra rolled a spliff to help her sleep and smoked it in the van, thus inadvertently ensuring that John was well and truly stoned from the fumes as well. Sarah and Elizabeth took one bedroom while Jenny and Catherine took the other. Evan, with a gentlemanly display of good manners that endeared him to the women, made do with the sofa. Before anyone lay down though they firstly turned out all the lights, locked all the doors and windows and stuffed clothes into the gaps under doors. They were all fast asleep within minutes of retiring, exhausted both physically and mentally.

They were awoken abruptly at first light by Kerra's blood curdling scream. She had woken from the deep sleep of exhaustion to find dead rats covering both herself and John in their bed in the van, hundreds of them. Their stiff bristly carcasses blanketed them both. She shivered and shook desperately to free herself from their suffocating weight and scrambled around to dig John out. He was buried under an even larger pile of dead rats. John woke up, confused and disorientated. Kerra searched for a shot gun, fearing he may have turned.

"I'm ok," he said.

"I don't know that."

"I'm not feeling very funny right now, not covered in dead rat," said John.

"Ok, we both could have turned," Kerra said.

"Shall we get out of this pile of dead rats so I can get my sense of humor back and see if the others are ok," John suggested.

John slid open the side door and an avalanche of rats slid from the van. He scraped the rest out with a broom and unearthed two shotguns. He shouldered one and slowly passed her the other.

"Why did you do that? I could kill you if I've turned," Kerra asked.

"Because if you've turned I don't want to live without you anyway," he answered, sincerity shining from his eyes.

This made her cry.

"That is so romantic," Kerra sobbed.

John laughed at her reaction and this in turn made her laugh and they ended up in a mushy cuddle.

"Why were you laughing at my love of romance," asked Kerra.

"Because you have rat caught in your pants," John answered cheerfully, pulling it out.

"Arrgh. But why are we ok? We should be dead," Kerra stamped her feet in

disgust.

“I don’t know but I’m going to see if the van still works,” John set to work and checked it over thoroughly. The van started and everything still seemed to work as it should.

Just as he finished checking the van John began to feel ill. Glancing at Kerra he could see that she was suffering the same feeling of nausea. Their colour changed at almost at the same time just as convulsions hit them, rolling them helplessly on the floor amidst the pile of dead rats. John was sick, yellow bile flooding from his mouth, turning black as it hit the air. Kerra was vomiting and retching, the same bile leaving her gasping mouth. They lay on the floor expecting to die but instead the convulsions slowly stopped and the vomiting ceased.

“That was disgusting. It was the same stuff that Robin had coming out of his mouth trying to go into Sarah,” Kerra said weakly, wiping her mouth.

“I don’t like rat vomit much, it tastes awful. Let’s check the others,” John struggled to his feet and hauled Kerra up.

They staggered towards the house cautiously looking around, expecting to be set on by a horde at any second. They found the side door was locked and tapped on it urgently but no-one answered. Kerra used the spare key she had been given and walked through into the lounge. No one was there. She desperately wanted to hold John’s hand but couldn’t hold the cumbersome shotgun at the same time. They saw that the front door was open and peeked out cautiously. Nothing stirred in the empty yard and they closed the door firmly. John led the way up the stairs into the first bedroom and flung the door open, covering the room with his shotgun. It was empty but the second one wasn’t. A large pile of dead rats covered one of the beds completely. Knowing the chances were that one of the others was under there John scraped off the dead rats frantically, using his shotgun butt to clear them. He reached down and pulled the huddled figure clear. It was Sarah who let out an ear piecing scream as she woke to see what was happening. She jumped up brushing her self down in horror. Kerra held her firmly, comforting her with soft murmurs until she calmed and caught her breath. Kerra helped Sarah grab her things and together they went downstairs, Sarah still shaking from her ordeal. Kerra looked outside again, holding the door firmly in readiness to slam it shut if any threats presented themselves. She could see nothing of the others. They had completely vanished without a trace, not a spot of blood or anything to show they had ever been there could be seen. Just as she was about to close the door Kerra heard a faint humming noise coming from behind her. It sounded like a chopper and was getting closer and louder. Stepping outside she saw but not one but a fleet of



helicopters flying over the house from behind the farm all carrying large containers strapped underneath their bellies. She thought they were Chinooks because of their twin blades. There were so many of them that the noise was immense. John and Sarah ran from the house too, craning their necks to take in the sight. Sarah started smiling and Kerra found she was doing the same whilst John looked relieved. Rescue, they thought, this must be a rescue. The helicopters' disappeared from sight, appearing to land behind the tree line about three miles away toward Ulva.

"Inside now," John told them, "We need to reach their landing spot safely so get anything useful you can carry." Running inside, they found that all the guns and equipment had gone except for Sarah's and assumed that the others must have fled after a zombie attack.

They grabbed food and Sarah's gun before running from the cottage in the direction the helicopters' had landed. They weren't sure if they would have a good reception or they would be exterminated on sight, assumed to be carrying the virus.

"They must have been watching everything from satellites and realized something was wrong," John pondered.

"I just hope they are on our side and the virus hasn't already reached the mainland," Sarah expressed her fears.

"I'm more concerned about waking up covered with rats this morning" Kerra said, "why haven't I died yet or been taken over? The virus wants something from us and I don't know what it can be."

Sarah didn't know every road on the island like Evan had so once at the van Kerra shook the map out, trying to ground it. She directed John down the country tracks until eventually they reached a high vantage point looking down across Mull. They took it in turns to use the binoculars to scout for the helicopters but couldn't see a thing.

"We're going to have to drive around to see what is happening on Ulva and whether anyone will talk to us," Sarah proposed. Her colour had returned and she seemed less shaken.

Kerra continued to direct them around the curving roads until they reached the road to the Ulva ferry. Half a mile away from their destination they spotted a manned road block ahead. They could see about ten figures guarding the roadblock, all wearing fallout suits complete with bubble domed helmets, were set up a defensive position and armed with machine guns and flame throwers. As the van drew up one of the figures walked forward and placed his hand in the air, signaling them to stop.

"Hide the guns," John hissed urgently, "I don't want to fight a machine gun

if I can help it.”

As the suited figure approached John could see that his eyes looked wary, almost terrified, through the plastic dome.

“Morning,” John spoke calmly.

“I’m afraid the island is under quarantine sir,” he was told firmly, “You will have to go back to your dwelling and stay there until notified otherwise. Turn the vehicle around and go the way you came sir.”

“I’m the vet’s assistant, Sarah Campbell. We have information that could be vital for the extinction of the virus we believe is causing this,” Sarah explained. He looked at her intently before talking urgently into the walkie talkie built into his helmet. Cocking his head to one side, he listened for a reply without changing the position of his shotgun which was aimed squarely at the vans windscreen.

“Get out of the car and come with us Miss Campbell,” the man ordered, Just you Miss Campbell.

“But I don’t want to leave my friends,” Sarah was uneasy. The ear shattering blast of a gun fired over their heads was his immediate reply.

That was a warning shot. My orders are to detain you and you alone and to use deadly force if required. The others are to go back,” the man said.

Sarah looked at the others, tears brimming in her eyes.

“They’re only limiting the risk I suppose. I’m sorry but I must go with them. Good luck,” Sarah hugged them both fiercely before climbing from the van.

The pair watched as Sarah was taken at gunpoint to the jeep and bundled into the back. John turned the van around and drove away.

“We don’t have a dwelling, or food or anything really,” Kerra said despondently.

“Let’s go shopping,” John said, desperately trying to think of a positive action to cheer her up.

“Only if there are no zombies or animals and we can look for our dream house,” Kerra joined in the game, “Would it be zombie proof then?”

“Preferably, yes. Who’s going to moan if we have to scrounge a few things to survive? It’s not like we can go anywhere else. We’ve been round the island at least three times now and there’s fuck all here except animals. Shall we risk Tobermory?”

“Sounds like a plan,” Kerra agreed, “if they wanted us dead we would be by now.”

They drove for about thirty minutes along desolate deserted roads without seeing a single animal or human until they approached Salen where the sound of gun fire could be heard. They saw forty or more suited men shooting at a horde

of animals who were charging at them. Kerra just caught a glimpse of this as they drove straight through. They soon arrived at Tobermory which appeared to be as deserted as the roads had been at first sight until they reached the main Street where they saw a naval vessel moored just outside the harbor. John pulled up at the Co-op which sort of made them feel at home because there were plenty in Nottingham, at least until in recent years when Tesco seemed to start taking over the world. They could hear gunshots echoing faintly in the distance. Shotguns at the ready they went inside the unlocked and empty store where they grabbed a trolley each and started shopping.

"It looks like someone has already been here," Kerra said, looking store floor. It was obvious that the contents of the shelves had already been hurriedly rummaged through. Dented cans and defrosting meat packs were all over the floor.

"I know. Grab whatever you can. I don't know how long we'll be safe here."

When their trolleys were full they loaded the van up and drove down the high street to the sea fare shop. They forced the locked door open and John grabbed a bag, scooping items from the shelves. Gas, cookers, mess tins, sleeping bags, clothes and a few nice gadgets he had always wanted were packed quickly. Kerra shopped for clothes and picked up waterproofs for them both. They found that they were really enjoying themselves after a while. The closed environment of the shop lent them the illusion of safety and it soon seemed as if they were just on a gigantic free shopping trip, Kerra's ultimate fantasy. John even found a wind up TV and wind up radio that he had thought were only exported to areas of Africa where they had no power.

"One more stop, the pharmacy," John said as he loaded the bags into the van, "I need some pain killers."

"Yes, I'll get some lady's things and skin cream. My poor skin will be ruined if I don't moisturise it soon," Kerra looked regretfully at her now rough red hands, "Then we can find our dream home."

"I need to stop at the builder's merchants as well then and get some wood for boarding up windows and such like. We can go to bed then until the soldiers have killed the zombies," John said hopefully.

The visits to the pharmacy and builders didn't take long and they were soon back in the van on their way out of Tobermory.

"Which way?"

"Don't care, I don't want to live here and I would rather avoid the locals so any holiday cottage is fine."

John drove until he found a row of the quaint brick built holiday cottages that seemed to be scattered around the island. They tried the door of a pretty

looking cottage with wild roses clambering over the door. It was unlocked and although the cottage showed signs of some one leaving in a hurry it was clean and tidy. John assessed it for security and decided it was easy to board up and make safe. He had brought a Porto loo after the rat incident that Sarah had told him about and some epoxy resin to seal those scary cracks up with but he wasn't scared, at least not much.

## **Chapter 12: Life In A Box. [Home](#)**

John started by boarding up the windows while Kerra put the shopping away, happily examining the fruits of their minor excursion into pillaging. John sealed the toilet shut, ensuring that nothing could force its way up the pipe. After an hour or two the place was completely tight. The cottage was small but the bedroom, lounge, kitchen and bathroom were quite adequate. Kerra cooked and the couple ate to the sound of bursts of gunfire in the distance again.

"I hope they're winning," Kerra said anxiously.

John peeked through the cracks in the window boarding and saw flashes of wool and horns passing the cottage.

"There still plenty of animals out there, a flock of sheep just went by. I'm going to see if we're famous," John tried to lift her mood as he wound up the television and tried tuning it in to a channel. Eventually he found the BBC news channel and turned the volume up.

"Today's breaking news: the army, under the supervision of the centre for disease control, quarantined the island of Mull today. A no fly zone and a ten mile perimeter on the mainland has been established. The only information we have been given is to urge everyone to stay away from the island or risk detention. The government have not released a statement but we have had unconfirmed reports of an outbreak of a deadly virus on the island and that the authorities have established the quarantine zone to analyse the risk to the public. Any risk of the outbreak spreading is believed to be low but all fishing in costal waters has been banned as a safeguard and any vessels or persons fishing in the sea will be arrested. Seaside resorts have been ordered to close and estimate they will lose hundred of thousands of pounds in business. All beaches on the west coast are closed and the prime minister is in talks with the Irish prime minister about measures his country should take. There are reports that weapons are being fired on the island as we speak, but we are unable to confirm this at this time. All communication with the island has been cut off and mobile networks are still not working. The government is urging people not to panic and has set up a hotline for those whose loved ones are on the island. We are now going live to the Isle of Jurra where we have had a report that soldiers are culling the entire wild life population. The culling is said to be taking place all along the North

West coast of England and Scotland. Sorry cancel that last report; we're going live to Downing Street for a statement from the Prime Minister."

"I'm afraid there has been a serious viral outbreak on the Isle of Mull and it saddens me to say there are very few survivors. From an estimated two thousand five hundred Islanders and tourists, intelligence received suggests that only a small handful of survivors remaining alive." The Prime Ministers voice was somber, "The entire wildlife population has been infected and culling is taking place as a matter of urgency. Until we contain the virus we will be unable to rescue the survivors. Emergency supplies will be left at collection points around the island until the quarantine has been lifted which is expected to take several months."

Kerra retuned the TV and found the same news repeated on all the channels until eventually she turned the set off.

They looked at each other, eyes widened in horror at the thought of having to spend another week there let alone months.

"We still have each other," John said trying to get a smile out of Kerra.

"Imagine that we are on a desert island, the last two people alive, this is what it would be like," he prompted.

"We might be the last two people alive and I can't think who I would rather be with," Kerra smiled at his effort to cheer her up as she pulled him into the bedroom.

They had found some games and played competitively for three days. John worked his way through most of the books. They regularly heard the crackle of gunfire, sometimes close to them and sometimes from a distance. Over a week dragged by in this way. They kept watch through the cracks in their makeshift shutters, monitoring the news reports to see what was happening in the outside world. The monotonous routine soon began to chafe their already fraught nerves and they were both starting to show signs of complete boredom. There seemed to be no end in sight.

"Were out of milk, out of bread, out of everything," Kerra sighed, worried about their dwindling food supply.

"We have spam."

"Why spam? Why did you pick up spam?" Kerra sounded irritated.

"It's all they had," John tried to be conciliatory, "Do you want to go and see if there one of those food dumps near by? Or try Tobermory?"

Kerra's face lit up with a big cheesy grin. They gathered essential zombie killing weapons and survival essentials such as guns, ammo and torches and opened the door. The fresh air felt wonderful after being barricaded in the little cottage for so long and the feeling of being alive ripped through them joyfully as

they drove towards Tobermory. When they arrived it was obvious Tobermory had been the scene of a battle. Bullets had gauged holes in the brickwork of nearly all the houses and shops, windows were shattered and the smell of cordite hung greasily in the air as if two warring armies had encountered each other not long ago. In the middle of the high street three pallets of foil wrapped food were partially open.

“Well there are must be other people still alive if they’ve taken food,” Johns spirits rose.

“Not many, they didn’t take much,” Kerra pointed out dolefully.

They parked next to the pallets and checked carefully around before leaving the van. There was nothing to see, no movement or motion apart from the lapping of tiny waves in the silent harbour. The cool sea breeze on their faces felt invigorating. The warship was still holding its position in the distance. Kerra zoomed her binoculars towards it’s and with a jolt saw that they were being watched in return. A uniformed man was waving at them, his gestures urgent. He seemed to be pointing to their right. Kerra turned and saw a pack of dogs moving toward them, neck hairs raised threateningly, padding along on silent paws. They would not have seen them if they hadn’t been warned.

“John, dogs!”

They raised their guns and within seconds four of the dogs lay dead on the ground and the remaining two had turned tail and ran. Heart thudding with relief at their narrow escape Kerra surveyed the area for any more lurking menace. She saw a woman in the distance, coming out from one the shops and moving toward them, her hand raised in greeting. It was Catherine. She was carrying a bag and limping heavily. It was obvious she had also come for supplies.

“Catherine, we thought you must be dead. What happened? Are you OK?” Kerra asked, clearly struggling with the mixed emotions of pleasure at seeing another human alive and concern that she may be infected.

Catherine appeared equally stunned “But how? How did you survive?” she asked.

“We woke up and everyone had gone apart from Sarah,” Kerra explained.

“We woke and the rats were everywhere,” Catherine was close to tears as she told her story. “They had taken Evan over. We were running from him, me and Elizabeth. We saw how they turn you; they put a bit of yellow virus in your mouth and take you over. Everyone else was covered in rats so we went for the van and saw you were both covered too.”

“Me, Sarah and Kerra all woke up covered in dead rats,” John explained, “then me and Kerra vomited gross yellow bile.”

“I haven’t seen anyone vomit it out, they just turn usually,” Catherine said in

amazement, “You must be immune! I’m with a couple of other girls who, like me, lost their men but weren’t harmed,” she continued.

“Have you hurt your leg?” asked John, looking with concern at a grubby bandage wound around Sarah’s foot and ankle.

“I twisted my ankle running from those dogs; I haven’t had food for two days because of them.”

Catherine quickly filled her bag with food. She looked tired and paranoid, which Kerra thought was totally unsurprising.

“I’m just need to go the pharmacy for a moment,” Kerra said.

“What for?” John asked. He was surprised as they had only been there a week ago.

“Girly things,” Kerra replied enigmatically.

In fact they had been having unprotected sex for nearly two weeks now. The first time she excused herself and maybe the second or third time too, after all they had been in imminent danger of death. She thought she’d get some condoms now though, as well as a pregnancy test kit and the morning after pill for emergencies. Of course skin cream and beauty products were also on the list. Kerra eventually found the test kit. She felt a bit silly getting it but thought she should, her period was late by a few days. She was usually as regular as clockwork, but the imminent death thing was always a factor. There were only three test kits so she took the lot. Browsing the shelves she found the rest of the items she was looking for and explored the other shop fronts, trying to find games of any description that they could play to kill the time. Kerra found several suduko books and a scrabble set. When she returned to the van she found John chatting carefully with Catherine, trying to decide if she was a zombie. He got a laugh out of her eventually, much to his relief. She had told him she had met others from around the island who had ventured out for food and that there were rumours that solders had been infected although she hadn’t seen this herself and neither had anyone else that she had spoken too She had been living on the second floor of a building, barricading the stairs with junk to keep everyone out. John started loading up the van with the emergency supplies. There were cookers, food parcels, gas bottles and even a few books had been thrown in. He had been hoping for a radio or something to allow them to talk with the outside world but nothing like this was there at all. He locked the van and went to find Kerra who had now wandered into the clothing shop.

“You ok?” asked John, trying to peering into the pharmacy bag. Kerra swung it playfully from his reach and he didn’t get a glimpse of the contents.

“Yes, just stealing you a present and getting myself some new clothes,” Kerra said lightly.

John looked around to see if there was anything he fancied while he was there. He picked a 'having to run for it' kit for them both. He wasn't sure they would ever be allowed to leave the island because of contamination risk so he packed a survival kit as well that would help them to survive in the wild if need be. He had a sudden brain wave: the life boat station was within easy reach. He could try and get their radio and get it working. Eventually he managed to coax Kerra out of her shopping mode and they drove to the life boat station using John's newly stolen GPS system. The door wasn't locked and so he walked straight in, followed by Kerra.

"So what are we after?"

"The radios from the lifeboat. We can listen to the army on it and see what's happening," explained John. "I'm not sure they'll ever let us off this island. Call me paranoid but I don't trust the government. I don't like to think of the reasons why they haven't given us means to communicate with them. They could just say we all died."

"You're right; we need to contact the outside world. How are we going to power the radio?"

"Car battery would do I think, or we could use the generator from the Galloway farm. We need petrol first though," John sounded enthusiastic about his plan.

John soon found the radios and, after loading everything including the ripped out the cabling and aerial into the van, headed for the petrol station.

The petrol station was, as expected, deserted and completely without power. John searched for a manual pump that he could use to extract petrol and found a manual barrel pump that had been used in an oil drum. All he needed now was some piping which he found this easily in the stores. Fitting the tubing tightly onto the end of the pump he slid the tube into the outlet and started filling the van by hand. It took a while but was better than walking for dinner.

"Aren't the army channels scrambled?" Kerra asked, spotting a flaw in John's plan.

John was disappointed. He thought he'd had a good idea and that this would be a project to keep them busy for a while. He'd also hoped he might be able to contact the mainland or shipping if they got in trouble. Discouraged, they got in the van and drove to Galloway farm. It was as deserted as everywhere else. They heard an occasional volley of shots in the distance as they got out of the van but heard and saw nothing closer to hand. At the trailer they found the generator was gone. It had obviously been salvaged by other survivors. John searched the Porto cabin, hoping for a back up generator as was often the case in rural areas but found nothing, it wasn't there. He would have to run the radio from the van



battery, somehow wire it in. Searching his mind for a solution he remembered the hospital and pickup truck.

“What are we going to do?” asked Kerra.

“We’re going to get the CB and I’ll mend it and fit it to this van.”

They drove to the spot near the hospital in Salen where the fighting had taken place the week before and saw the dead, animals and humans alike, were still lying where they had fallen. Kerra thought it unusual, not a trace had been left of those who had been killed before and she thought that they would have returned and cleaned up the mess long before a week had passed, not just left the bodies there. John pulled to a stop just in front of the truck and immediately started unwiring the CB and its connecting parts. He grabbed soldering equipment and put this in the van as well. Mission accomplished and laden with food, tools and hopefully a means of communication, they drove back to their holiday cottage, again not seeing a soul or animal. The island would have seemed completely deserted if it were not for the thunderous shots they heard roar out now and again in the distance. They seemed to be coming from several different locations

“They must have killed everything by now,” Kerra said.

“If they had surely they would have moved the bodies.”

“So why haven’t they come for us again? It doesn’t make sense that we’re still alive,” Kerra puzzled, “and why did the virus say we were special?”

“No, he said you and Sarah were special, not me. Anyway, why don’t we just ask it? There’s Darren,” John stopped the truck and got out, shotgun in hand.

Darren was standing by the side of the road. He was still recognizable as John’s room mate for the past few days in some ways, but now had ashen skin stretched tightly over a frame that looked as if he had lost a lot of weight very quickly. Shreds of skin hung in tatters from his jaw, almost as if he were decaying. He carried himself very differently as well. He looked arrogant and held himself erect in a way that was very different from the sloppy posture the old Darren had.

“You still didn’t get what you wanted then?” John baited Darren into talking.

“Oh but I did, you may have got stoned so I couldn’t assimilate you but I still got what I wanted,” replied Darren.

“You will be wiped out soon,” John said, his eyes full of hatred for the creature who stood so mockingly in front of him, “and that will be the end of you forever. You should have stuck with having a few animals to infect but now my species will wipe you out forever.”

“I haven’t even begun to live yet. Your scientists declared war upon me and your vet threatened my children. I’m just finishing a war your species started and I will win. I will be the dominant species on the planet. As I assimilate creatures I gain their knowledge, I absorb all their information. Soon I will know all that humans know,” the Darren creature looked amused.

“You didn’t get much from Darren then did you,” John replied.

“I know where your parents live and I know where Kerra’s parents live. That’s enough to make you both suffer,” Darren replied.

John heard a rustling from the bushes and realised that creatures were converging on their position. With a final glare at Darren he jumped in the truck and accelerated away.

“There are still plenty of them alive out there, I could hear them coming,” John told Kerra who had stayed in the van, her shotgun pointed at Darren the whole time, “I’m going to drive around for a bit to make sure we lose them.”

He neared the west coast of the island after several miles and realised how much Tobermory had been battle damaged. From this position they could see a complete cordon around the island made up of warships and gunboats bristling with flame throwers and machine guns. They undoubtedly had the range to hit the van. John checked his rear view mirror and saw they were being followed by several horses and sheep. He reversed and headed in the other direction.

“Stick a white sheet out the window; I don’t want to get shot.”

Kerra waved a small piece of white sheeting from the window frantically, kneeling on her seat to reach her arm as far out of the window as possible as John detoured up the coastal road to avoid the animals. They heard the rattle of machine gun fire from behind them as they made their escape, Kerra couldn’t believe the number of craft in the water: it looked as if they might be coming in for the kill from all sides. John drove quickly back to the cottage to find safety enough to relax for a while. That’s cured the boredom for a week or two he thought ruefully to himself.

“Well, the Darren thing told me that the weed saved us from the virus! So have you got much left?” asked John.

“I’ve run out of weed but have plenty of resin,” Kerra replied, “This means Sarah must smoke weed, cool,” She was delighted that something John had formerly frowned upon had now been accepted as life saving.

“Or that the virus has mutated or done something different. She seemed fine and normal to me though,” John pondered, replaying his memories of the morning of the rats.

“If anything had happened she would look like Darren does now, a real zombie, and someone would have killed her.”

Over the next day Kerra grew quieter and spent more time within her books, taking naps while John worked on his CB restoration. This task was proving challenging with the make do equipment he had. He needed a tool capable of holding small components and had a thought; he would check to see if Kerra had any eyebrow tweezers. Being a gentleman, he decided to leave her asleep while he borrowed them and then return them afterwards. He knew he wasn't supposed to touch her girly things but thought he could get away with it this time. As He opened up her toiletry bag, which seemed to hold a lot of things, he immediately saw the pregnancy test kits and condoms. He zipped the bag up straight away, mixed feelings of guilt for having looked through Kerra's things and shock at what he had found momentarily overwhelming him.

'Hello Mike, yes I saved your daughter from a fate worse than death but got her up the duff at the same time, sorry,' he thought to himself.

This explained why she hadn't jumped all over him since their trip out to Tobermory. He'd figured she must be on the pill and hadn't thought to ask, more pressing matters had arisen at the time. Putting the CB to one side he fetched the survival bag and repacked it with everything useful he could think of: a dinghy, tent, everything. It weighed a bomb but he was convinced they wouldn't get off the island yet. As he finished repacking Kerra woke up.

"Morning my precious," John leant over and gave her a passionate kiss, "can I get you anything this morning? You just lay there in bed and let me pamper you.

How about some healthy orange juice? All-day breakfast?

"What's wrong with you?" Kerra was instantly fully awake and very suspicious.

"I was just trying to be nice."

"You're not that nice! What's wrong?"

"I didn't mean to look; I was just getting a pair of eyebrow pluckers to fix the CB."

"You found the test kit didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Coffee now," she ordered.

"Sorry, I feel bad." John looked the picture of guilt as he left the room.

Kerra smiled to herself. She had wondered how long it would be before he found the tests. She decided she may as well use one now as she needed to pee. In the bathroom she unwrapped the test kit, had a quick read and then peed as directed on it. Quickly, she jumped back into bed, holding the test and waiting for it to show a result. She was fairly confident that she wasn't going to be pregnant. Not many people get pregnant the first time they have sex, she

thought, but why did they do it again? Kerra was cross with herself for her stupidity and cross with John for sending her senses out of the window, making her greedy with lust. John walked in at this moment, carrying two coffees. He nearly dropped them when he saw her unsmiling face and what she held.

“You have done it already?” asked John worriedly.

“Yes.”

“Yes. You’re pregnant,” stated John, quickly needing resolution.

“Yes, I have done the test. Stop panicking, no-one gets pregnant the first time they have sex, there are always scares,” Kerra replied, her voice now sounding more hopeful than confident.

“You were a virgin,” John looked as if he had just been told Father Christmas was real. His shock showed clearly on his open face.

“Yes! Why? Is that so hard to believe,” Kerra glared, annoyance written clearly over every inch of her.

“Well you were so good at it,” John tried to soothe the irate woman, “How long does that test take?”

“Another ten minutes yet,” Kerra lied and sipped her coffee.

John sat looking like a lost puppy dog that hoped for a bone but expected a telling off instead. His intensity felt slightly annoying to Kerra who was far more relaxed about the whole thing. The digital test kit beeped, drawing her attention instantly to the read out display. Her face changed, all colour left it, her mouth dropped open and her eyes took on the glazed appearance of someone in deep shock. She looked disbelievingly at the legend on the test kit. Yes, it still said ‘Positive. Estimated 2-3 weeks pregnant’. She mutely passed it to him, her hand trembling. John looked at the reading. He had no idea how to feel or of what to say. They both sat in silence for five minutes and sipped their coffee, trying to order their shocked brains to think.

“Well, we’re going to have to find a bigger place,” John said, starting the conversation.

“Are you happy, sad, don’t care what?” asked Kerra, her voice rising in pitch.

“I can’t think of anyone I would rather have a child with, it’s just that right now is a bit scary. It must have been that life or death sex we kept having.”

“Life or death sex?” Kerra asked.

“We nearly died and that made us want sex even more. It’s biological fact.”

“So you don’t love me at all.”

“Of course I love you and want to be with you,” John said, reassuring her quickly, kissing her and giving her a big cuddle while he continued, his voice regaining confidence, “Us having a child? That’s wonderful, How are you

feeling,” John hoped he sounded mature.

“Like it shouldn’t have happened, like my first child is a mistake and like I want to be off this god forsaken island for good,” Kerra burst into tears.

“It isn’t a mistake, it’s no such thing. That’s chemistry working, that’s love.”

“You’re so sweet sometimes I could cuddle you to death,” Kerra blew her nose noisily and dried her eyes. John’s words had soothed her troubled thoughts.

They sat and cuddled for a long time, waking up a little and coming to terms with parenthood.

“Where are you?’ asked Kerra, seeing that John’s brain was working on a plan.

“I think we should go and reclaim Elizabeth’s house. It has everything we need; a fresh indoor garden if it’s still working plus electricity for washing clothes.”

“I’ll get dressed and we can go today.” Kerra leapt from the bed, excitement at making a new home together combining with her recent shock and making her legs wobbly when she stood. John reached out a hand and carefully steadied her.

The washing had sold it for her. She was running out of knickers and everything and spending most of her days slobbing around in her dressing gown. Even during their brief stay at the cottage they had accumulated quite a lot of stuff and all the bags they had were bulging full. John told her off for lifting which she hadn’t known she should avoid. This gave Kerra a prickle of slight annoyance, as if she didn’t have full ownership of her pregnancy. John was packing the last of the books that he hadn’t yet read when he came across a small blue book lying on its side at the back of a shelf; a diary. He hadn’t noticed it before and couldn’t believe what he had found when he looked inside. It was a detailed log of experiments and their results and he soon realised that they were focused on the very virus that had killed so many people. He packed it quickly planning to read it thoroughly later.

### **Chapter Thirteen: New beginning [Home](#)**

John loaded the van himself, not allowing Kerra lift a single thing. Kerra complained that she felt useless, more for effect than anything else. In truth she was beginning to enjoy feeling cherished and spoilt. They drove effortlessly across the island but finding the house took a long time. Evan had kindly guided them there before and neither of them could remember his directions very well. As they turned down yet another side road, hoping to see the track leading to Elizabeth’s house, they saw instead a snorting meat mountain of a bull that had cornered an injured soldier against the rock face lining the road. His bio suit had been torn open near his head and the bull was pawing the ground, roaring its anger before moving towards the soldier at a run, going in for the kill. John and

Kerra both jumped out and opened fire. It took four shots to leave the bull lying motionless on the ground.

“Are you ok?” Kerra asked the soldier. His eyes were filled with terror as he looked back at her through the plastic dome of his now useless helmet.

“No I’ve have been bitten. Leave me, I may be infected,” he replied, turning away from them and trying to limp painfully away. His voice shook despite his brave words and he sounded very young, barely out of his teens.

“That’s not how you get infected, only in the movies,” explained John, following him.

“My leg is broken I think, I can’t put any weight on it,” the soldier said, promptly passing out at John’s feet.

John pulled him over to the van and hefted him inside with some difficulty. Kerra stood behind him, her shotgun raised towards the road in case any more bulls were nearby. John used his knife to cut away the soldier’s right trouser leg. He could see the leg was broken from the odd angle it stuck out at but no bones were poking through, much to his relief. It needed setting but other than that should be fine. Leaving the young soldier in the van he continued their journey, retracing the route in his mind until they succeeded in reaching Elizabeth’s house at last. They tried the front door and found it was locked. The house still seemed to be intact with no broken windows or doors. John drove the van to the barn and jumped out, asking Kerra to drive it to the front of the house and meet him there. He used the tunnel from the barn, which was trouble free, to reach the house. Thomas appeared to have left so, after a cursory check to ensure no nasty surprises were lurking, John unlocked the front door. Kerra, obedient for once, was waiting in the van and after ushering her inside John quickly carried the unconscious soldier in followed by all the gear.

“I’m going to hide the van in the barn, lock up after me,” he ordered, slightly breathless from his exertions.

John parked up and secured everything as he went. Back in the house he thoroughly checked every cupboard, every room, under beds, everywhere, looking for animals or zombies. It all seemed clear so he made sure every door on rooms that they wouldn’t be using was locked or nailed shut. The house was quite big and he wanted a secure environment. He felt confident that the house was quite secure, there weren’t many large animals left on the island. Satisfied at last, he went through to Kerra who was preparing a splint for the soldier’s leg. She was also trying to get him to smile before one of them shot him. Kerra gave him some strong pain killers that she had liberated from the chemists, hoping to use them recreationally. That had been in her pre pregnancy days, she thought ruefully, and they were of no use to her for that purpose now. Between them they

set his leg as best they could: they were no doctors but it looked straight and in position. Their patient finally managed a smile when the pain killers started to kick in. Well, it was either that or the hot chocolate with a bit of melted cannabis block in it that did the trick, Kerra thought. She had decided the doctored drink would kill the virus from the inside this way if he was infected, and that the weed would help with the pain as a bonus. Feeling secure for the first time in days but exhausted, they ate spaghetti straight from the tin and settled down for an afternoon kip. They hadn't had a really good sleep for a while and the fact they were snuggled down in a decent sized bed in a decent size room helped them relax. The soldier would be out for a while after the pain killers.

John woke up first, refreshed, and went to check their guest who was just beginning to stir from his drugged sleep.

"How are you? I'm John," he introduced himself; "you were a bit out of it earlier."

"I feel much better thanks but could do with some more painkillers if you have any? I'm Richard from the Welsh Guards." He held his hand out to shake John's. His colour was better than before and the look of fear had faded from his rather watery blue eyes.

"How come you were out on your own?" John was curious.

"I wasn't, I was left behind due to infection risks. If any soldier gets a potential infection we're under orders to join the remaining island population and await rescue. We're supposed to just gather as much Intel as possible and report back to HQ."

"How are you going to report back?"

"I can use hand signals to the ships or radios if I can find one. They're still assessing the virus and don't know much about it."

"You won't get infected but didn't you detain Sarah Campbell? She knows loads."

"Yes but the scientists need to prove what she is saying is right. We haven't seen any human zombies as you call them, only animals. To us looking in it just appears that the virus is sending infected humans insane."

"Coffee?" John offered, mulling over this information.

"Yes please," replied Richard.

John remembered the diary from the cottage that he had packed and went to find it. He read through the listed experiments, trying to find out what had caused this mess. Most of the terminology in the book was too advanced for him. He did understand though that whoever discovered this virus was desperately trying to kill it off. He handed the small book to the soldier.

"What's this?"

“It appears to be a diary that belonged to one of the scientists who was working on the virus; I found it at my last place.”

“Your last place?”

“Yes, we based ourselves in a holiday cottage for a while. When we found that Kerra was pregnant we decided to move here where it’s clean and self sufficient. We needed more ammo as well and knew there was some here.”

“This book needs to go to Ulva ASAP,” Richard said his tone serious.

“I don’t want to risk it just at the moment, what with Kerra being pregnant. I would help normally but I can’t risk her getting hurt.”

“That’s my choice, not yours,” Kerra had come into the room unnoticed as they were talking; “I would love to take the diary where it could be used to stop this thing. I want some books on pregnancy and any other information about giving birth and things anyway. You need a good splint for that as well,” Kerra pointed to the soldier’s leg, “let’s ask them.”

“Morning sweetheart,” John gave her a big kiss and patted her belly.

“We could drive up to the check point at Ulva, hand over the book and ask for supplies,” Kerra suggested, “but breakfast first.”

Kerra whipped up a scrummy breakfast and they set off with Richard, heading towards Ulva. It was about a thirty minute drive and the roads were now clear of snow and ice. They soon saw the road block and drove slowly up to it. Parking the van sideways John opened the side door and walked towards an approaching soldier who looked fearful of their presence.

“Morning. We mean no harm and will return the way we came but we have information for you,” John said reassuringly.

The soldier looked into the side of the van and waving John out of the way spoke to Richard.

“Name, rank and orders,” he demanded.

“Corporal Richard Smith of the Welsh Guards,” replied Richard, “possible infection risk Sir. I was told to gather information and report Sir.”

“Report Corporal.”

“We have a log that belonged to the scientist who created the virus. It shows the virus is not passed on to humans through bites, Sir. These people saved my life and gave me the book. Please could you help them with their supplies Sir,” asked Richard, “and could I have a radio sir, to report in?”

“I will see what I can do, son,” the officer replied. His face broke into a smile as he turned to John, “Thank you for looking after our man. What can I do for you?”

“My girlfriend is pregnant, about three weeks gone, and needs books on pregnancy, vitamin supplements and clothes I suppose: girly pregnant stuff.”



The officer ordered his men to take a full list of their needs, their names and where they were staying. They were treated like human beings for the first time in what felt like ages and it made them feel good. An enormous sense of wellbeing swept over them. They had felt isolated and alone for so long.

“Come back tomorrow at about the same time and I’ll see what I can do,” said the officer “or I could air drop the load in if you prefer?”

“No, the virus would know exactly where we are if you do that and then it would come for us. We’ll come here,” John replied. The officer looked at John strangely when he said this but John hoped he didn’t think he was crazy.

The trio drove off back to the house where they made coffee and wondered if the officer would be good to his word. They played scrabble and watched DVDs for the rest of the evening. Kerra insisted on getting everyone stoned and explained she slept better at night because she knew that no one would wake up a zombie. The next morning they were up early and Kerra’s excitement was clearly visible. She had made a big list the day before and had also sent a message to her parents, telling them that she was fine and alive. They were ready to go at least half an hour earlier than they needed to be. John and Richard had picked up on Kerra’s vibe and were looking forward to the supplies. John wanted more ammo as they were very low. There hadn’t been any at the house when he got there after all. Richard wanted pain killers and hoped for some treatment. Kerra wanted word from her family and the baby stuff. There was no sign of any supplies in sight when they arrived at the check point. A soldier told to them to wait and soon a truck came along with the officer they met before. He got out of the truck and went over to them.

“We haven’t got everything you need or want but my superiors have come up with a plan based on the book you gave us yesterday. Corporal, you are to have your leg set and a cast put on before being briefed on our plans,” he said.

“So what’s the plan?” John asked as Richard was helped away.

“You and the corporal will collect as many islanders as you can. We’re going to use a chemical formula that will kill the virus in the air or on contact. Houses will be flattened by the RAF all over the island. We’ll set up a safe zone where you and any islanders you find will live. That will be your house. You will have radios, food and protection from the chemical. The corporal will show you how to do everything. In a week or two we should be shipping you off the island to your families.”

“Oh,” they said. Their faces showed that their minds hadn’t thought they would be going anywhere so soon.

“John, please follow me,” the officer asked.

They walked over to the back of the truck where he took out three pump

action shot guns and several large boxes of ammunition.

“Now I thought you should have something a little better to group the islanders together with than twelve bores,” the officer said.

“How come you’re not finding the islanders?” asked John.

“We have had over two hundred soldiers killed and one infected. We don’t know how or why but none of you, including our man, have been infected. We’ve been given our orders by the CDC. They have said the virus is airborne as well.”

“Weed kills it,” John told him.

“Weed?”

“Cannabis. Could you get us some more? We’re running low but that look you gave me yesterday made me not want to ask then,” replied John. “Didn’t Sarah Campbell tell you?”

“Sarah died in the isolation camp. We haven’t managed to rescue any islanders for long: they keep dying on us.”

“Well the virus is intelligent and once it enters a body it can transfer through the mouth to the next victim. We have seen it and seen how the weed kills the virus. Your soldiers and scientists will be infected by now, you will see. If a body has been invaded the person won’t smile and you won’t be able to get a laugh out of them,” explained John.

The officer’s face looked terrified and shocked. His face paled.

“They have been saying the virus makes you insane if it infects you,” he said.

“Well I would do that if I was an intelligent virus determined to take over the world,” John replied.

The officer stood silently for a moment, obviously fighting inner turmoil. He nodded to himself, obviously having made a decision.

“We intercepted a smugglers boat full of cannabis last week. It’s in the harbor down there and due to be destroyed this afternoon,” the officer said. “I’ll liberate it quietly I think. Set up the radio and await my instructions.”

“Ok,” John replied, happy that he had been believed and that their rapidly decreasing supply would be replenished.

A team of medics had finished setting the corporals leg and loaded the sedated man onto the back of the big truck by this time. John decided to drive the truck leaving Kerra to follow in van. John loaded up the shotguns and left two with Kerra before taking one for himself. He was quite impressed with their new weapons. As he drove John reflected on what the officer had said and realised that the virus knew where they were again. This bothered him; he didn’t like it at all. The scientists and soldiers had obviously been corrupted. When

they arrived back at the house John parked the truck at the barn ready to unload and joined Kerra who had parked at the front of the house.

“I will unload this lot if you make tea and a sandwich,” John suggested, trying to stop her lifting.

“Getting broody and overprotective again are we?” Kerra replied laughingly.

John didn’t get to reply before a huge explosion ripped through the air. They saw that the barn had been demolished by the explosion as had the truck with the corporal still inside. John hoped that Richard hadn’t been awake enough to feel any pain.

“Lets get packed, we’re leaving. The virus knows where we are and will be coming,” explained John.

“How?”

“The army guys kept rescuing islanders and then they kept dropping dead. They must have transferred the virus to the soldiers and scientists.”

They bundled their supplies into the van and drove away from the house, anxiously looking back as they sped away to see if the animals had started to appear yet.

“What faith do you have that the army will get us out of here now?” sobbed Kerra, great wracking sobs escaping her.

“Don’t cry, I’ll think of something. I’ve a list of islanders that they think are alive here, twenty or so. We could go to them now if you want? If there are twenty alive the virus wants them for a reason I suggest we find out what it is before the army kills us off or something eats us. Or we could try to make it to the mainland the dinghy,” John suggested rather doubtfully.

“Yes, first foggy day we get, we’re going,” Kerra said, wiping her eyes on her sleeve as she made a visible effort to control her emotions, “we need fog to get past the gunships.”

John pulled over to punch an address into the sat nav. It showed that their destination was on the other side of the island and he started to drive in that direction. They were on high ground and could see the island of Ulva laid out before them in the choppy green sea. It was covered with miles of plastic bubble tent sheeting. As they gazed at the scene they saw the flash of weapon fire and heard the rattle of shots coming from the island. Kerra looked through the binoculars and saw soldiers killing soldiers. She realised that they had met the zombies now that John had warned them about. They drove away silently, each dwelling on their own thoughts until John eventually pulled up at a small farm. They could still hear gunshots ripping though the former tranquility of the island. Jets appeared in the sky over them, the drone of their engines clear above

the still echoing gunshots. The jets flew over them and the next sound they heard was the roar of explosions as the jets released their cargoes of bombs over the island. It was a terrifying noise. Several waves of jets flew over and the weapon fire ceased. Helicopters flew in next and the sound of heavy machine guns was clear. Shocked, they wrenched their attention away from the skies and walked up to the farm house door, only to see a shotgun poke out of the letter box.

“That’s close enough,” a woman’s voice warned.

“We came to warn you that the RAF are going to flatten the island,” Kerra explained.

“So be it then but if you take a step closer you’ll lose your head,” the voice replied.

They obediently turned and headed away from the house toward the van. They heard the door open behind them and turned alertly towards the sound. The woman had emerged from the house and lowered her gun.

“Wait, please. When will it happen and how do you know?”

Kerra and John explained what had happened to them and the woman told her story. Like everyone else they had met, everyone she knew was dead. She told them she would go to a cave she knew for a week or two and hide out there.

John and Kerra continued their mission to find the rest of the survivors and warn them. They found their next survivor at another remote location. She was young and had a two year old child who seemed very happy and undisturbed by the whole thing. She had got her old motorbike working and planned to meet them in Tobermory the next day. Kerra picked three more people from the list to contact.

John and Kerra spent the rest of the day contacting people and trying to get them to meet in Tobermory. About fifteen survivors agreed. Most of them had transport of one kind or another and they arranged to meet at the lifeboat station the next day. Exhausted, John and Kerra searched the town for somewhere safe to stay overnight. Everything seemed to be trashed. They went to the golf course to see if they could find a really posh hotel but in the end settled for one on the high street which they easily made safe. John soon got the wind up TV going while Kerra prepared dinner which comprised of reading the instructions on the army ration pack she had been given.

There had been a wide spread blackout on news of the Ulva air strikes. Kerra thought that if her parents had received her message they would have been hounded by the press by now. While they ate they looked through the list of survivors. There were fourteen women, three teenage girls, one toddler and a couple of blokes. John searched for the common denominator, the reason the virus wanted them, but it eluded him. There were more women than men but

there still were men. The virus was ruthless; it would kill anyone unless it needed them alive. They cuddled, sleepily trying to make sense of the whole thing, until the TV wound down and they drifted off to sleep. John couldn't help but think that twenty or so people were not worth saving now that they knew the island would be bombed to kingdom come.

In the morning Kerra cooked a large breakfast and had coffee ready. John had slept in which was unlike him but he had suffered a broken nights sleep, starting awake at every noise. After breakfast they carefully made their way to the lifeboat house. Several people were already there. John used his wit to get laughs and smiles out of all of them. They were all supposed to meet there at ten o'clock but there were still only seven of them at eleven o'clock. John decided to begin the meeting.

"As I have already explained the RAF are going to bomb the hell out of this island and already have bombed their own troops on Ulva. Can anyone think of somewhere that would withstand air strikes where we can hide until they think it's all done?"

"Hi, I'm Sally," a tall red haired woman introduced herself, "there's Mac Kinnons cave. We would be safe there but we would need to take everything we needed to survive in with us."

"We must take everything anyway. They will flatten the island just like they did Ulva," John pointed out.

"We'll get cut off by the tide at high tide but the cave itself is safe," explained Sally.

"That's good," John said "that gives us time to sleep safely. It doesn't flood though does it?"

"No, it stays dry. I didn't think about the tide keeping out the animals, good idea," Sally replied.

"We'll have to take plenty of supplies. It will be cold in there and we'll need lights and batteries," Kerra joined in the planning.

"I have a van. We could load up with everything and I could drive it as close as possible," John offered.

"Agreed then," Sally said, looking around the room for objections.

"We'll go to the shops and the supply pallets and clear them out," John was keen to make a start.

It took three hours to completely clear the stores and shops of all essentials. John made several trips across to the drop off point with the van full to brimming. It soon became clear that it was going to take all day to get everything together in one place. They cleared a supermarket of drinks; bottled water mainly but also wine. John estimated they had about a two week supply of food

and water. If they hadn't been bombed by then they might be safe to come out and forage again. He was the last one to reach the cave, Kerra having already gone there. It was a huge cavern but the camp was set up in one corner so that heat could be conserved. Everyone was in the very best survival gear that the shops could supply. They had created a heat trap using blankets attached to the walls by climbing gear. It was essentially a house made of blankets within a cave. It was very warm and the little heater attached to the giant gas bottle would easily continue to keep it warm. As the tide rolled in they rolled out sleeping mats and popup beds. This was not the most comfortable way to spend the night but more forgiving than the floor. Everyone settled down to sleep as John and Kerra took the first watch. It had been decided that two people needed to be on watch at all times in case of attack, despite the tide being in. It was dark outside and it seemed a long time since they had any time to themselves. The day had gone by so quickly and the fact that so many people didn't turn up worried John in case they were be zombies. It was then that they heard the bombs. There were no warning, just large thuds in the distance. Everyone woke up, terrified that the next bomb would crack the rock above them and bring tons of rubble down on their heads. The navy started pounding the sides of the Tobermory harbour, continuing their bombardment relentlessly until every building was destroyed, buried and wiped out. The destruction continued for several hours without a break until it suddenly stopped and everyone, except John and Kerra who stood guard until the early hours of the morning, fell back into an exhausted sleep. In the morning John cautiously emerged to look outside. He could see fires blazing everywhere, smoke raising high in the sky. There were yet more waves of planes flying over. This time John saw them drop fire bombs, napalm he thought, systematically burning the island to death. He retreated quickly; he could hear the planes coming in closer and he didn't want to get hit.

#### **Chapter 14: Wolf in Sheep's Clothing [Home](#)**

The others awoke the next morning, bleary eyed and pale after a rough nights sleep. Kerra and John were knackered and put their heads straight down. They slept for most of the day. They were woken by one of the teenage girls gently calling their names. She looked about fifteen and had long ginger hair tumbling disarray to her shoulders. Her creamy skin had an endearing scattering of freckles.

"You want some food? I was told to wake you for some food," she said, obviously worried that she had disturbed their sleep.

They got up from the floor stiffly and immediately felt the chill in the air, it was freezing cold. Kerra put as many layers on as she could and topped them off with a hat and scarf. The other women had organized themselves quietly,

preparing the food in front of the blanket house in a considerate attempt to give John and Kerra time to sleep. Kerra poked her head out and saw the women were very cold, shivering and with pinched bluish tinged faces. As soon as they saw she was up they clambered inside the blanket house and lit the fire. Kerra saw that they had prepared a hearty smelling stew and dumplings. She took one serving which she took inside to John.

“I think we should build another little room at the end of this one so you can keep warm if we’re on night watch,” Kerra suggested.

“Like a shagging room,” the ginger girl giggled. This lightened the mood and everyone laughed at the cheeky comment including John and Kerra.

“That’s enough of that talk!” Sally, who the ginger girl resembled to an astonishing degree, said through her laughter, “that’s how you and your sisters ended up pregnant.”

“We thought it was the end of the world and that we were all going to die virgins unless we made out with the few remaining none zombie lads. Life is so unfair,” the ginger one said.

John laughed till he thought his head might explode until he was elbowed sharply in the ribs by Kerra.

“So you have three pregnant daughters? I’m pregnant as well,” Kerra said.

“It’s the cycle thing you know. We all cycle together and I got caught as well. I couldn’t believe it, I’ve got three already,” Sally said waving her hand towards two more red haired teenage girls

“This is Kirsty my eldest at nearly seventeen, Kerry sixteen and Kayleigh fifteen,” Sally said.

“Did someone say they were pregnant?” a woman’s voice raised in a questioning tone came from the other side of the blanket hut.

“Yes it was me,” all five of the women replied laughing.

“I’m Louise and I’m also pregnant.”

“I’m Emma and I’m pregnant,” a new female voice joined in, “This is Tom, my husband.”

The scene seemed almost surreal, like something from a Catherine Tate show, but they were soon into pregnancy talk, swapping myths, legends and folktales about childbirth. Tom and John went outside to check if there was anything left to see after the nights bombing. They clambered over the rocks and made jokes that if the women were left there too long they would be too round to make it out. Eventually they scrambled their way up the beach to where the van had stood. Well there wasn’t much left there or indeed anywhere else. All greenery had been wiped from the face of the island; all that remained were burnt cinders of heather and large black open spaces. Through the binoculars

they saw a long line of soldiers walking along with flame throwers, hundreds of them, burning anything the bombs had missed. Behind the soldiers bulldozers were scraping the earth until bare soil or peat was exposed. They were intent on destroying all life on the island. A shiver ran up John's spine, raising the hairs on his arms and the nape of his neck. He saw that Tom looked equally scared.

"So, what are you going to call your child?" John asked Tom, changing the unspoken subject.

"Hope, we thought it would be fitting under the circumstances. Do you think they will let us leave alive?"

"I don't know."

"What about yours? What are you going to call your baby?"

"We haven't talked about it. We didn't plan to have a baby; it was life and death sex initially. Well, lust as well."

"We planned ours for three years. Got everything just right, nice house, good income, good stable friends and then this. It's not what I wanted to bring our child into," Tom said mournfully.

John heard the drone of an engine and pulled him quickly to the ground as a truck approached, "Come on, we'll be spotted if we don't move,"

Bending low, they hurried down the beach and back into the cave before they were either caught or cut off from the cave by the tide.

The following days flew by, filled by shared tales of the zombie attack. The people in the cave had all been alone for such a long time that they seemed to have many stories to tell. John and Tom scouted the area carefully each day and hadn't seen an animal for days. The island had been fire bombed again two nights previously, leaving the already blackened island scorched and burning. They hadn't seen any soldiers on the ground for at least five days. John and Kerra were worried about supplies. They had inventoried the remaining food and, try as they might, they couldn't see how they could survive for more than another week. They had drawn night watch again and John was cuddling Kerra in the moonlight.

"I think its time we moved on and made a break for the mainland. We can't live here forever," John voiced his thoughts.

"There's something else that's bothering me. I'm nearly out of weed and I think all the women here are infected, well their babies are anyway."

"I don't get it."

"They weren't sick after they were attacked, by the animals like we were. Remember what Darren said?"

"You think the virus chose to infect the babies instead of the host?"

"Well, stem cells are formed when a baby is conceived and these can easily



be recoded for the virus. Darren rotted but babies with recoded stem cells wouldn't. I think they could be a permanent home for the virus but I am only guessing."

"How come you can know this but don't know about lifting when you're pregnant?"

"A' level biology. How come you know about lifting when pregnant?"

"I watch too much TV. When shall we go?"

"When they're asleep. It's going to get ugly soon; there isn't enough food for long."

"I have the emergency rucksack here but we need some water."

"I'll get the water."

They waited for nightfall when the others slept. They were lucky, fog shrouded the island and they would not be visible for long once they left the cave. As soon as the tide was out they snuck out and walked for several miles to find a crossing point. The mainland wasn't visible through the swirling fog and no ships could be seen. It appeared to be perfect conditions for a safe crossing. John inflated the bright orange dingy which he heaped with blankets for both warmth and camouflage. They rowed in direction they thought the mainland must be in, using the current to their advantage for a quicker journey. The tricky part was the landing. They managed to keep away from the jagged rocks they discovered when they reached the coastline and found enough just enough of a gap swirling between them to reach a sandy beach. They were wet and cold, but alive and on the mainland they thought. John ditched the shotguns then quickly deflated the raft. He tied heavy rocks to it and threw it into the sea. No sign of their arrival could be left.

"I'm cold," Kerra was shivering.

"Keep moving and follow me," John quickly walked towards the road into a small wooded area where he put up a pop up tent. He took clean dry clothes and a heater from his rucksack before they stripped down, huddling together in the sleeping bag until they warmed up. As soon as their shivers subsided they dressed again and made hot food on the small camping stove.

"They have an exclusion zone around Mull and the coast so we will have to hike today and get your dad to pick us up at the end of it."

"I have no problem walking," Kerra said, ready for anything now that they could reach home.

After three hours of intense walking they stopped, feet sore with newly formed blisters. They were both near the end of their supply of stamina.

"Ok, I'm knackered," Kerra groaned.

"I'll make camp, it's getting cold and we haven't had any sleep yet. We

would have managed to walk twelve miles on the road but the ground is boggy and the hills are hard work. We'll be fine after some food and a sleep."

John set up camp and got the heater going and food cooking. Kerra was cold and he helped her into the survival suit and joined her, sharing his body heat. When she was warm he fed them both a big warming dinner. Full and exhausted they both fell asleep shortly afterwards. Bright and early the next morning they awoke, refreshed and warm. Neither of them wanted to get out of the comfortable sleeping bag and face the cold air. It was so cold they could see the vapour of their breath in the tent every time they exhaled. John forced himself to get up and lit the heater to warm the tent up before starting to prepare breakfast. Kerra had trained him quite well; he wasn't burning food any more. They sat in the sleeping bag to eat before reluctantly getting up and dressed. Just as they were about to leave the tent they heard choppers flying overhead. This bothered them; the last thing they wanted was to be caught in the exclusion zone. They didn't know what their fate would be if they were captured here and neither did they want to find out. They quickly broke camp and followed the GPS to the nearest village that they thought might be out the exclusion zone. Kerra searched her bag for change and, using a phone box outside the village post office, and called her stepfather. He was both shocked and overjoyed to hear her voice. He had thought they must be dead. He drove straight up to meet them, only half convinced that she would really be there. Kerra had reassured him that she was fine and told him not to make a fuss, just to pick them up. They could celebrate when they were home she told him. Phone call made, they went in the nearest pub to wait. Kerra ordered a pint for John and half for herself.

"I feel cheated."

"Why?"

"I only get to have half a pint. That's what the book says I can have."

"Was it written by a scientist?"

"Can I have another half please barman," asked Kerra.

John stripped off a couple of layers of clothing. He was beginning to steam: the combination of the roaring fire in the pub fireplace and the alcohol was warming him up rapidly. Excusing himself for a visit to the Gents, he couldn't help noticing the state of himself in the mirror. He ran his fingers through his hair and combed it back a little. He had grown quite a beard without knowing it. Kerra hadn't said anything about it. He felt a surge of relief almost overwhelm him now that they had made it to safety but this feeling was swiftly diluted. He couldn't stop thinking of Tom. He hadn't been a wanker and John felt guilty about leaving him in the cave, sneaking off without a word of farewell. Taking a deep breath he composed himself and went back to Kerra who had put her phone

on charge, plugging it into a wall socket next to their table.

“Dinner,” she said, her eyes almost popping out of her head as she looked at the menu.

“Yes,” John was equally delighted.

They read the menu and saw all the fish options had been taken off.

“Have you got any vegetarian options barman?” asked Kerra.

“Cauliflower and broccoli bake.”

“Make that two please,” John asked.

Their appetite for meat had vanished and Kerra had decided to make it a rule she wouldn’t eat anything that had tried to kill her.

The news channel was on the pub TV as they were eating their meal and their attention was drawn to the headline now flashing across the screen. They paused and concentrated on the report.

“Operation Scorched Earth has been a complete success the Home Office reported today. The operation was designed to wipe out all life on Mull to ensure the safety of the human race after a virus killed two thousand five hundred civilians and five hundred soldiers in the past two months. It is thought that the virus was created by terrorists who had planned to release it into the population. A service will be held at Westminster Abbey next Sunday in memory of those who died.”

The barman quickly switched channels. The close proximity of the village to Mull had been killing tourism in the area and his custom was right down.

John and Kerra tried to solve the problem on both their minds: what to do about the others on the island. There was a chance that they might not all be infected. They both felt they had to do something quickly but that getting home was their first priority. They decided on a story to tell Mike and Kerra’s Mum.

The couple waited for the next nine hours in the pub for Mike who eventually arrived, hugging Kerra with relief as he saw his stepdaughter alive and apparently unharmed in front of him. They jumped straight into his car, desperate to get out of the area as quickly as possible. John drove as he was sober to give Mike a rest. Kerra’s mum, who had been out when Kerra rang earlier was now waiting eagerly at home for them. Mike sat and asked question after question. The couple told a heavily edited story of how they survived and fought the monsters. Mike was just glad to have her back.

Mike explained that the virus was said to be making people mentally unstable, a rabies kind of effect it was said. There was now a complete media blank out on what had happened at Mull. He said the prime minister ordered the airstrikes after the troops turned on each other.

“Are you going to the press with this then,” Mike asked.

“No, they’d put us in labs and lock us up for testing,” John replied flatly.

“We want to lead a normal life and get on with it,” Kerra agreed.

“I reported you as missing on Mull,” Mike said, “that could be a problem now.”

“We’ll tell them we didn’t go to Mull. We went on bender instead and had fun in Scotland because you didn’t approve of our relationship. You’ve only just found out,” Kerra said.

“They won’t believe that,” Mike said.

“They will, they won’t want the press to get hold of us either,” John said.

After several hours of motorway driving they arrived back at Nottingham and headed straight to Kerra’s house in Wollaton.

“Are we dropping John off?” Mike asked.

“No,” Kerra’s voice was firm, “I did tell you that he is my boyfriend and has saved my life numerous times didn’t I.”

“Ok, you tell your mother then,” Mike said, knowing better than to argue.

Inside the house her mother smothered Kerra in hugs, kisses and wouldn’t stop pampering them both.

“Are you sure there’s nothing else I can get you?” she asked after plying them with hot drinks.

“What I’d really like to have a hot shower and borrow a gown,” John asked, feeling shy about his request, “We’ve lived wild for over two weeks.”

“I could do with getting clean as well Mum,” Kerra chipped in. She was almost overwhelmed to be safe away from the island, just as John was.

Kerra took John to her personal ensuite, tiptoeing to ensure her mother didn’t hear them. She was full of giggles and her eyes danced with mischief. Kerra opted for a bath while John scraped the filth and fur from his face.

“Is your mother going to tell you off?”

“I hope so, taking a strange man into my personal bathroom and cleaning him all over isn’t on you know!”

“Kerra’s mother’s voice floated up the stairs at that moment.

“Kerra, John can use the family bathroom my dear,” she shouted.

“Ok mother,” Kerra replied jumping in the shower with John and giggling a lot.

After showering off what felt like several acres of mud they dried each other off and snuggled into clean fluffy bathrobes. They were both over excited; relief at reaching safety manifesting itself in giggles, but went downstairs ready to answer her mothers pending questions.

“I’m so pleased you’re home Kerra. What happened and why did you take John to your bathroom? Mike said you’d explain,” Kerra mothers voice held

concern but her face looked almost as if she were hiding a smile.

“John is my boyfriend. We’ve been going out for two months now and sharing bathrooms and bedrooms,” Kerra declared, “We have some good news for you: you are going to be grand parents. Isn’t that good?” Kerra smiled at her mother. She wasn’t scared of anything they could say or do anymore. Kerra’s mother showed delight and shock simultaneously. John felt shocked and very thankful that Mike hadn’t had a go at him. They sat on the sofa together holding cups of hot chocolate and told Kerra’s mother, Janice, and Mike the full story of what they had survived. They even told them about the people they had left in the cave and why they left them, which John still felt guilty about.

“So you think the people in the cave were infected,” Janice said, trying to take in the almost unbelievable facts she had heard in the last hour.

“No mother,” replied Kerra, “but I think their babies will be.”

“What about the adults? They could be saved,” Janice was distressed.

“It’s not worth the risk of what the army might do to us if they find us,” Kerra told her.

“Ok dear,” Janice said, “I understand,” Janice was distressed about the cave people but would never have agreed to Kerra returning to the island.

“We’re off to bed now mum, we’re so tired. Please don’t wake us. I could do with a really good long sleep,” Kerra yawned.

Kerra and John sat thankfully between Kerra’s silky sheets. Kerra rolled a fat spliff for bed time.

“Are you allowed to smoke spliff in bed?” John asked.

“No I’m not allowed spliff at all. But bugger the rules! I nearly died several times.”

They fell asleep spooning and enjoyed the soundest sleep they had had for what felt like years.

Mike and Janice hadn’t bothered going to bed. Kerra and John had talked with them until; 6am and Mike wanted to get them off the missing persons list as soon as possible so they could get on with their lives. He rang the helpline and spoke with a very polite officer who was most helpful. Phew, he thought. He rang work and let them know that his daughter and John had turned up, making excuses as to why they hadn’t made it to Mull. He, of course, sacked John to make it believable. In all fairness he was also annoyed with John for getting his stepdaughter pregnant so it also felt like a nice bit of retribution. Janice in the meantime completed five loads of washing, completely emptying their bags out and cleaning everything. Most things were covered in mud, soil or other disgusting looking substances. Mike phoned the rest of the family to let them know that Kerra was back. They all wanted to come round immediately and see

her for themselves but he put them all off until the next day. He told everyone that she had come back after getting pregnant to make their story more believable and he kept John out of the equation for the moment. They all wanted to talk to Janice as well of course but Janice was no good at lying so Mike did it all. Mike would do a catch up with Kerra and John later on to get their stories bang on. It was midday by the time Mike and Janice sat down together over sandwiches and tea, debating if they were doing the right thing. This of course was a big mistake on Mike's part. Janice calmly explained she had been married to him for seventeen years and if he wanted to stay married he would take care of his stepdaughter. He calmed her down and explained that he was looking at the bigger picture: people were on the island and the government lied to everyone.

The sudden banging at their door startled them both. As Mike moved to answer it the door flew from its hinges and armed soldiers in bio suits entered the house, pushing Mike roughly to one side when he tried to intervene. The soldiers shouted at them not to move. One stayed with Janice and Mike, steadily keeping his rifle aimed at their chests whilst the others searched the house. Within a minute Kerra and John were brought down, both wearing white suits and slippers. They were all pushed roughly from the house and marched into a sealed van that was parked directly outside. Kerra was crying in shock and John cuddled her tightly, whispering soothing words in her ear.

"Where are they taking us?" Janice asked.

"To a Clean lab make sure were not infected. But the real question is who is taking us; the army or the virus?" John said somberly.

They were in the moving van for several hours before it came to a halt and the doors opened. White suited soldiers ordered them to get out and they were escorted through a white walled facility to two enclosed cells; one for Janice and Mike and one for John and Kerra. Men immediately began to spray harsh smelling chemicals everywhere they had been.

### **Chapter Fifteen: The Test. [Home](#)**

John and Kerra looked around their cell, quickly taking in the bed, two chairs, table and the small TV in the corner. A chemical toilet and a wash basin were in a small cubicle in the other corner but there was no shower. A glass window allowed their captors to observe them. Hung near the window was a walk-in bio suit and an assortment of syringes was laid on the table next to two cups and a jug of water.

"Looks like we're lab rats, look at the camera and microphone up there," Kerra pointed.

A uniformed officer appeared in the window. They recognized his face from

the island. It was the officer who had given them the exploding truck.

“Good afternoon, I’m Captain Hislop. I didn’t get the chance to introduce myself at our last meeting. Congratulations on surviving the air strike and getting off the island. That is quite some feat by anyone’s standard,” the officer spoke, “All we need from you is to check whether you are carrying any of the virus and once you are cleared you will be free to go. Please give my colleagues here your full cooperation,” he continued, his tone warm and reassuring.

“I want something first in return,” John spoke firmly.

“What is your request?” Some of the warmth had left Hislop’s voice.

“Half ounce of weed and smoking materials,” Kerra said.

“With no bomb in it this time please,” John added.

“You’re in no position to be asking for anything,” Captain Hislop said coldly.

“There are more people alive on the island,” Kerra used her bargaining chip.

“Where?” demanded Captain Hislop.

“Weed first, your incompetence has nearly killed us once already,” John’s voice was steady and his face showed he would accept no compromises.

The officer abruptly turned and walked away, pausing to order a young soldier and a psychologist to list their demands. Kerra guessed that one was a shrink because of his clipboard tick chart and his awful writing. They ordered their weed and enough smoking materials to last for a month or two. The psychologist started asking questions immediately.

“Come back when you have what we’ve asked for,” Kerra told him.

They lay down and cuddled while John flicked the TV on and watched almost in disbelief at the lies and propaganda the news programmes were spreading about the events on Mull. About an hour passed in this way during which several people came to the window to stare at them. Hislop was one of them with another uniformed man and then came the psychologists. They all peered in, not speaking but watching them cautiously. Eventually one approached the window and beckoned them over, “Here are the items you requested” He placed a medium sized parcel in an air lock they hadn’t noticed before. Kerra tore the paper off excitedly to check out the contents.

“Well it’s block but it will do,” Kerra said nonchalantly, “I’ll just roll one and see if it’s ok,” Looking at the block she saw it was a nine bar. It was enormous and she had never seen a block as big as that.

“Yes it’s good,” she nodded, passing the joint to John who took a drag.

“Weed kills the virus,” John said to the eagerly awaiting psychologist, “In MacKinnon’s cave there are seven adults and one child. They only have three or four day’s food supply left.”

“They are infected though, well their unborn babies are. The virus infected the foetuses so it could evolve,” Kerra joined in the telling of the tale.

“So your baby will be infected as well?” probed the psychologist.

“No, mine is protected because I have been smoking weed. Cannabis kills the virus so it can’t infect you if you smoke it.”

“Thank you,” The man wrote down every word they had said. He looked buoyant, as if the news they had given him had pleased him enormously. His large stubbly face was flushed and sweat gleamed on his brow under his rapidly receding hairline, “I’m Doctor Martin. We’re going to have to ask you lots of questions but first we need samples of your blood.”

They both gave blood and answered what felt like thousands of questions. It was exhausting but eventually they finished and were left alone to watch TV and eat a meal that was served to them in a plastic container, much like an airline meal and even less edible.

John was fascinated interested by any news broadcasts, watching them avidly to discover if anyone out side the lab knew they were alive. A news flash was announced and he saw that journalists filming the island from the Oban castle bay ferry had captured scenes of soldiers rescuing people from MacKinnon’s cave on the coast of Mull. The commentary told him that the Secretary of State had no comment at that time but would be issuing a statement shortly. John and Kerra watched as the seven adults and one toddler were helped aboard a small landing craft. The lab was becoming a hive of activity; everyone seemed to be rushing around. The evacuees were clearly expected at the facility which hopefully meant that they would keep them all safe. If Dr Martin hadn’t listened to what they had told him they would all die in seven months. They stayed glued to the television broadcasts until they tired of the reruns, switched channels and fell asleep.

The next day Kerra was given her first scan. She was intensely worried that the baby had something horribly wrong with it and the feeling of dread grew as the nurse moved the scanner around to find the baby. She was having problems detecting the foetus but eventually found it and started to point it out a on the screen. Kerra saw the baby was rat shaped and screamed. The rat turned on the screen to look at her and she felt sharp pains as it opened its mouth to display rows of razor sharp teeth. She saw the shape on the screen dip its head and felt scissoring agony as it started biting her from the inside.

The next scream woke her. She woke up in a cold sweat, realising with relief that she had been dreaming. John lay undisturbed next to her, having the ability to sleep through anything or so it seemed. Kerra lay awake for a long time, afraid of sleeping in case she slipped back into the nightmare but



eventually exhaustion claimed her and she slept.

They woke up to the sounds of hustle and bustle. People were rushing around again. Through their cell window they saw the evacuees from the cave being escorted in and heard the sound of their cell being unlocked. They joined their erstwhile cave mates a little warily, concerned that they would blame them for their desertion. The survivors looked thin and drawn but happy and as soon as they saw them they thanked John and Kerra gratefully for saving their lives, telling them how brave they had been in swimming to the mainland. They did not have much time to express their gratitude though before they were quickly and firmly isolated from each other again for testing. The officer in charge spoke to John and Kerra, smiling in a friendlier fashion than they had seen before from him.

“Well, you’re heroes now! You have just saved seven people from starvation. The next step is to keep you in isolation for two months to make sure you’re virus free.”

“Two months,” Kerra drew in her breath.

“You’re alive, be thankful. It will take us at least that long to test whether the babies could be carrying the virus,” his voice softened “I have a surprise for you though: a nurse will come and scan you today. It’s a little early but I thought you would want peace of mind. She asked me to advise you not to use the lavatory until she has seen you and to drink plenty of water.”

“Thank you,” Kerra said, pleased at his thoughtfulness.

“Oh, your parents will be going home in a week if everything checks out,” he had started to walk away, “we need some more blood and a small tissue sample.” Even as he walked away white suited cleaners were disinfecting the area where he had stood.

John flicked on the news channel and listened to the prime minister’s speech. “Thanks to the cooperation of two civilians with the army,” the prime minister told the hastily assembled press conference, “nine people have been rescued from the island. The nine will remain in isolation for the next two month under the close supervision of the CDC until all risk has been eliminated. Their names will be released when their next of kin have been located and informed.”

John had requested some games and baby books for Kerra and himself. He needed to distract Kerra who was beginning to feel very uncomfortable and wanted desperately to use the toilet. She thought her bladder must be at least the size of a football. Just as the games and books were delivered through the air lock the expected nurse arrived, stepping into the walk-in suit as soon as she entered the room.

“Hello Kerra, I’m Cathy,” the nurses friendly smile could be seen clearly

through her helmet; “I will be carrying out a scan for you today and monitoring your baby’s progress.”

“Can you tell what it is yet?” asked Kerra.

“No not yet. Now lie down and get comfortable on the bed for me,” Cathy requested.

She spent five minute setting up she brought equipment over to Kerra from the airlock and spent this time talking to Kerra calmly and reassuringly. She asked how many weeks pregnant Kerra thought she was, whether she hoped for a girl or boy and whether she had chosen any names. Eventually, after many questions and baby banter, the machine was up and running. Cathy unzipped Kerra’s top and smoothed thick cold gel on her still flat stomach before moving a probe around her belly. Kerra was getting concerned: she knew nothing really about what the virus had been doing. It was all based on assumptions and not fact. She had given it her best guess but it was only guesswork and the doubt was clear on her face. The nurse reassured her several times. Eventually they saw an image on the screen. It looked like a peanut, small and unrecognizable to Kerra as a child until the nurse pointed it out to her. She could see the baby’s heartbeat pulsating steadily. Kerra needed repeated reassurance that the baby was developing normally was normal, asking several times if the nurse was sure. Cathy assured her everything was fine and that she would be back in a few weeks to check again. John was staring in awe at the screen. He hadn’t seen a scan before and was fighting his emotions as he saw the baby. Pride, love and fear played across his face as he took in every detail until Cathy unplugged the scanner and wheeled it away.

“I didn’t get a picture,” Kerra said, recovering her equilibrium after Cathy had left.

“I’m sure they’ll do another scan soon and you can ask for one then,” John said soothingly.

Kerra looked across the corridor at the other rooms. She could see that the nurse was visiting each one at a time, scanning equipment placed in turn at every window. She thought sadly of how many children the virus had already killed and how many more it could wipe out in the future. John saw that she was looking gloomy and introspective and carefully coaxed her into a game of scrabble. Kerra determinedly rolled a spliff. She was resolute that no virus would survive in her body.

A week went by painfully slowly. Nothing happened apart from test after test. They were asked almost the same questions over and over again and were both starting to feel a little crazy.

Kerra fantasized about ringing the psychiatrist’s neck very slowly and had

stopped co-operating. She answered all his questions by saying “you want to fuck me don’t ya.” That got rid of him at least. He left the room speedily, glancing back at Kerra with his cheeks burning red and his face set in lines of horrified disapproval. This had the fortunate effect of cheering Kerra up and making John laugh in what felt like the first time for ages. Just as they were finishing their giggling fit the officer in command came to the window.

“I have some good news for you,” Captain Hislop said. “Your parents have returned home. I’m sure you’ll see them on the news shortly. We are pretty certain now that none of you have the virus but we’ll need to test the babies in about three weeks. We can check them by taking a sample of the fluid around them. It won’t hurt them at all.”

“Wasn’t anyone infected with the virus at all?” asked John.

“No, it appears the virus can’t survive in a small percentage of the population, luckily for you, but we are still analysing your information and we will need to test the fluid,” the officer said.

They both looked at him as if he was bonkers.

“I’m assured by the scientists that it will work,” the Captain Hislop was disconcerted by their look. He was used to unquestioning obedience and not assumptions about his sanity, unspoken as they may be.

“You could just get them stoned,” Kerra said.

“That’s not very scientific, the scientists need to get their information under test conditions,” Captain Hislop replied.

Weeks dragged by but surprisingly John and Kerra found that they got on even better than they had before. John even made a paper ring and asked her to marry him, a touching proposal which, of course, she refused. Her refusal was on the grounds the proposal was made under duress and that she had been either locked in a room with him or stuck on an island for the whole time she had known him. She wanted to check that in normal life he wasn’t going to go out with his mates on the piss every five minutes. John, his feelings hurt, pointed out that she was being a little harsh and Kerra relented to the point of saying that if he could get a nice ring she would reconsider. Kerra didn’t care about expensive jewelry but wanted to make sure she was doing the right thing when she made her decision. One day flowed into another and several weeks passed. They found they were losing track of time. They kept themselves busy playing games, planning their future and getting to know each other properly. Kerra found herself telling John things she never thought she would share with anyone. She had grown to trust him completely.

Early one morning another nurse arrived to perform another scan. To Kerra and John’s relief it showed the baby was developing normally and everything

was fine. They still couldn't tell what their baby's gender would be but could see it's body and head clearly. The nurse carefully took a sample of amniotic fluid to check for the virus. It was uncomfortable for Kerra and gave her a slight cramp which was frightened her. They would be told their fate in a week, the nurse told them. Kerra noticed that this time the nurse wasn't testing or scanning the others and wondered why. It bothered her but she thought that maybe they were a week behind her or that there was a logical, non threatening explanation. The next seven days really dragged. They had asked for and been given some new games but they sat unopened in the room. They were unable to think or talk about anything other than what the tests might reveal. John spent a lot of time lost in his own thoughts. He worried about what it would be liked to be locked up permanently. He understood his concern was all about losing the life he had chosen and desperately wanted. He remembered when he was on the dole a few years before: he had no money or anything and he could barely survive. Even when he got off the dole he could barely survive until he got a decent job, and he was barely surviving now, but the difference was that he had something to live for, more so than ever now.

Kerra was beginning to obsess about the other women, wondering if they would be tested at all as the week dragged by. Finally, after what had felt more like a decade than seven days, a side door that neither of them knew existed in the cell, so carefully had it been camouflaged, opened and Hislop stepped through. He smilingly gestured them through the door and into a changing room. He wore a big cheesy grin and had changed out of this uniform into a t shirt and trousers.

"I never thanked you for saving my life that day on the Ulva road," he said shaking their hands warmly, "thank you. Please take these vouchers for baby necessities and this, a bottle of the best whiskey I could find," Captain Hislop said jovially.

They both thanked him, surprised and hopeful that this meant their release was imminent.

“You’re to get changed and meet with the department head for a briefing on your story,” he continued, “You will of course be compensated for your cooperation in the matter of the national security of the country.”

“Who do you work for; it’s not the army is it?” Kerra asked.

“Sorry, that’s classified information,” Captain Hislop replied.

They changed quickly and were escorted to the Public Relations office where they were introduced to Colonel Grey, a tall stern faced man in his early sixties. He had ordered afternoon tea to be brought to his office.

“We’re quite happy with your story and believe almost every word you have told us. However, your theory that the unborn babies have been infected appears happily to be unfounded. We don’t want a mass panic brought to the shores of our great nation. Do you understand?” Grey asked his eyes steely.

“Yes sir,” they both replied.

“You are to say you swam from the island after organising and saving the others from the bomb raids and that you were acting under instructions from the army. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir,” they repeated.

“You both seem to be experiencing a psycho-physiological response from the trauma you suffered. We appreciate that you will need to talk to someone about your issues.” He passed them a small cream coloured business card. “Here is a telephone number, day or night this man will be available to you. Do you understand?”

“Smoking cannabis saved your sanity throughout your ordeal it would appear. However I suggest you stop now for the sake of your baby and because of the press who will be camped on you door step. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir,” they both said again, looking at each other ruefully.

“Here is a check for two hundred thousand pounds. This is to be shared between you. Please stick to your stories and if you make any mistakes ring me immediately on this number. We will be monitoring all of you to ensure your safe transition into society but hopefully I won’t see you again. Oh, here is a list of acceptable terminology we like to use. Maybe you should take one for reference purposes,” he thrust a small leaflet towards them as he pressed a button on his desk. A uniformed driver entered the room.

“Take these people anywhere they want to go,” Grey ordered. The driver acknowledged the order by saluting smartly before ushering John and Kerra outside to a waiting car.

Kerra asked that he drove them straight to her parent's house. The journey was quick and John and Kerra sat in silence until they reached their destination. As the taillights moved away from them they both let out sighs of relief.

"He was scary," Kerra shivered.

"I think we should move into my house, John said "I don't think the press knows who I am."

"I haven't been to your house yet," Kerra sounded enthusiastic, "It should be fun."

As they hurried inside Kerra's parents home a hungry photographer snapped their picture before running over to ask for their comments.

"Fuck you!" came swiftly out of Kerra's mouth as she ran inside.

"Sweetheart!" her mother was overjoyed "they didn't tell us you were coming," she hugged Kerra tightly.

John walked in behind her and Mike shook his hand politely.

"You alright son?"

"Yes thank you Mike. Glad to be out though. Did you see the PR officer?"

"Yes, he's something else he is," Mike said shaking his head in disapproval, "the house was gutted when we got back and everywhere had been sterilised in case of the virus being here. They gave us a fat check and told us to keep our mouths shut. Get you a drink?"

"Tea would be great," John answered gratefully.

"No, a real drink," Mike laughed, opening his drinks cabinet.

"I have this," John offered, "an officer whose life I saved gave me this," He handed the whisky bottle to Mike.

"The good stuff," Mike said approvingly, pouring them both a drink. Kerra had been dragged into the kitchen by her mother for the girly chat of the century while John had been tactically distracted by Mike. Mike took John outside, guiding him by the elbow.

"Is this where you asked me my intentions towards your daughter?" John asked trying to remember the words to articulate his rehearsed speech.

"No, she does what she wants; I just want her to be happy. I figured as she's spent four month's living with you already she would move in with you so I thought about your house. I went to make sure it was intact and your bills were in hand," Mike said "I also did this," Mike handed him an envelope, "I hope you don't mind."

John tore the envelope open. It was his mortgage paperwork and showed his house was now fully paid off.

"Thank you. I don't know what to say," John was touched and embarrassed by Mike's generosity.

“Don’t say anything. The government money paid for it and for what we needed and you deserve it more than us for bringing her back. Janice cleaned up a bit and moved Kerra’s stuff over there so don’t be too shocked when you walk in. She wanted it nice for you both and she needed to do something you know.”

“Oh,” John was now even more embarrassed at the thought of Kerra’s mother cleaning his house and possibly finding things he would rather she hadn’t. His bed time reading was something he definitely hoped she hadn’t seen for a start. “You’re right, I have asked her to move in and she said yes. We have a cheque from the government too and want to go on a holiday, somewhere sunny, and then get ready for the baby.”

“They had some good city breaks this time of year,” Mike said, “I don’t like going outside Europe that much myself.”

“Kerra is mad about Asia but I want to go to America. There is so much I want to see there.” They were interrupted by Janice calling them in. She had just guiltily remembered that Kerra had a boyfriend.

“Would you like a drink?” Janice offered “oh, you already have one.”

“Mum’s going to give us a lift home after dinner, if that’s alright,” Kerra told John, smiling at her parents as she planned her escape from their house.

“Thanks, that would be great,” John answered with relief, knocking his whisky back. This was going so much better than he had envisaged.

“We’re going to the pub for dinner,” Janice told him, “I thought going out would be a treat.”

Kerra slid over and grabbed John firmly needing the security of his touch. She had just been through an hour of her mothers intensive questioning about how they had lived on the island and felt she needed rescuing from her over inquisitive parent. At local pub Kerra and John both ordered vegetarian dinners, explaining to Mike and Janice the reason for their apparent pickiness about meat in as few words as possible. It seemed like an eternity before the evening was over, meal eaten and tales of their incarceration swapped. The promised lift materialised and at last they were alone again, standing in front of John’s home.

A shocked John saw immediately that the house as if it had a face lift while he had been away. Everything that needed repairing had been mended; there was a new front door, new windows and the garden looked immaculately manicured. Mike had even given him a new set of house keys. They went inside locking the door firmly behind them.

“I’m so sorry about that. I’m embarrassed,” Kerra apologised as soon as she was through the door.

“Well, welcome to how your parents want us to live! My god, I don’t believe it,” John was amazed, “Mike told me not to be too shocked because your

mum had been cleaning. I was a single guy living on his own with a steadily increasing degree of mess and now it's immaculate. It's even been decorated as well."

"I'm so sorry," Kerra was crimson with shame, "they have always been the same and....."

John interrupted her apology by kissing her lovingly. "It's ok, we have each other. We can buy another house together in couple of years and make it our own," John soothed her, rubbing her back gently.

They explored the house for the next hour. John found photos of how the house had been BKM which they decided stood for Before Kerra's Mother. Kerra loved the before photographs and felt cheated a little by her parents but was delighted that they had put in power shower and a multi fuel burner for those cold winter nights. They had also fitted a top of the range kitchen with a larder fridge. For all his grumbling John loved it. They would have had a huge job getting the house up to scratch in time for their child's birth. They found the nursery which had been set up in the spare room. It was fully decked out with expensive top of the range equipment and toys and vouchers for an exclusive decorating store lay on the brand new hand carved cot bed. Kerra's eyes lit up at sight of the beautiful nursery. Their bedroom was pretty bland but had a nice TV in it. They didn't get as far as exploring the garden; Kerra didn't let John out of the bedroom for the next hour. The new bed definitely needed testing she said, laughing as she loosened his belt.

John was in a state of utter contentment when he heard a knock at the door. He struggled from the warm bliss of the cotton sheets he had drifted off to sleep on and, wrapping a towel around his waist, opened the door. What looked like half the worlds press was outside. It was very cold outside and very embarrassing. His first thought was that the double glazing worked well, he hadn't heard them. Suddenly reacting in a blind panic he shut the door and locked it.

"Don't go outside," he called to Kerra who had just come downstairs.

"Why? she asked, looking at him questioningly.

"Why? The garden is crawling with reporters and photographers and they've just seen me half naked!"

"I bet that was a shock for them. Cake and coffee?" Kerra offered calmly, turning her head away from him so he couldn't see that she wanted to laugh at his outraged expression.

"Yes please. I'm going to get dressed; I'll have to say no comment or something or they'll never leave us alone."

Kerra made coffee and hastily got dressed herself. As they ate their cakes



and drank the coffee she remembered the vouchers and scanned the room, planning her purchases.

“Well I suggest we put this cheque in the bank and go shopping for kids stuff. We’ll let them follow us round and make short brief statement and then book a holiday online,” Kerra offered her ideas.

“I just need to find my car key or have they upgraded that as well,” John was back in grumble mode, “yes they have.”

“Sorry,” Kerra apologised again.

“Look at that crowd and I don’t even know which car is ours. There’s no tag,” John said crossly, “I’ll just have to press the button until something flashes.”

They walked into a barrage of questions as they left the house. Neither of them knew what to say or which direction to go in. They could feel their adrenaline pumping; it was too soon to have people in their faces, to be near so many people. Finally John discovered that he was the proud owner of black Land Rover Freelander. They got in, repeatedly calling “no comment,” as cameras and microphones were thrust towards them.

“I need a spliff. I nearly lamped them out,” Kerra seethed, bristling with indignation at the barrage of questions that had just been hurled at her.

“We’ll have to get it delivered then. They’re all over us, following us, that’s sick man.”

He was thoroughly enjoying his new car. He felt bad that he had been so churlish and grumpy earlier. He was used to looking after himself and making his own choices and had resented what felt like interference. He couldn’t stay cross in this car though.

“There’s a Mothercare at the retail park near the marina,” Kerra told him happily.

“I know the one,” replied John.

They got out and were followed by the flashing cameras and shouted questions that they had encountered outside their home. Most of the mobile news vans had already arrived, having stayed on John’s tail all the way, and a few latecomers were screeching into the car park. Kerra was torn between being amused that they seemed to have their own personal paparazzi and annoyed at the intrusive questions.

“I would like to make a comment,” John said. Silence fell apart from the clicking of camera shutters.

“We don’t consider ourselves to be heroes. We just did what we had to do to survive and if you don’t mind we would like to be left alone for a little while. We have been out of the world for four months, some of that time living in a cave,

and we need to readjust. Thank you,” John finished his speech and, taking Kerra by the arm, walked away from the bristling display of cameras.

“Well you tried. It didn’t do much good though,” Kerra said sympathetically as his speech had had no impact at all on the still following media.

They only brought a few items before jumping back in the car. Kerra was getting increasingly wound up about the intrusive crowd that dogged them all through the baby wear section so they gave up on the retail park and went straight to visit a friend of Kerra’s where they could purchase some weed instead. This time John managed to elude the press who didn’t know the area as well as he did. They stayed long enough for a cup of tea so they did not arouse suspicion about their activity before going home and locking themselves in. Kerra rolled a spliff quickly and was just about to light it when John, who had gone to the window, called out to her,

“Don’t light it yet, I think, yes it’s the Prime Minister.”

“Fuck the prime minister,” Kerra said emphatically, taking the spliff upstairs.

John answered the knock at the door and saw he had been right.

“John isn’t it, pleased to meet you,” the Prime Minister said.

“Come in,” John said politely, shutting the door behind him.

“I wanted to come and thank you in person for bravely saving the lives of the Mull survivors by swimming to get them help,” the Prime Minister said gravely, grabbing John’s hand and shaking it robustly. He was a big man and his handshake was firm to the point of painful.

Kerra came down the stairs looking more like herself. She wore a big cheesy grin on her face.

“Tea prime minister? I’m Kerra, John’s girlfriend.”

“Yes please. I hear that you also swam across from the island?” the Prime Minister crossed the room to shake Kerra’s hand, a lot more softly than he had shaken John’s he couldn’t help but notice.

“Yes but I would have died if it wasn’t for John aiding me the last two hundred meters. He is so modest that he hasn’t told anyone that prime minister. Cake?” Kerra smiled simperingly at the head of government himself, speaking in the sweetest little girl voice she could.

“Yes please. What are your plans now?” asked the Prime Minister.

“We’re going on holiday to get away from the press for a bit and then we’re getting married. You should come,” John spontaneously invited him, looking at Kerra with naughtiness in his eyes.

“I think the Prime Minister has more important things to do than come to our wedding,” Kerra said softly.

“I would be honored. When is it?” the minister asked.

“September,” John replied.

“October,” Kerra said simultaneously.

“Well, we have to see when the church is free,” Kerra said making it up as she went along to cover for the fact they hadn’t got a clue.

The lies were getting worse so they stopped the topic and brought the conversation down to a level they could cope with until eventually he left, leaving them his card with his direct number and an open invitation or call him to ask for help if they needed it.

“Saving your life?” John looked quizzically at Kerra who blushed.

“I was stoned. Now we will have to get married and in a church.”

“So that’s a yes then?”

“Ok but you must promise me one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“That we alter the date. I’m not going down the aisle when I’m fat.”

“We could run off to Gretna Green but I vowed never to go back to Scotland. Las Vegas?”

“No I want a proper wedding, sometime after the baby.”

“Ok then.” John agreed reluctantly. He had hoped they could get married sooner rather than later.

“He didn’t know the full story did he?” Kerra turned the conversation back to their ministerial visit.

“No and its better that it stays that way. He only turned up for votes,” Johns experiences of late had left him with a deep cynicism towards authority.

John and Kerra spent their evening relaxing and excitedly looking online at holidays. Kerra looked hopefully at Asia holidays while John dropped heavy hints about how many gun owners there were in America and how safe they would feel if they went there.

### **Chapter Sixteen: Everyone Deserves a Break [Home](#)**

“We’re only going for a week. How much stuff are you taking?” John looked at the enormous case that Kerra was sitting on in an effort to close it. It was the middle one of a set of three, the other two already bulging near the door ready for him to carry downstairs. The cases were deep pink and so, at that moment was Kerra’s face. Excitement and the exertion was closing the cases had left her flushed and giggly.

“There may be some nice places to eat or fancy restaurants. I don’t want to go unprepared.”

“You’ll be in the coffee shop and you know it.”

“I’m pregnant and I need to take it easy,” Kerra retorted, looking as if she

were shocked he would even think such a thing.

John fought past the paparazzi and loaded the suitcases into the car. Kerra drove, winding her way through narrow lanes and jumping on and off the motorway for about an hour before losing the following press. John took over then and drove to the East Midlands airport where they checked in for their flight to Europe. They had compromised on destination and chosen not Asia or America but Amsterdam. Kerra had never been but was keen to visit. It wasn't the sort of place her parents would ever take her. She had bought a guide so that she could enjoy the full experience and intended to see everything. They were going on a holiday and having fun and they needed it. They had chosen to stay in a modest hotel, extending the time they could have without working to enjoy being a family by planning thriftily. They both thought two years off work would be fantastic. They went through the usual rigmarole of checking in, waiting for hours and eventually getting a flight that lasted less than the waiting time. There followed a quick rail link and a short tram journey to the hotel. The hotel was near a small square called the Leidseplein situated just out of the city centre. The bustling square was home to the Bulldog, a thriving coffee shop with a Ben and Jerries sitting handily next to it. Seating areas were liberally placed all around the square and bustling waiters were serving trays of exotic teas and freshly ground coffee to the pavement café clientele. The smell of food permeated the air and titivated their senses. Everywhere Kerra looked was something new and interesting to see. Everyone was so calm and relaxed, no loutish behaviour or stupid bunches of hoodys waiting to get lucky or mug you. 'It's so nice and smiley,' she told John happily. She looked intently at every face and saw no one was sad or frowning. It was heaven. They hadn't even checked in yet but were being served coffee at a table outside in the sun where they sat. They finished their coffee but Kerra was so entranced that she didn't want to move and ordered another. She liked the little biscuits and the pot of cream and the little after dinner mints, she liked that you got the please and thank you, she liked the sun and the smell of fresh coffee and deliciously wafting aromas of delicious looking plates of food.

"You're happy and you haven't even been to the coffee shop yet," John commented.

"Yes."

"But they have lists of drugs that you like to smoke," John said.

"Yes."

"There's a Ben and Jerry's, there's museums too."

"Yes."

"That's all you have gone on about on the plane."

“Yes. Do you ever get moments of total clarity in your brain, a complete feeling of contentment and relaxation where nothing matters? I having one now and I’m keeping it going as long as I can. I haven’t felt like this for a while and it’s lovely.”

“Oh, no, this won’t do! You’ll have me buying little doilies to go under my coffee at home,” teased John, who really wanted to do something active now.

“If you’re bored go and take the bags and check in. The guide book says it’s round the corner over there.” Kerra pointed languidly. It was clear she wasn’t going to be going anywhere in a hurry.

While John went to check into the hotel, taking two heavy suitcases with him, Kerra sat basking in the sunlight, leaning back into her seat. Then it happened. She felt a rippling movement flitter across her belly, a butterfly feeling tickling through her stomach. She was just starting to show but had successfully ignored this so far so she tugged her top down firmly and pretended it hadn’t happened and that she wasn’t getting fat. The moment passed in a heartbeat so she got up and walked to the hotel. John had been gone for quite a while and knowing him he was probably laid in bed waiting for her to get bored and turn up. She registered and was given a key and directions to their room. Kerra made a mental note not to get too wankered; firstly she was pregnant and secondly the stairs were the steepest she had seen for a long while. She knew that their room, a double with an ensuite, was on the third floor. The stairs had been every bit as steep as they looked and Kerra felt as if all the air had been taken from her lungs by the time she reached the room. Pausing for a moment to get her breath back, she took out the key she had been issued with at reception. It was an old fashioned key with one of those oversized tags that would not fit in any pockets she had, making her thankful she had packed her large bag collection.

She opened the door calling out softly, “Hello sexy, where are you?”

She felt movement behind her and felt a hard object being dug painfully into her ribs. “Don’t move,” a deep voice with a strong American accent hissed into her ear. She could feel that a man was standing very close to her, just behind her to her right. Turning slightly she could see that he was holding a pistol with a silencer on it to her ribs

“Don’t you know it’s rude to point guns at pregnant women? Where’s John?” Kerra said angrily.

“It’s a necessary evil I’m afraid. Please take a seat on the bed,” He shoved her forward towards a half open door.

As she walked forward she saw John cuffed and gagged on the bed, his legs up leaning against the head board. Kerra sat next to him and pulled his gag off.

“Are you ok?” Kerra asked.

“Yes I’m fine,” John replied. He had a red mark on his forehead and it looked as if he had been hit before being tied up. “It’s only a knock; I fell off the bed when I tried to get the gag off earlier.”

“What’s this all about?” Kerra, who surprisingly was very angry but not scared, turned on the second man in the room who had been guarding John.

“She’s scary,” the second man spoke quietly. He also had an American accent. He pointed to Kerra. He could see the ‘don’t fuck with me’ look in her eyes. Moving slightly so that his gun covered both of them he held his other hand out towards Kerra. On his hand was a long brown open box.

“What? You’re holding us at gunpoint and giving us weed?” Kerra said with surprise.

“Roll one and both of you smoke it,” ordered the first man. His gun remained steadily aimed towards them.

“Why go to America when it comes to you?” John laughed sarcastically and this made Kerra smile a little.

The first man came forward and removed John’s cuffs. Their captures shared a joint between them once Kerra and John had lit up. It was getting messy and they were all a little giggly but also very paranoid which wasn’t a nice felling.

“So what’s this all about?” asked John.

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you,” the first man said.

“Try me I have a very good imagination,” Kerra replied.

“We’re working for a government department that can’t be named. It’s run by people who can’t be named as well,” the man couldn’t finish for laughing.

“I knew you weren’t up to it yet, you lightweight. Please excuse my friend he hasn’t been smoking long,” the second man gave his colleague a friendly teasing.

“Can you get to the point? Why have you held us at gunpoint and made us smoke weed?” Kerra persisted.

“We’re not allowed to say, it’s our policy. I love that bit,” they were in fits of laughter now and one of them put his gun down to wipe his streaming eyes.

John picked it up and pointed at the incapacitated men who took a moment to realise just what had happened. Kerra took advantage of their confusion to grab the second gun from an unattended holster. Both men were now sober, looking in dismay at the guns pointing at them.

“I have an idea. Ok boys, roll another one each,” Kerra ordered.

The men started rolling, looking very worried. This wasn’t supposed to happen and they had no plan and no defense for it.

“Now put a little more in lads, don’t skimp,” Kerra insisted.

“But it strong bud this is.” The first man protested, “This is super, super skunk especially grown for us.”

“I know. It is good shit isn’t it,” Kerra nodded approvingly.

The Americans started smoking slowly. John and Kerra could see them slowly start to turn a paler shade of white edging into an unhealthy looking green. After about half an hour they slid one at a time slowly to the floor, lying prone and obviously incapable of any movement in the near future. John cuffed them together and searched their pockets. He found nothing. No wallet no money, nothing.

“What kind of people hold someone hostage and makes them smoke weed?” Kerra shook her head in wonder.

“I’m thinking about Ben and Jerry’s. What should we do with these?” John pointed towards the sleeping figures.

“Room service?” Kerra suggested.

“Ah, I have emergency chocolate here,” John discovered his survival pack.

They sat and munched the chocolate ravenously and started to sober up a little, Kerra found some coke in a glass bottle in the mini bar. It was to die for, better than any coke from a plastic one.

“Do you think they’re like hit men who get people stoned to death,” John asked.

“They think we’re infected so they got us stoned to kill us. That has to be why they can’t say,” replied Kerra.

“Give us a break from that,” John said.

“I know, but we still have two bodies to get rid of,” Kerra was feeling practical.

“We’re thinking about this the wrong way. Let’s check out and pay for one night and leave them here,” John suddenly had a brain wave.

“Naked, with no clothes or guns,” Kerra agreed.

Between them they soon had both men stripped and chained to the radiator and had stowed the guns in the toilet system. They checked out and went to a bigger hotel further to town an Ibis.

“We are doing the right thing here aren’t we? Did you take their weed?”

“Sure we’re doing the right thing,” replied Kerra, “we didn’t talk and we haven’t killed anyone. We’re sound and yes, of course I took their weed.”

They dressed for an evening on the town and soon discovered a nice quiet restaurant. After a lovely meal Kerra began yawning and John realised he was joining in. traveling had been tiring for them both and being held at gunpoint and forced to smoke cannabis had taken its toll as well. They returned to their new

hotel for an early night. Their wake up call the next morning was startling and unpleasant. Three men stood over their bed. One of them was holding a breakfast tray with Coffee, orange juice, croissants and a plate heaped with Danish pastries.

They both sat bolt upright, Kerra clutching the sheet to her chest modestly.

“Morning, sorry about that,” the nearest one said “We had a rather rough start yesterday. I would like to commend you on your resourcefulness but we do need to talk.”

They did not look like typical secret service agents or C.I.A. or F.B.I. type guys. They seemed to have longer than average hair, beards and stubble. They wore ordinary mid range designer clothes, nothing that would make them stand out in a crowd. The intruders found seats and placed the breakfast tray on the bed.

“We brought breakfast, I hope you like it,” the man who had done all the talking so far continued, helping himself to a croissant, and a cup of coffee.

“What do you want?” John asked.

“Well, let’s have breakfast first,” he passed hotel dressing gowns to Kerra and John and poured coffee for them.

John and Kerra slipped their gowns on self consciously.

“You do realise that we’re on holiday, our first break from impending death for several months?” Kerra asked crossly.

“Well yes, it’s fortunate that you came here, one of the few places in the world that it’s safe to approach you,” the spokesman said.

“So what is it you want?” she asked, risking a sip of coffee

“We were going to offer you a job,” he looked amused as he answered Kerra’s question.

“Strange interview,” John retorted.

“As you may have already guessed, it’s not a normal job with an ordinary job description,” the spokesman said.

“I’m pregnant and we’re having a break from working for a while, getting married and then raising our child,” Kerra said flatly.

“Yeah, we’re hardly qualified for this cloak and dagger stuff,” John agreed.

“We only want you to watch people,” the man said.

“Watch for what?” Kerra asked.

“Just watch, get to know them, interact,” he answered as he passed her a list of names.

Kerra read out the names of the survivors from the island. She couldn’t believe it.

“What’s my pay?” Kerra asked.



“That’s not the first question people usually ask,” came the rather startled reply, “but it’s a thousand a week plus travel”

“You’re not going to do it are you Kerra?” John sounded worried.

“We have always known the island group are dodgy and I want to get what I can out of this. We have a child coming, and there’s no more danger in doing this than we’ve already been in. It’s probably the only way to get answers,” Kerra sounded determined.

“We’ll post you updates,” the men, satisfied, left the room.

“This gets weirder and weirder,” John said in resignation. He knew Kerra meant what she said.

“At least we’re getting paid for just being nosey! We haven’t broken any rules,” Kerra said.

Their uninvited guests left, promising to be in touch at regular intervals for updates. They left the pastries and coffee behind which John was profoundly grateful for. He was ravenous.

“That was strange,” John said with his mouth still full, “It’s as if they’ve read everything that happened to us and spoke in code without saying anything.”

“Let’s go shopping and forget about the whole thing for the moment. Look, I have a bump,” Kerra showed him, laughing at his look of mock horror. .

They spent the morning shopping and Kerra bought many clothes, cannabis memorabilia and two vaporizers. They ate out and visited the museums in the afternoon. The rest of the holiday passed in a flash with no more strangers either holding them at gunpoint or bringing them breakfast in bed. Full of holiday spirit, relaxed and refreshed, all too soon they were on their way back home. John drove back from the airport.

“Well, we’re spies now and probably traitors,” He whispered to Kerra rather melodramatically.

“No, we’re employees doing secret research, in the fifty third state of America,” Kerra joined in the game.

“Like in that lab,” John added.

“No like journalists,” Kerra said disapprovingly.

When they pulled up outside their home they saw that the press had decamped. Breathing a sigh of relief that they wouldn’t have to fight their way through a media circus again John unloaded the car while Kerra opened the door. It was hard for her to push inwards. She saw that a huge mound of reporter’s cards and mail as well as a few packages were blocking it from opening properly. Kerra picked up the packages first as they were exciting. The first one contained a big pile of weed, company issue she thought. The second held an electronic bug detector. With a sudden realization Kerra looked at John and drew

her finger across her mouth before carefully opening the package fully. They both read the instructions carefully and in silence before Kerra started sweeping the house carefully with the detector. She soon started finding what appeared to be small electronic listening devices. Alarmed, and not at all sure that they had found them all, they went outside to talk. As they left the house a robin swooped down and perched in a neighbouring tree overhanging the garden. It sat very still, staring at John and Kerra.

“Fuck off! I have a gun in the house and I’m going to have to concrete out here,” John said to the robin.

“Calm down, you’re getting paranoid,” Kerra said.

“Finding bugs and being held at gunpoint on holiday will do that to you,” said John, who was getting angry.

“What did you expect?”

“I expected to be left alone to live my life and not have my child and the woman I love put in danger,” John said, “and look at that,” he gestured towards the street in frustration. They must have been spotted on their way home because the press were camped outside their house again.

“I thought I was the one supposed to be hormonal,” said Kerra kissing him passionately before continuing, “I’ll do a bug sweep again. I think these will have been left by the army guys, making sure we’re playing nicely.”

She finished the sweep and, satisfied she had missed nothing, sat opening the mail. The first few letters were bills and offers of money from the big newspapers for their stories. Then Kerra found a letter from Sally. She wrote that she wanted to arrange a reunion and see how they were going. Sally had given her Facebook details so they could contact her. Kerra logged on and sent friendship requests to Sally and other survivors. She also sent Sally John’s xbox gamer tag so they could have a private chat with her, realising that their phones could be tapped by reporters by now. Xbox was like the Wild West and most criminals used it ensure privacy when they plotted heists or to sell drugs. Xbox was the place where people could be completely racist, abusive and unpleasant and no one could do a thing. The lack of supervision had left a nice hole in unmonitored communications between people and Kerra thought it would be ideal to chat. Later that evening she checked her Facebook and saw that Sally had received her message. She turned on the xbox at the agreed time and found Sally online as arranged. Sally told her that she had been well cared for and was also living in Nottingham; the survivors had all been relocated in and around Nottinghamshire so they could keep in touch, having lost everything else. Kerra soon found out that they had all been given money to get started. Sally had organized a giant baby shower for all the mothers to be, including Kerra It would

be in held October, about a month or so before the first baby was due. They arranged to meet up for coffee and have a girly shop at Mother Care in a week's time. Island talk didn't really come into the conversation but she knew it was there in the undercurrents of their talk and that the question 'why did you just leave?' was just waiting to be asked. She was aware that the cave group had been told not to talk about the Island, just the same as them, but it was hard. The week after their return passed quickly but John was feeling restless. He felt if he were trapped in his own home by the press just as surely as he had been trapped by the virus on the island.

"We need to make a statement to the press so that they'll leave us alone for a bit," John said agitatedly, "there are still three reporters outside."

"Yes, let's type one up and give it to them," Kerra agreed.

They spent the next two days preparing their media masterpiece before ringing the army PR man and getting a reluctant go ahead from him to release it. Kerra ventured outside to hand out their press release and allowed the reporters to ask a few questions and take photos. At last they got the result they needed; freedom. The reporters left the driveway, satisfied for the time being that they had the scoop they needed.

On the eve of the planned coffee morning with the girls Kerra was despairingly choosing what to wear; to show the bump or not to show the bump? That was the question. John had arranged go fishing with friends in the morning. He had been desperate to get out the house just hours before but now he could he found he had developed a dislike for all things outdoors. It was freaking him out a little that he would be outside without a shotgun, but he knew he had to deal with it. He had a spliff, which he had taken to smoking twice a day now, and this calmed him down. He even put some cannabis in his ground bait. The next morning they both went out and did their own thing before reuniting with each other in the evening. The day had felt strange as they had not been out of each others sight for such a long time since before they met. John appeared to have enjoyed his fishing and was thoroughly relaxed as, despite his fears, not to mention his very active imagination, nothing had tried to eat him. Kerra had brought a mountain of baby clothes and confirmed all the mothers to be were ok and appeared normal and thought that John and Kerra were wonderful, their rescuers in fact. She had a good time and seemed relaxed too, John thought. Apart from sending a large quantity of weed through the door, the mystery men hadn't been in touch again so John went online to check the bank balance. They were supposed to get paid and presumably they would pay it straight in their bank accounts. If they can find us in Amsterdam surely they can put money in our accounts, he thought. There were no new payments in there and he noticed

that they had overspent a little although it didn't matter. Kerra continued her weekly coffee mornings with the girls until the time of the baby shower. After that she became more house bound, far too tired to go running around. Kerra had grown a little more paranoid recently as well as a lot rounder and was desperately concerned about her baby's welfare. She had religiously been for all the scans and classes and done everything she was supposed to, but still had an over whelming fear that something was terrible was going to happen. There had been several spider incidents where John had been summoned to kill yet another spider that she was convinced was coming for her baby. These spiders had died quickly and without reanimating, to his relief. One day John found that Kerra had set the vaporisers going in each room of the house, which got him completely stoned before he had even reached the kitchen where Kerra was determinedly rolling yet more joints. She had fumigated the house with cannabis part of her still afraid that she needed to kill off anything that shouldn't be there. He put it down to their experiences on the island and to being very pregnant. Finally Kerra's waters broke and John drove her nervously to the City hospital where he sat patiently with her until she gave birth. The baby was fine and didn't order a spliff as John had been convinced it would on emerging into the world. The baby seemed a perfectly healthy pink and plump baby girl who they proudly named Suzan Janice Patterson. Kerra only spent one day in the hospital. The doctor explained he liked to get mothers on their feet and moving, something about it being better for them. An exhausted Kerra treated this theory with disbelief; she was certainly not ready to go rushing about but was glad she could go home and light up a joint.

### **Chapter seventeen Motherhood [Home](#)**

Susan was now two weeks old John was lying on the bed, gurgling at her, trying to get her to laugh.

"This baby is resistant to my charms! I can't get a laugh," John said.

"You won't, it can take about six to eight weeks before they can smile or laugh," Kerra replied.

Kerra had been nervous as a new mother. It was one thing to know and read what needs to be done and quite another to actually do it she had found. She had started to be able to identify different cries and screams to see what Suzan wanted and had a basic routine going. She was up in the night breast feeding every three hours although it felt like every three minutes and John volunteered for the other end of the stick, changing the endless stream of soiled nappies. The weeks passed quickly in this way and news of the other women having successful childbirths soon filled the newspapers, who hadn't left anyone alone completely yet. One of Sally's daughters had a caesarian section. She was

incredibly young and probably not yet ready for a child Kerra thought. The girls met up, although very infrequently, complete with new babies and Kerra completely forgot she was supposed to be working for the mystery men. They had never showed their faces again or put money in the banks so sod them she thought. Kerra liked her new set of friends and felt content and safe with them. Time has a way of removing bad memories when you're happy, excited and relaxed and all the survivors were quite content in their new lives. They had adjusted to living with masses of people after the solitude of the Island .Kerra's paranoia had died down since giving birth and seeing young Suzan's face and arms and legs, everything really.

"Babies grow quickly," John said in surprise, fighting with the babygrow that had once dwarfed his child.

"Yes and we don't want any more just yet. Remember, we have to wait at least six weeks," Kerra removed John's hands from her waist.

"Sorry."

"I'm still not feeling like it much. My boobs are sore, I'm fat. Just look at the state of me," Kerra said sadly, glaring at her battered body and her stretch marks.

"You're not fat, you're a woman now," John said placatingly.

Kerra pulled a face as she took Suzan upstairs to her cot. She was soon back downstairs, smiling her head off.

"She did it?" Kerra said.

"Did what?" asked John.

"Smiled and give me a little laugh," Kerra said.

"Cool. Happy now our child is not a zombie?" John grinned, relieved himself.

"Yes, well I tried not to think about it and you know how paranoid the whole thing made us. The mystery men who showed up didn't help," Kerra said.

"What are we going to do if they turn up again," asked John.

"Report them to the army I suppose. Well they didn't pay and the girls seem fine. My life is good now, I don't want to spoil it," Kerra said.

"I agree. They employ people to deal with threats and it doesn't have to be us," John said, settling down for an evening of cuddling in front of the television.

Early the next morning Sally phoned Kerra and arranged to meet up at Sally's house. Kerra had never been before and she was keen to exchange birthing stories and baby stuff. They hadn't seen each other for a couple of months because Sally and all her daughter's were pregnant. It was a lot for her to manage. Sally acted as the focal point for all the social functions as she was the

oldest and most motherly. Kerra also hadn't wanted to see her until she was comfortable in her new motherly role and knew what she was doing. Kerra had arranged to visit her own mother on the way. Janice insisted on seeing her regularly and always wanted to get her alone to make sure John was looking after her properly. John was looking forward to a full day of gaming as he hadn't had one on his own for a while.

Kerra visited her mother who was very proud of her grandchild and daughter before heading for Sally's home in Annesley Village just north of Nottingham. Kerra followed the sat nav to Mosley Street where a row of identical old miner's houses stood with open fields to the front. Sally greeted her with a hug, admiring Suzan and urging her inside out of the chill wind. The house was full of people and a row of pushchairs was parked in the conservatory. Kerra was taken aback by how many people were there. The house just didn't seem big enough. She placed Suzan in a row with the other babies in the conservatory well within her line of sight. She wouldn't last long without crying if she was out of eyesight. The other babies seemed so well behaved, none of them were crying or fidgeting. Kerra happily greeted everyone as they started introducing their babies, she was dead proud; her baby had smiled first. The other babies hadn't smiled yet. Finally Sally introduced Kerra to her baby who was, like Suzan, about four and a half months old. Sally's baby boy was able to crawl quite happily already. His experienced mother said she was surprised herself as her other children hadn't crawled until they were six to eight months old.

There was a long discussion on the matter and Kerra learnt that the other babies were sitting up but not crawling yet. Sally's baby was well built and would make two of Suzan. Sally scooped him up and flew him over to Kerra to admire. The child was instantly sick all over her. Sally apologised profusely and showered Kerra with tissues and baby wipes, dabbing ineffectually at the white foul smelling vomit on Kerra's skirt.

"He doesn't usually do that," Sally apologised again "Maybe he has an upset tummy."

"It's ok, babies do it all the time," replied Kerra soothingly as she went to the bathroom to clean the sick from her clothes. The baby had somehow swallowed a spider by the look of the vomit. Kerra cringed and winced as she cleaned legs and abdomen from herself.

She rejoined the others, watching the row of placid babies carefully. The spider had set her paranoia off again and they all looked like zombie babies now to her. Kerra picked up Susan who had swiftly noticed she was missing and had began to wail, stopping happily only when Kerra picked her up. The group of

women made tea and chatted for some time before slowly filtering home. Kerra issued an open invitation to them all to meet at her home in a month's time. Anyone who wished to come was more than welcome she smiled, whilst at the back of her mind worry was eating away at her. As she drove home she wondered about the children. That spider had freaked her out she thought, and made her all anxious. At home she checked her baby book which said six months was usually the age when babies crawled, but when Kerra did an internet search it showed her babies crawling at three months old. There were direct studies that showed that because of the development of S.I.D.S the sleeping position of the baby changed and so they were crawling and walking later on average. 'My baby is fine,' she thought to herself.

Kerra calmed down, rolled a spliff and then smoked it at the patio doors before getting Suzan to bed and turning on the TV which was set to the news channel again. John seemed to be obsessed with news lately. While looking for the remote she listened to a report of two men shot dead in Nottingham. You got the odd one but two at once was surprising she thought. Kerra watched as the footage showed pictures of American students who, the broadcaster announced, were killed in a case of mistaken identities. She sat up startled as two photos of the men from Amsterdam were plastered across the screen. The commentary continued, telling her that they were killed about a month or two earlier but that the bodies had only just been found. Well, that's why they didn't turn up Kerra thought. She was immediately concerned for her baby and John. There must be something wrong with the babies, Kerra thought, or this wouldn't have happened.

Kerra began researching every child development article she could find. She started with what a baby should do first. There were so many contradictory articles, mostly full of old wives tales and all stressing that babies can and do develop differently whilst remaining in the 'normal' range. In the end she was certain that there was no way of telling if a child was infected, apart from the smile. Just then John came down from the bed room. He hadn't noticed Kerra coming in as his headset blocked out all other sounds apart from those coming from his xbox. Kerra explained about the two men found dead in Nottingham and he flicked through the TV reports to get the next showing and was eager to analyse all the information to do with the men and understood the implication of the child development research Kerra was doing. He had been pushing the fear from the island away and he had seen the Kerra's paranoia nearly collapse in on her and he was relieved in a way. John knew something wasn't right but didn't want to face it.

The month passed quickly. Suzan was now sitting upright by herself but still

fell if left unaided. She really did have the best smile ever. John had already set up a height marker on the kitchen doorframe, ready for when she could stand so they could see the change as she grew. When you're with them you don't notice the change so much, he thought, knowing he wanted something to look back on. Kerra had frantically been cleaning up and preparing food for everyone who might turn up for the island mother's gig. She had moved the sofa's round so that there was more room for the pushchairs and was now cleaning the hidden fluff from where they had been. The door bell sounded just as Kerra had finished. Sally was standing in the doorway, her eyes red rimmed and her face set in an expression of worry.

"Sorry I'm early. My uncle passed away this morning and I've been rushed off my feet, He was our closest relation and the kids are devastated," Sally hurtled into an explanation, tears brimming from her eyes.

"Come in. do you want a drink?" Kerra said, putting her arm around Sally comfortably and leading her to the sofa. "You didn't have to come, we'd all have understood."

"No, it was on the way and I thought it would be best if I just popped in and let you know that the others aren't coming either, sorry it was so late," Sally apologized, "I haven't even had his body taken away yet."

"No, please don't worry about me right now, it's fine," Kerra reassured her.

"The neighbour who went round to do his housework rang me and said he had gone," explained Sally.

"I'm sorry," Kerra said.

"I said I would be up as soon as possible but I was dealing with the kids. I wondered if you would look after Marcus for a couple of hours?" asked Sally.

"Yes that's fine, no problem," Kerra replied.

"My uncles in Loughborough and it won't take me long there and back." said Sally.

Kerra passed her a cup of tea. "Of course, that's no problem," Kerra said.

"Thanks," Sally said gratefully, "I've a bottle made up for him already in the pushchair, the nappies are in there as well but he should sleep for an hour or so yet. I'll be back in two I think."

Sally quickly finished her drink and left for Loughborough. Kerra was pushing a giggly Suzan in her baby bouncer gently with her foot when John came down, abandoning the xbox where he had been hiding from the female onslaught of mothers and babies who he had expected to enter the house. He started to roll a spliff and then noticed that there were two babies.

"I don't remember ordering another one," John said, scratching his head.

"Sally's uncle passed away and she has had to go and sort it out. She asked



me to look after him for an hour or two. Smoke that outside,” ordered Kerra with a ‘you should know better than that’ look on her face.

John had just lit his joint and squeezed out the end ready to relight it once he got outside rather than going upstairs. He walked to the back door and stood outside smoking slowly. Kerra could smell the cannabis coming in through the open back door but the cold was coming in as well. Kerra got up to complain and to get some scented candles from the kitchen just as Marcus’s eyes sprang open wide, his nostrils widening at the smell coming in the room. His chubby hands fumbled at the pushchairs safety straps, tearing them away from him. He staggered towards Suzan who was staring at him, a perplexed expression on her face.

“Die!” Marcus said, a surprising deep and sinister voice coming from his little pink rosebud mouth, his claw like fingers grabbing at a sharp letter opener as he tottered straight for Suzan.

Kerra lunged forward to protect her just as Marcus’s knife wielding arm was slashing down on Suzan, the knife pierced Kerra through the hand. She let out a huge scream of pain and terror then pushed Marcus away to grab Suzan,

“Die bitch. I said you would get it and I meant it,” Marcus rumbled, looking like the character out of Chucky.

John came running in and saw Kerra on the floor holding her hand and kneeling between Suzan and a very pissed off fat baby.

“He has the virus John, he tried to kill Suzan,” Kerra screamed, weeping.

John took a drag of his joint and blew it at the baby who ran and hid behind the sofa. He had never seen anything move quite as fast, just like a chinchilla. John picked up Suzan then passed the joint to Kerra after she struggled painfully to pull the knife out of her hand. Kerra wrapped a tea towel round the gaping bloody wound.

“It won’t come out while we have a spliff on,” Kerra said, taking a deep drag and filling the room with smoke.

“Phone the army, they can take it away and dissect it,” John said.

“You’re all going to die,” Marcus repeated venomously.

John phoned the officer from the army and explained the situation. He was told to keep the baby in sight but not to do anything else; the army would be there within thirty minutes.

John phoned Janice to pick Suzan up just in case they all ended up in labs again. He didn’t want that for Suzan. Screams of pain were coming from behind the sofa and they looked at each other, puzzled. John had blocked the sofa off to stop Marcus going anywhere. Janice arrived within minutes, explaining that she had been on her way to a friend and hadn’t been far away. Kerra quickly

explained what was happening and asked her mum to take Suzan and look after her for a while until this was sorted out. Janice left quickly, holding Suzan tightly and protectively. John ensured that Marcus didn't escape.

"They're going to take you to a nice laboratory now and chop you up to see how you work," John wanted the virus to feel fear, the same fear he had forced them to live with for so long.

Kerra was nursing her hand whilst rolling another spliff. She soon lit it and fetched a sharp knife from the kitchen in case Marcus had some friends coming to help, he was too sure of himself.

There was a knock at the door, which then burst open before they even had time to move.

"Armed police don't move," armed policemen shouted as soon as they entered the property determined to locate any perpetrators. Kerra and John froze.

"Drop the knife," A uniformed policeman shouted at Kerra.

"On the ground both of you," another ordered. They were swiftly cuffed and at that point Marcus started crying. The baby could be heard behind the sofa. The officers moved the sofa and picked up the child who appeared to have severe bruising along both of his arms. They radioed for an ambulance and manhandled John and Kerra into the back of the police car. John and Kerra didn't say anything. They sat in shock in the back of the car nestled up to each other as they were driven to central police station where they were searched and arrested on suspicion of child cruelty and possession of class b drugs before being separated and locked in different cells. The incident had not escaped the attention of the media who had taken several photos of their arrest. The cells were nearly bare and lifeless with hard concrete floors and discoloured walls covered with badly spelt and biologically impossible graffiti. Hard plain wooden benches were the only furnishings. Captain Hislop must be in it with the company who discovered the virus or the army developed the virus itself, John thought, frantically trying to make sense of today's terrible events. They were interviewed by police officers and returned to the cells. John carefully told the police what happened, knowing that they wouldn't believe him. They just kept asking him how the bruising occurred to the arms of the baby. John was sure the child had done it to itself. Kerra told the same story until eventually they took her to hospital to receive medical attention for the wound to her hand. They brought her straight back to the police station after treatment where they both spent the night locked in their respective cells. In the morning Captain Hislop arrived with several military police. No words were spoken as the MPs cuffed them before taking them outside to an army truck and loading them aboard. No one at all spoke to them on the journey which took several hours. They couldn't

see where they were going. Eventually the truck ground to a halt and they were escorted away from the truck and into a sterile white walled building which at first sight appeared to be medical ward. They soon realised however that they were in a psychiatric ward with several patients already in residence. The doors were locked behind them. A tall man in his forties approached them carrying a clipboard and wearing a doctors coat which had no name tag.

“You have been transferred here for psychiatric evaluation pending a military police investigation,” the tall man said curtly.

“We’re not soldiers, why aren’t we on a civilian ward?” John asked.

“For reasons of national security you are to be held and treated here,” the doctor replied in a clipped and unfriendly tone.

“Where is here?” asked Kerra.

“I’m not at liberty to say,” His expression made it clear he was uncomfortable talking to them.

“Do you have a name?”

“You may call me Doctor Smith; you are free to wander the ward but no further.”

John and Kerra looked around the ward. The patients seemed to be drugged up and were staring listlessly into thin air. There were beds made up with the patient’s names on them and after wandering around they found beds with their names on.

“This isn’t like any ward I have ever seen,” Kerra whispered.

“I know. These patients don’t seem ill, just drugged up and spaced out of it,” John said.

“Do you think they are all infected, the doctors, soldiers and the police?” Kerra asked.

“No, I saw some of them laughing,” John said, “I don’t understand, we should be in a civilian jail. Not that we have done anything wrong.”

“They want our silence,” Kerra said, “look at that man. He’s the bloke who shot his chickens from the island.”

“Oh shit, there’s the other man from Amsterdam,” John pointed across the ward.

The man looked weary and a long stream of dribble was leaking from the side of his open mouth, his eyes were fixated and he was unable to move hardly at all. They examined the charts at the foot of each bed and saw that there was no record of medication being administered.

“Don’t eat or drink anything, I don’t trust them,” Kerra warned.

“I know, something isn’t right here,” John said, holding her hand.

A white coated orderly came across the ward to them.

“You have a visitor. Please follow me,” said the orderly.

John and Kerra followed the orderly into a lounge serving as an interview room where Captain Hislop was sat.

“Hello. I bet you are wondering why you are here,” he said as they entered the room.

“Well yes, we haven’t done anything wrong,” Kerra said.

“Well, the police found a quantity of cannabis on your property and an abused child trapped behind a sofa. I thought you were going to be ok but it appears that the initial diagnosis of the psychiatrists was correct, that you have a cannabis induced psychosis which revolves around a trauma sustained on the island,” Captain Hislop said calmly.

“So you’re saying everything we have seen is made it up and we’re nuts,” Kerra stated.

“Well that’s what the outside world will think, being sleeper agents for the military means you will be held here under national security act and treated by the military,” the officer said.

“You’re infected aren’t you,” John challenged him.

The officers laughed.

“No of course I’m not,” Captain Hislop said.

“I’ll take it from here Peter,” another officer entered the room.

“I’m afraid you have stumbled across something very few people experience,” the officer said. “The virus, as you call it, is an intelligent life form that has been around for millions of years, living in harmony with man to further the existence of both species.”

“I don’t think what happened on Mull was for the greater good,” John said.

“That was an infant criminal stolen by those opposed to our co-existence. I can remember when man first invented fire. I have been around for years, learning as man has learnt. Our children take several hundred years to mature and are all instinct until then. We nearly wiped ourselves out through not controlling our offspring,” the officer stated.

“You’re not one of them,” John said to Peter.

“No he isn’t. He is one of a few who know or have learned of our existence and reap the benefits of that knowledge, as could you,” the officer said.

“So you want us to work for you and the alternative is what?” Kerra asked.

The officer pointed to the ward of dribbling people.

“I’ll give you a day or two to think it over,” the officer said leaving.

Captain Hislop sat with them, trying to convince them without success that it was worth it to work with the virus and that the benefits far outweighed the negatives before John and Kerra were led back onto the ward by the orderly.

They looked carefully around knowing they would be watched John cuddled Kerra so they could whisper quietly to each other.

“Oh my God,” Kerra said.

“I know. We’re going to have to do something,” said John.

“We could do with unmedicating this lot. We might stand a chance of getting out of here together,” Kerra said.

Kerra surveyed the room, desperately looking for anything that could lead to their escape. The windows were barred and she could see cameras watching them from every conceivable angle. The nurse’s station was locked. She looked carefully at the other patients, trying to determine if anyone had a glimmer of themselves left in them. Finally, she peeked out the window to see if she recognized were they were.

“We’re in the army base at Chilwell,” Kerra said.

“How do you know?” John asked.

“I dated someone here years ago,” Kerra replied.

“They made out they drove miles and miles to get here, that means there’s a chance of escape,” John’s spirits lifted.

“What then?” Kerra was just about out of optimism. “We’re going to be wanted by the police straight away.”

A sudden commotion at the ward doors claimed their attention and they saw with horror that Sally was being bundled into the ward by two strapping orderlies. She was fighting them with every inch of her slim frame, using her nails to rake their skin and her feet and elbows in a hopeless effort to break free. She saw John and Kerra and realised her baby wasn’t with them.

“Where’s Marcus?” she screamed, “What have they done with my baby?” she broke down, inconsolable tears racking her body which gave the orderlies the chance to plunge a needle into her arm. Sally went out like a light and was hefted onto a bed in the corner, unconscious. This was getting freaky now, Kerra thought, what had they told Sally and why had they dragged her here? They weren’t going to find out today though, Sally was out. John and Kerra sat huddled together on her bed. All their fight had gone for the moment and they were desperately worried about Suzan. They knew her grandmother would die to protect her but what chance would she stand against the entire police force and army combined?

About twenty minutes later they heard the rattle of a trolley being wheeled onto the ward by another large orderly. The trolley held plates of food and at the sound the other patients roused. The patients moved uncharacteristically quickly, queuing up in an unsteady line and grabbing plates of food. Kerra and John fetched sandwiches but didn’t eat them. They watched the others devour theirs as

if they had never eaten before.

“There’s something in the sandwiches,” Kerra warned John.

“Everyone has to eat sometime I suppose,” John said, “This must be how they sedate them.”

As the orderly walked away Kerra rushed over hurriedly to the guy from Amsterdam and snatched his sandwich away. He grabbed for it, his eyes pleading and his mouth open, ready to eat it from her hand. John quickly punched him while the orderly’s back was turned and dumped him in an armchair facing away from the nurses window. They then tied him to the chair and gagged him, praying the nurses wouldn’t find him before they had detoxed the drugs from his system. The other patients were soon sat drooling again, blank eyed and expressionless. John and Kerra did their best to imitate their zombie like behaviour. The man from Amsterdam was now awake and his eyes showed that he was again thinking and functioning for himself. The spark of intelligence had returned. Being careful not to be observed, John moved closer to him, opening and shutting his mouth vacantly as if medicated while he whispered to him not to talk loudly or scream or move before cautiously removing his gag.

“You’ve been drugged,” John whispered.

“I know, the side effects are it makes you ravenous, I could eat my own arm off at times, but I didn’t have the energy to,” the man said.

“The drugs are in the food.” John told him, still doing his best imitation of being yet another medicated patient mouthing nonsense. He even let drool come from the side of his mouth to Kerra’s repulsed amazement, “do you know anyone else here?”

“No we usually get killed, not captured. I’m Paul.”

“Finally a name,” said John.

“Yes we don’t give information out because you never know who you may be talking to. Do you want to untie me?” Paul asked.

John untied him and Paul stretched and groaned as if he had been sat there for ever.

“What’s the deal with you two?” asked Paul “how did you come to be here?”

“You see that woman over there? Her baby attacked us and we stupidly rang the army and got arrested then sent here,” explained Kerra.

“Where’s here?” Paul asked.

“Nottingham Chilwell army depot,” replied John.

The trio sat close together, whispering snatched explanations in between pretending to be drugged up and unaware of their surroundings. John saw the

orderly's gaze pass over the ward several times and move on past them, apparently satisfied. Paul explained he had been in America and that the Americans were tracking the movements of certain people known to be virus infected. They had not acquired all the details of everyone who was infected, it was near impossible to tell and if they killed too many of them the virus would just do what it had done at Mull, so they had become watchers. Their role was to wait for the best moment to strike and collect enough information and resources to tackle such an immense problem in the meantime. It would only take one infected person to survive and that one can become thousands of animals within a short period of time. The virus did need recently pregnant women to infect. If it simply infected an animal or human they would look like a zombie inside two weeks. They could rewrite the DNA as the child was developing to attain ascension in human form. The virus retained information from each victim it acquired and that gave it great knowledge but it can only reproduce through our reproduction. The virus typically takes a human male form and picks a fertile human and gets IVF treatment to reproduce. It can also sense when a woman is about to fall pregnant faster than a test kit. They put themselves in positions where they influence those in charge rather than lead as this attracted less attention. They lead the people above them to successful careers and of course control environments to their own kinds benefit. They are massing in Nottingham, trying to set up a stronghold here but generally they are scattered around countries and work in small groups. We became suspicious when the government sacked their chief drugs advisor for saying cannabis was harmless and needed decriminalizing. They then moved it from a class C drug to a class B drug when you can't die from overdosing unlike every other drug. They must be attracted by poverty; poor people breed more and this allows them to increase their numbers quickly. They don't have a leader but the older strains of the virus tend to be less visible and, like playing chess, they send in the young more expendable offspring first. John told Paul about the officer who said he could remember man inventing fire. This nugget of shared information lit a flame of excitement in Paul's eyes. He whispered to John that they had only traced one virus back to the dark ages so far so the officer must be the oldest one they had ever found.

"How are we going to get out of here?" asked John.

"They are going to let us out the front door I hope," Paul's eyes sparkled. "I was drugged when they brought me in but they didn't search me very well," He surreptitiously took his belt off and started tearing the stitching apart. He pulled out a lump of cannabis resin, some tobacco, rizla and matches and a small gadget that looked like a rape alarm.

“My emergency stash supplies,” he whispered, looking around with a vacant expression to make sure the orderly’s hadn’t seen him, “this is a transponder and will alert other operatives to my whereabouts. They will come for us but not until they have assessed the situation,” Paul explained.

They started rolling spliffs and ended up with a total of six.

“We need to wait until nightfall to make a move,” Paul said, “There will be less of them on duty then.”

“What about Sally?” Kerra asked “I don’t want to leave her here.”

“Ok, how about we will leave it till early morning,” Paul suggested, “but I won’t trust her until she’s got stoned.”

“What will that transponder do?” John asked, “When will they come?”

“They will be here already but just watching to see what is happening. When we act they will,” Paul said.

The evening food run arrived and they all queued for food, mimicking the half starved behaviour of the others. They buried the food in the bedsheets where it wouldn’t be seen. Tired now and feeling quite weak from hunger they took it in turns to try and doze until early morning. None of them managed much sleep; the things they had seen were enough to scare them into permanent sleeplessness.

At five o’clock in the morning there was only a nurse and an orderly on duty. It was quiet and the patients were asleep wherever they had lain after the drug filled supper sandwiches. Sally was just starting to stir and cry, she had awoken remembering what she wanted to forget. The nurse and orderly came out of the office with a needle ready to silence her. Paul knew this was their moment. He gave the signal and the three of them got ready to light a spliff up each. The matches were an instant give away but it was too late; there were three of them between the office and the nurse and orderly, effectively cutting them off from raising the alarm. The pleasant aroma filled the nostrils of the nurse and orderly as they cowed away in the corner, knowing death would follow if they fought. Kerra rushed over to Sally’s bed, delighted to see that Sally was free of the effects of the earlier sedative filled needle, and untied her. Sally wept with relief as Kerra pulled her to her feet and, throwing a steadying arm around her waist, led her to the door. Kerra looked around the room and as she checked that the orderly and nurse were still cowering in the corner she felt a black rage overcome her. The virus had attacked their child and several other people who they considered friends who had helped or saved their lives and she needed retribution. She made eye contact with John and stalked towards the corner, all fear leaving her, swept away by her hatred and desire for revenge. John caught her intent and joined her, needing to relieve his own feelings of impotency and



fear. Paul signaled them to leave but they would have the last laugh. The pair carried out a pincer movement with smoke rings homing in on the two cowering in the corner. the nurse and orderly hissed defiance at them and backed away still further but, backs to the wall they at last tried to fight back, throwing punches blindly at Kerra while trying to waft the smoke away. John and Kerra picked up chairs and pummeled them relentlessly until they both lay unconscious and bleeding in the floor. The nurse's nose was almost flat on her face, smashed into bone and gristle by a heavy blow and the orderly was bleeding profusely from one heavily swollen eye socket. His eye lay on his cheek, ruptured and useless. The clouds of Kerra's anger parted for a moment and she saw the virus carriers were no longer capable of fighting back and that both chairs were shattered into fragments by the ferocity of the attack she had John had visited on them. The anger and intent was about survival rather than rage. It was almost primeval. They each blew a full lung full of smoke straight at the virus. Almost instantaneously the virus in the bodies bubbled and pulsated, foaming black liquid came out of their mouth until death finally claimed the bodies that had so willingly carried it.

They rejoined Paul and Sally who had watched the scene with shock and horror but also with understanding, at the doors. The ward door keys had fallen from the nurse's pocket during their attack and, snatching them up, John unlocked the door and walked out. There were lights on everywhere and Kerra led the way as she knew how to get to the main gate without being seen. John thought he would ask her how later but had a good idea how she knew. There was only one guard on duty at the main gate so all they had to do was wait for a car or preferably a truck to sneak behind when it came through the main gate. Strangely there was one going out that moment and their hearts pounded as it stopped as if it spotted them in the bushes. A woman got out and told them to get in quickly. Suspicious but left with no choice all four climbed into the back seats and lay quickly on the floor out of sight. The truck reached the main gate and drove straight on through into the streets of Chilwell.

### **Chapter eighteen Get stoned Don't Be Silly [Home](#)**

When the truck finally stopped John and Kerra didn't recognize where they were. It was still dark and there was no street lighting to speak of. The woman's voice commanded that they get out and follow her, which they did. Sally was still a mess but had pulled herself together enough to walk and answer when spoken to. They were in a dark lane with a farm house at the end as far as they could see. The cold air was refreshing and put vigor into the strides of the rescued and they soon made it to the farm house. They were met by a group of men brandishing machine guns, a Heckler and Koch 9mm John noticed, the

same as armed police carry. He played too many video games but he thought it was nice to see the real thing. They were escorted inside where joints were being prepared to ensure that they hadn't been compromised. There were no unwilling participants to the ritual, death by bullet was quicker but none the less it was death. Only Sally was refusing to smoke, complaining bitterly about been made to smoke weed. She hated the stuff which was pure poison she thought. After being threatened with death several times she gave in, coughing her lungs up as she inhaled under the watchful eye of a gun wielding stranger. Paul calmed the men down, he knew after seeing how fast the blow backs from Kerra and John had killed the virus that Sally would be doing more than coughing if she were infected. Sally was now smoking and her coughing had slowed to an occasional splutter. She still looked like she wanted to die but the mellowing effect was kicking in and as she calmed so did the group. Introductions were made and to the group's immense relief it was confirmed that their rescuers were part of Paul's group of watchers. Paul reported in, explaining that getting completely stoned wasn't necessary was a relief to the whole group as many units had never managed to function whilst stoned. 'Couldn't be arsed,' was written on many after action reports. There was a brief update on the situation as a whole for the county and then on nation wide virus activity, which was mainly focused on Nottingham. There had been enemy movement everywhere but no-one had any solid facts on what was happening. Kerra had located the kitchen and was brewing fresh coffee whilst listening to the reports. She had also located a phone and tried to ring her mother; she was worried about Suzan and about the virus going after her. She hadn't managed to get through to her and Kerra was ready to go to war. She had enough, fuck the watchers, she thought. She had been lubricating Sally with coffee to enable her to find out what had happened to her. Sally was hard, harder then Kerra she thought. Sally was just starting to straighten up and Kerra was about to get the answers she wanted.

"What happened to you?" Kerra asked softly.

"It's Marcus. He's infected," Sally said sadly.

"I'm sorry," Kerra empathised with her.

"I was told Marcus was at the police station, something about you attacking him. I went to fetch him and Marcus talked to me and then went to bite me, I called the army and ended up with you," explained Sally.

"What about the other babies?" Kerra asked.

"I don't know," Sally admitted, holding her head in her hands. "They don't behave the same way that my others did when they were small. They never laugh but I don't know for sure."

Kerra and Sally chatted outside. Kerra felt awful about what had happened

but realised it was out of her hands for the moment but that she had the tools to do something soon. Kerra went back inside to announce that she wanted to go to Suzan and help Sally with the other children. The rest of the group had been discussing what had happened and what the virus might be up to. They were setting up new monitoring points and discussing observation methods but again planned no action. Kerra was certain the virus would come for them as it had warned several times.

“We have five potentially infected children and we’re all wanted by the police. What you are planning to do about this?” demanded Kerra.

“We’re watchers, not activists,” she was told, “We can relocate you in another city where you will be safe but we have to keep a balance or war will erupt,” said the lead watcher.

“Sally needs to check her children and grandchildren. I need to find Suzan and make sure she is all right,” Kerra stated firmly.

“All in good time. We’re trying to see what the virus is up to,” the leader replied. “Twenty or so of them are congregating at Newstead Abbey every Monday evenings for meetings.”

“There are people who we care about near to the virus and people we care about who are infected with the virus,” Kerra shouted. “We need to do something,” She couldn’t seem to make them understand the need for urgent action.

“There are hundreds or even thousands infected,” The leader tried to calm her, “where can you start?”

“At the beginning with the first one I find! I have heard enough,” Kerra stormed, “we need a lift out of here.”

“I tell you what, you find them, we’ll kill them,” John offered.

“You don’t understand, you’ll start a war that way,” the leader was getting visually agitated.

“I’m already living in fear most of the time, I don’t want to anymore,” Kerra pressed her point, her temper flaring at the negativity of the others. John, seeing her distress, moved to her and put his arm comfortingly around her shoulders.

“You’re going to get yourselves killed,” replied the leader, “here are the truck keys get out of here and good luck. You won’t hear from us again.”

“We might die but at least we’ll die fighting for the people we love,” Kerra snatched the keys from him contemptuously, “I’m sure that’s better than just watching the people we love die.”

John took the keys from Kerra as they reached the truck. He could see her hands were still shaking with anger and he didn’t trust her driving at that moment. Kerra didn’t argue, she knew she was still wired. John and Kerra

jumped into the front seats and Sally climbed in the back. Within a few minutes of driving away from the farmhouse they recognised where they were.

“Where to first?” John asked.

“Well, we’re close to Sally’s house so we’d better go there first and pick up phones, money, car etc,” Kerra said. She really wanted to go straight to her mothers and check Suzan but knew she needed to prepare properly for her daughters sake.

“My daughters be wondering where I’ve been,” Sally said “They’re living at Bilsthorpe. They managed to buy houses nearly next door to each other and the youngest one moved out as soon as she got to sixteen.”

The journey to Mosley Street was uneventful. John was half expecting road blocks and was also worried that The Watchers might tip the police off if they were worried their actions might start a war but the roads seemed quiet with just the usual early morning traffic. Sally jumped out as soon as they arrived and went to her neighbours where she had had the foresight to leave a spare key. John and Kerra had been expecting a greeting party of some kind but there was no one there either. Sally soon emerged from her house carrying her purse and talking reassuringly to her daughters on her phone. She quickly made them promise to meet at Kerra’s mum’s house in an hour’s time. John drove to Kimberly in record time, slowing to drive by his house and checking for any ambush before returning. The house appeared deserted. He pulled over quickly and saw the door had been boarded up, presumably by the police. They broke in the back door, out of sight from the street, and picked up bank cards, keys, phones and an unopened vaporizer that the police hadn’t taken as it.

They didn’t want meet any of the authorities who they thought would be looking for them sooner rather than later so stuck to the speed limit on the way to Kerra’s mothers home. Despite Kerra’s desire to reach Suzan as quickly as humanly possible, she realised their strength at the moment lay only in avoiding capture. It was seven thirty in the morning now and the roads were starting to fill with traffic. They made it to Wollaton safely and parked the big army truck well away from the house so as not to draw attention. Kerra opened the door and felt a rush of overwhelming relief as she saw both her parents were there happily giving Suzan her early morning feed. Her mother rushed over and hugged them half to death. Kerra swept up Suzan and gave her a big hug and kisses. Her baby was safe and she felt as if she could breathe again. Janice made coffee and breakfast and they took it in turns explaining what had happened while they ate. Neither of them had eaten for such a long time as they had had to avoid the drugged hospital food that they were simply ravenous. There was a knock at the door made them all nervous but it was just Sally. She had reached all her

children and told them to meet her at Kerra's parents. Kayleigh, Kirsty and Kerry all walked in carrying their babies. It was hectic now in the room with babies screaming and all the adults talking at once or so it seemed. Sally sat down with her daughters and explained carefully what had happened to her with Marcus. They looked at their own babies in dismay. Sally was now in tears again, she had been so busy dealing with her own loss she felt she couldn't bear it if any more of the children were infected. Kerry asked how you could tell if the child was infected or not. Kerra explained what they knew which resulted in frenzied attempts by all the mothers to coax laughs from their unsmiling children with absolutely no success. Kerra explained she would go and get some weed and see if that inspired them to show any signs. Borrowing her mum's car she drove to Broxtowe to one of the main dealers there. It was a woman with cancer who dealt only to pay for her own usage. Lucky for Kerra she was up although it was still only it was only nine thirty in the morning. Kerra brought a full ounce, which was everything the woman had, and drove back to Wollaton picking up tobacco and rizla on the way. She drove past the truck which was now getting some attention from the local traffic warden; they had left it on yellow lines.

As soon as Kerra went in the house she rolled a joint. Everyone sat patiently as Kerra spend a good ten minutes rolling the joint and placing it on the table ready. She felt very strange skinning up in front of her mother.

"If the children haven't got the virus will it hurt them?" Kirsty asked nervously, clutching her somber looking baby protectively.

"In the short term it's fine, but I don't smoke near Suzan generally as a rule because smoking is bad. It's the same as anything, too much is bad," Kerra replied.

"So this won't restrict their development?" Kayleigh asked, concerned about her child's wellbeing.

"Look, people stop growing at about eighteen; no one can definitively say what is good or bad for a child. They are always growing; I would always wait until you have finished growing before you start any bad habits," Kerra explained.

"I don't like it," Kerry said adamantly.

"Once isn't going to hurt them, you swallowed window cleaning fluid when you were just four. My back was turned for one minute and there you were under the sink," explained Sally.

The young mothers were all curious and at the same time very scared, it was as if their own mother, always a keen anti smoker, had gone a little nuts. They had never seen anyone roll a joint before and watched in horrified fascination as Kerra took three papers and joined them together to make one larger one, poured

a sprinkling of weed crushed between her fingers along the paper and then filled it with tobacco. Kerra carefully rolled it into a carrot shape and put a small cardboard tube in one end. Kerra made sure any loose bits were fastened down and tucked away. They asked her if she was going to light it but she said she would wait five minutes. She was dreading the next bit. What Kerra had failed to mention was that John had already taken a large lump of weed and had set the vaporizer going behind them. There was no smoke very little smell and it was slowly filling the room with THC. He thought it beat having to get everyone stoned to make sure they weren't infected. But there was a drawback. Killing anything at anytime, even a deadly virus, wasn't pretty and it wasn't the sort of thing you do with friends and family present. As Kerra picked up the spliff and lit it she watched everyone for a reaction. They all seemed absolutely fine. The babies were lying very quietly and very still. They looked fast asleep. Suzan was the only baby awake with her little eyes twinkling and a giggle coming from her mouth. The group were getting stoned, a little high, without even knowing it. They all watched the three babies in their pushchairs intensely. The strong smell of weed was now filling the room but Kerra didn't blow the smoke at them as this could be harmful if they were ok. She did allow it to slowly float across the room in small waves circulating like fog on a damp summer's day. The babies began waking and letting out little murmurs as if asking to be picked up. Kerra decided to give them a little longer; it wouldn't hurt and would put their minds at rest. All three were awake now, their eyes searching the room and their little hands grasping the straps which kept them safe in their push chairs. It was completely silent in the room and Kerra felt she cut the tension with a knife. A huge thumping bang startled everyone and made Kerra jump so much she nearly dropped the spliff. Everyone soon saw the culprit was Mike who had fallen over on one of Suzan's toys. Hot air rises and so had the vapors from the vaporizer. Mike, being the good host he was had stood up and allowed everyone to have a seat but was a little stoned.

"It's ok, I'm fine, just fell over Suzan's toy," Mike said. A sigh of relief filled the room and, tension broken they turned back to look at the babies. Three pushchairs were empty. They were gone, apart from Suzan who was sat giggling away at herself.

"Shit, John said in horror. The girls fell sobbing onto their mother's arms, tears of grief rolling down their pale cheeks. Kerra grabbed Suzan and brought her close to keep guard on her. She knew Suzan was fine but didn't want to seem uninvolved after all the others all let their babies take part. Mike and John started searching the room then, finding no sign of the missing children, the house and the garden. Kerra reloaded the vaporizer with some more weed. Mike had a big

house and the search would take some time. From what Kerra and John had seen the infected children were very fast. Hearing a sound from near the back door Mike ran through just in time to see the cat flap swing shut. He opened the back door to his rather larger than average garden only to see all three babies scamper at high speed over the lawn and through the hedge into a neighboring garden. He went through into the lounge.

"They got away through the cat flap," Mike said loudly. The cries and wails of the young mothers made it difficult to be heard. Silence fell as he spoke "They went through the hedges and I lost them. They were very quick," Mike looked at their disbelieving faces.

"We'd best be going now before anyone turns up for us," John stood, realising that the virus would be after them again and soon.

"We could take Suzan to the coast for a few days where she will be safe," Janice offered, "we have a caravan there that no one knows about it. It's our retreat."

"You never told me," Kerra said accusingly.

"Well that was cos it was our little love nest," Janice smiled, "No children allowed."

"Too much info Mother!" Kerra was mildly appalled, "thanks though, that would be a good idea. I don't know what we're going to do but I'm pretty sure they'll come after us. Can I borrow your car?"

"There's a van in the yard that might be better. It's not traceable to any address except for the business. It should throw them off the trail for a bit," Mike said, handing the keys to John.

"What are your plans Sally? Kerra asked "they'll be here soon."

"I'll follow you and find Louise and Emma and see if their children are ok," Sally said grimly.

"You know where she lives?" Kerra asked.

"No, but we could phone her and go round," suggested Sally.

"We should all stick together really," John said "it will be safer. Let's all take the van."

"I'll hide the car; park it off road around the corner or something," Sally said.

Sally gently gathered her daughters who were still in shock and crying as if their hearts were broken and shepherded them into the van. Janice and Mike left quickly with Suzan. John gathered the vaporizer, weed and Mike's laptop into a bag and got in the van with Kerra. The van only had five seats so everyone was pretty squashed.

"What's the laptop for?" Kerra asked.

“We can’t all stay in this van and they will find us if we go home, I thought we could rent something on line and drive there later,” John said.

“Cool, but won’t they trace your bank transactions?” Kerra asked.

“Yes but I’ll book, pay cash on arrival and draw everything I can today on my card before it gets stopped or something,” John explained.

John drove straight to his bank in Kimberly and drew out ten thousand pounds on the spot. Kerra booked them in at a campsite in Tuxford for a month in a static caravan under a false name, Mr. and Mrs. Peterson. ‘Easy to remember,’ she thought.

Sally phoned Louise but couldn’t reach her or Emma so they decided to make for the campsite first instead.

The drive to the campsite took about half an hour. It was nice to get out into the countryside but John and Kerra were aware that there were animals everywhere that they couldn’t see. John booked in as soon as they reached the campsite, getting it out of the way so they had somewhere to stay while they came up with a plan of action for fighting the virus.

There was a bustle as they explored the caravan. John sat down and put the TV on. He was looking for news of what had happened or been reported. He also brought a paper for the same reason. The girls had gone to the bathroom together after one of them came up with the idea of changing their hair colour so they wouldn’t be recognized and using tanning products. They had even bought John hair dye and some clippers to give him a trim. He was pretty sure however that the virus would recognize him when it saw him but if their pictures were all over the news they would need to make some alterations. He listened to the international, local news and then he did the text news. There was no mention of arrests or anything. He Googled the search into the computer and nothing came up. It was as if the Isle of Mull never happened or he had never existed. He trawled the net to look at previous press releases but they had been totally wiped. Why, he thought. The only possible reason can be that there are too many of them just in the right places. How many positions would you need to write history and control what people remember? Surely the reporters camped on his doorstep must have an idea something was up. He found the hot line numbers for the big newspapers but when he rang them up and told them that he had been arrested they weren’t interested. The government had placed a ban on reporting anything to do with ‘The scorched earth survivors’ as they were known, he was informed, to allow survivors to get on with their lives. After the trouble with phone hacking, all the papers were playing ball. The members of parliament weren’t happy about losing their nice expenses accounts and had been harsh on the reporters. This gave John an idea. No one was going to listen to him until he



could provide proof; he needed to record and display the virus and show how it worked to the rest of the world. He searched successfully for a local electrical shop where he brought a camcorder. Reporters were only given a short length of time to report old stories and then they had to pursue new ones. He just had to get a new story to them that they would jump at and at the same time kill off the virus. He knew the infected would be meeting at Newstead Abbey every Monday evening and thought that this was probably his best chance. The girls had been in the bathroom for about two hours and he could hear that they were still crying and comforting each other. He couldn't imagine what they must be going through knowing their adored babies were part of the virus. When Kerra emerged from the bathroom she had jet black hair and looked quite different and a little chavy, with her fake tan showing.

"What do you think?" Kerra asked.

"I think you didn't need to do it. I can't find one report of Mull or us, not anything," John said before explaining what he had been doing for the last two hours. Kerra was a little disappointed that he hadn't commented on her new look but listened and took in what he was saying.

"I think the British government probably know about this virus and are playing along with it, terrified of the deaths that would happen if they acted. They're watching it just like the Americans, scared of what might happen," Kerra said.

"Do you feel safe to go home?" John asked.

"No."

"Let's kill it then," John sounded determined.

"The government will argue that we caused the mess if it goes tits up," Kerra said.

"I brought a camcorder just for that purpose and the next stop is the army surplus stores at the cattle market," John said.

"What for?"

"I thought we would do some research at Newstead Abbey but I don't want to be seen," John answered.

"We're no action men John but I know if they are meeting there they must be using the reception rooms they use for the weddings. It's Sunday tomorrow so lets dye your hair and give you a new look and then we'll check it out," Kerra said.

"Ok but how is this going to help us?"

"We have a plan. There is nobody more terrifying than women who have had their children defiled let me tell you," Kerra said solemnly.

Kerra led John into the bedroom where the women were waiting to give him

a new look. Kerry was a trainee hairdresser and knew exactly what to do. One hour later John emerged from the bedroom. All he could smell was fake tan. He walked into the bathroom and looked at the mirror.

"I look like I own a chain of corner shops and my last name is Patel," John said to Kerra.

"Good isn't it," Kerra said, trying not to laugh.

"How long does this stuff last? How much did you use? If the virus can tell if you're pregnant, can it tell you wearing fake tan?" John asked.

"It'll fade in a couple of months. Stop it, we'll find the rest out on Monday," replied Kerra.

Sally came out of the bedroom with the other girls who managed a brief smile at John's woeful expression and sorry face.

"I still can't get hold of the other two," Sally told them.

"They must have them by now," Kerra said, shaking her head sadly.

John put on the news as the girls, who had taken over the decision making process, surfed the net. They were looking for something but he didn't know what. He noticed had a news report come in of a two car pile up that had left three adults dead. Two children had survived the accident on the Newark to Nottingham A52. The names Tom, Louise and Emma were given together with photographs of the dead. Feeling desperately sad, John told the others. They gathered around the TV and stared at the news report. It could have been any of them. Tears were rolling down the girls faces. They had grown up with Emma and John saw the pain of loss turn almost instantly into hate and anguish. The girls sat in the corner together comforting each other but Sally held back the tears and fought through the pain. You could see her turn it into anger and resentment. Sally turned the TV down and made a phone call.

"I wish to hire out one of your reception room for a formal meeting for the evening. Would it be available on the 29<sup>th</sup>? Yes? Lovely. What caterers would you recommend? That's very helpful; do you have their contact details? Thank you very much, I will ring back to confirm the booking tomorrow," Sally said in a rather posh accent.

"This is the firm who cater on a Monday evenings," explained Sally.

"I've heard of this company," Kerra said. "They own a small chain of sandwich shops throughout Nottingham; they use mainly female staff as well."

"There's only so many ways into the hall itself," Kayleigh said, drying her tears, "we should have a drive over and see which ones they lock last."

"What's happening," John asked.

"We're going to steal the catering truck and uniforms go into Newstead

Abbey and poison as many of the evil monsters as we can,” Sally announced, glaring at John as if she expected him to try to dissuade her.

“What if they are not all infected but just working for them?” John asked.

“We need to do a little shopping for that,” Kerry said.

“Ok what do I do?” asked John.

“Not sure yet, you’re our back up,” Kerra told him.

“Oh,” said John, who had been expecting something to do.

“We’re going shopping and will be back in an hour. I’ve got my phone but I don’t want to get pulled because there are too many in the van,” Kerra said taking a grand out of the cash bag.

They all left John to himself and, predictably, he surfed the internet and listened to news. He was trying to see the bigger picture of why the virus had decided to set up base in Nottingham. There must be reasons but unless you were going to invade why? There are far nicer places to live for a start. He looked up the searches on American search engines trying to find a link to the Americans who had died two months earlier. Nothing came up. There were conspiracy theories spread all over the net but nothing solid he could put his finger on. John got bored and decided that he would build a secret weapon, while the girls were gone. He tinkered with the vaporizer and looked at how it worked. He took some money and went to the camp shop. He looked around and found a caravan battery and a power inverter, some duct tape, shopping trolley, a wind up toy, some Nottingham lace gift dollies and a small sewing kit. His plan was to create a vaporizer that didn’t need reloading. The weed would be pulled across the heater section of the vaporizer trapped in premade sections of lace for continual THC could be released. The vaporizer heats the weed and this releases the THC. This way it would fill a roomful of THC giving you a protective air filled space which could be used as a virus road block. He saw the only problem was that you may pass out from getting too stoned if you weren’t used to it. The girls were soon back and John had hardly noticed the time go by. They had lots of bags of sporting goods by the look of it. They took out a pile of crossbows and baseball bats and several knives.

“Not taking any chances are you. That could take out an elephant,” John said, admiring the crossbows marked as 175 pounds.

They could have got five years each for what they had in the bags.

“I wanted to be prepared. They will have guns and I can’t get them so I bought these. We’re going to tip the arrows in resin,” Kerra said, pulling out a large lump of soft block.

“Where did you get that from?” John asked, “It looks really good stuff.”

“Some guys tried to mug us coming out of the hunting shop in

Northampton,” Kerra explained.

“Are you alright?” John asked, concerned.

“Men are very obliging when you stick a knife in their nuts,” Sally interrupted, smiling grimly.

“It didn’t seem like you were gone that long,” John said, suddenly noticing the time.

“I brought food,” Kerra said placing several large bags of Chinese food on the table in front of him. “You look worried?”

“I’m just scared of losing you and don’t want you to get hurt,” John explained.

“We will be fine,” Kerra gave John a big reassuring hug, “the weapons are in case we need them only, I brought plenty of ammo for running if need be.”

John opened the Chinese and stopped pouting because he had been left out of the planning. He liked planning strategy; it was like playing chess to him. They finished their Chinese and settled in for an early night so they were rested for the morning. John cuddled close to Kerra and held her all night. He hated war and this was what they were declaring. Hopefully they would win.

### **Chapter Nineteen: This Is Where Byron Took Loads of Drugs [Home](#)**

All of them were up early and planning on eating out at a little burger wagon near the M1 that they had spotted the day before. John was going to be driving that morning and had rolled an emergency spliff in case they ran into any nasty’s viruses while they were out. They were sizing up Newstead and checking the layout before they went so they didn’t ‘fuck it up’ as John so politely put it. They needed to know where people were going to be and where the kitchens were. After all, they would be providing a service.

“Its big isn’t it,” Sally said, not expecting anything so grand.

“Isn’t this where Dracula was written?” Kerry asked.

“No, Byron liked taking drugs; opium and mushrooms or so it was rumored. Byron challenged Mary Shelly and John Polidori to tell a ghost story each at a villa in Germany I think it was. It’s rumored that they all got wasted and had trips that were similar,” explained John lighting the spliff and then rolling another one.

“Frankenstein, the first zombie movie ever,” Kerra said “Do you think they met the virus then?”

“Who knows? They did take loads of drugs, they might have,” John replied.

“Do you think Bob Marley knew about the virus?” Kerry asked.

“I think people smoke weed and have for thousands of years for pain. They probably didn’t know about the virus. Getting high feels good, like getting pissed, that’s why people do it,” Kerra said.

“Yeah taking drugs makes you feel good, I mean you don’t see people digging up foxgloves and trying to smoke them. That would kill them,” John said.

“Are foxgloves poisonous? They’re everywhere and have nice flowers.” Kayleigh was outraged.

“Yeah, dangerous as hell, Hemlock is the same. They have some strange restrictions on drugs. You can grow poison on your garden legally, look at paracetamol; it comes from a plant that grows in the ground in your garden. Could you imagine them banning sales of paracetamol plant in case of overdose?” John said ranting jokingly.

“Can we concentrate on the matter at hand and not get too stoned,” Sally chided them softly.

“Yeah we’re doomed to failure if we were to get too stoned! We just couldn’t be arsed about some killer virus,” they all sat laughing for a good ten minutes as John had been passing round the spliff. Kerra got some chocolates out and passed them round until their glazed eyes became sober again. John reversed into the nearest parking bay to the huge house and they clambered out.

As soon as they entered the main building they completed a tour of the building, quickly finding the reception rooms but no kitchens. They eventually came to the conclusion that the caterers must use the café outside and bring any hot drinks inside to serve. They continued their reconnaissance, memorizing routes in and out of the building as well as ensuring that everyone knew their role like the back of their hand. The size and layout of the place meant they would never be able to watch everyone coming and going. They had to just hope that all their victims would be in one room. Sally did her thing and checked out the reception rooms, persuading a polite council worker to give her a guided tour just in case they had missed anything. They stayed all day and ate at the café to get the layout. They wanted to see what happened as a matter of routine and how it all shut down for the evening and what security was present. It appeared, like many council run projects, that the workers did everything but there didn’t appear to be evening security in sight, which probably meant that it was done by a private firm. Predictably, all the entrances were shut bar one in the evening and that one was on the main road from Nottingham. They knew now which direction the caterers would be coming from. All they had to do now was intercept them on their way in. They had timed the journey from Nottingham to Newstead Abbey but the caterers might come from several different shops belonging to the chain and they didn’t know which one. They would have to intercept them on a main road and that was hard and risky. They also had the option of following the caterers in and pretending to be part of their group. John

was worried it was all going to go wrong. There were too many things that could happen. The girls had however managed to acquire clothing that looked almost the same as the catering company's uniform. They returned to the caravan and discussed their plans, mulling them over for several hours to the point where they thought they had the plan down perfectly and that they had thought of everything.

The next day brought tension to the caravan. The girls were busy preparing everything ready for the night time assault. When everything was ready to their satisfaction they sat impatiently tapping their feet and pacing, trying to think of anything they might have missed. Kerra was feeling positively sick and went to throw up. She wasn't expecting to be so nervous but what John said the night before made her think of Suzan and her safety and what she could lose. After what seemed like an endless wait it was finally time for them to load up the van and drive to the Newstead Abbey main entrance. They waited at the entrance, checking their watches for what seemed like an age. They weren't sure what time the meeting started. Eventually the catering van arrived and they followed it along the tree lined road until it parked up in front of the outdoor café. They watched the caterers getting out and saw that there were only four of them, all women. It looked as if John would be staying in the car for now at least. He wasn't happy about it and wanted to be close to Kerra in case anything went wrong but this was a stealth killing or supposed to be. The caterers went straight into the kitchen carrying trays of ready made sandwiches, cakes and rolls. They put a Burco on for hot water and Kerra watched them prepare pots of coffee into large transferable flasks to take to the main house. The plan hadn't accounted for when they would exactly take the places of the caterers as they hadn't known enough about what point in their routine would be the safest to intercept them. They had planned to poison the food with the block. This proved to be a mistake as the four caterers were now taking the food to the main house. Kerra stealthily, if rather clumsily, climbed out of the van and followed them inside. Cars had started pulling up outside, people were arriving for the meeting. Kerra spotted where the caterers were setting up; not in the grand reception room but in the main hall. Her heart was racing as she quickly ran back to the van and explained to the others where the meeting would be held. The girls had, with very little time, torn resin into small chunks and tossed them into the tea and coffee pots while Kerra was away.

"I don't think it's going to work," Kerra said anxiously.

"Why," asked Sally.

"The resin need to be melted into a fat, like yogurt or milk or butter or it just doesn't work," Kerra explained.

“Plan b,” Sally said.

“What’s plan b?” asked John.

“Mug the caterers, wait for the room to fill up and do some old fashioned zombie killing,” explained Sally.

“That’s mad. You don’t know how many of them there are in there,” John protested.

The girls, laden with bags full of weapons, waited for the caterers to come back for the beverages. As John watched the four caterers walked down from the main house. The girls were on them in a minute. They had the shocked waitresses cuffed up and stashed away in the café within minutes. Not a scream had been allowed to escape.

“Right John, wait here and if it kicks off you come in to help. We’ll see if this coffee and tea works first,” Kerra said, giving him a big kiss.

The girls, toting the bags of weapons took the flasks up to the main house. John thought it was a terrible plan to wait there and so took his secret weapon and a baseball bat for a walk to look into the window of the main hall. He watched as the girls walked into the hall where about twenty men were standing in groups, talking animatedly to each other. He saw the children at the same time as Kerra whose eyes widened visibly with fear. Kerra felt her stomach churn. This was such a bad idea. The children would recognize them immediately. Just as she had decided to try to alert the others a man walked into the room.

“Would everyone like to take a seat?” A rather portly middle aged man took to the stage; obviously he was leading the meeting.

The crowd of men assembled themselves round the tables while the small babies climbed the chairs and sat on the edge of the stage. At this point Kerra knew something was wrong. They were all obviously waiting for something to happen. And happen it did: the real caterers walked in holding pistols fitted with silencers and pointed them at the girls.

“Well it appears that the first item on our agenda has now been resolved and the remaining island survivors are now captured,” Marcus said, standing on the table.

“We don’t want any more messes like that one Marcus,” a man the end of the table said sternly.

“Hear, hear,” the assembled group called.

“Kerra, you appear to be of use to us again, the rest can go to the ward,” the portly man had moved to stand in front of her.

“What do you want of me?” Kerra asked.

“My dear Charles here has cancer and will need the use of a new baby, which by the look of you, will be conceived any moment,” the man said calmly,

looking amused at Kerra's expression of horror.

"I think I might have something to say about that," John said walking in the room.

"I think that baseball bat is no match for the browning pistol, now be a good chap and join the lady. We will deal with you after our meeting. We're only booked for hour," the man said.

"Why Nottingham?" John asked angrily "Why not live in peace on an island somewhere away from man? You don't need us."

"That is a very good question and is exactly why we are here. You see there is nowhere left where we can hide or live in peace. Mankind, although he is the second most evolved creature, destroys everything he touches and needs to be culled," replied the man.

"So? You could represent yourself however you wanted in a parliament or government and work toward the future of everyone but instead you just want to kill," John argued.

"We need to kill; your political systems don't work and are corrupted by power and greed. We have seen businessmen bribe politicians with directorships, shares, and holidays. Even your care home inspectors are bribed in this very way, especially when they are owned by doctors, just so they can make a few extra pounds. What is work but a bribe to live or to survive? Strange that you wouldn't take a bribe from us and just walk away," the man said.

"Well there are more important things than money and power. Feeling safe is one and I understand that very well now," John answered, "That's why I'm here. With you in existence I don't feel safe and can't trust anyone or any living thing,"

"As I said, we'll deal with you afterwards. I'm sure we can find a fitting arrangement for you once we have detoxed you," the man said, signaling for the caterers to take tighter control over their prisoners.

With the prisoners held at gunpoint in the corner, the meeting began. The first agenda item was a discussion about the children. John learnt that the locked ward, which they thought was run by men researching the virus, was in fact a prison for those in the virus society who wished to go back to the old ways. They advocated mass extinction of the human race and to wait for the next intelligent life to evolve. They were now at large, hence the reason so many viruses being present at Nottingham. To bring them under control again meant mass extinction for Britain as virus would take on virus and war would result. a big debate raged as to the future of the species. Some were arguing that they needed to move into space as the planet would be made uninhabitable soon by human hands and the only way the virus would survive would be to take on amoeba form for several



thousands of years.

John and Kerra were eavesdropping with astonishment when they heard a gagging noise and looked up. Their captors appeared to be ready to vomit. One by one they slid to the floor in rapid succession, choking on the vapors released by the improvised vaporizer John had turned on before entering the hall. Black slime poured from their mouths. In the rush for the guns lying on the floor that followed John found himself struggling, two of the men trying to drag him away from the nearest abandoned weapon. They soon went down as Sally and Kerra's crossbow bolts unerringly flew across the room. The virus carriers were struggling, fighting to get out of the room but the girls were intent on wholesale slaughter. At least ten of the infected were down and several more were choking helplessly on the floor. The children, faster than those with adult bodies, had escaped out of the door and were running, scattering for safety with two of the girls in hot pursuit tracking at least five escapees. They caught four easily but the final one got away. Blood and carnage were everywhere as John and the girls regrouped in the main hall.

"It's war then," John said.

"Looks like it," Kerra answered, no regret in her voice.

They watched as the rest of the virus carriers died, vomiting bile and gagging until their borrowed bodies gave out. John scanned the paperwork left on the table and saw there were lists of facilities and installations spread across the country, complete with names of people who had been captured or killed. People who had been bribed or who were on the payroll were also named.

Exhausted John and Kerra sat on the floor watching the dying convulsions of the virus. They were exhausted. Sally and her girls were leaning on the wall, huddled together for comfort. They knew they had to leave soon. Just as John dragged himself to his feet they heard the noise of chopper rotors whirling directly overhead. It sounded as though there were a lot of them, more even than in Mull. The windows imploded, forcing them to crouch down, arms protecting their heads from the flying glass as armed soldiers descended, surrounding them on all sides. They dropped their weapons as commanded and the officer from the island walked in.

"Well done, ladies and gentlemen. It looks as though you missed one or two though. Colonel Roger Dunnstable of Her Majesty's secret service, also known as Captain Hislop for undercover purposes," he said, taking out an official badge and showing it to them.

"And are you going to kill us or take us away and lock us up for murder," Kerra asked tiredly.

"Not today, you're free to go after signing this piece of paper," he replied

jovially.

“So we can’t talk about this,” Sally summed up the situation.

“No, but I can tell you that we will have the rest of them rounded up today I’m sure,” the Colonel replied.

“I thought you were on their side,” John said.

“The American’s aren’t the only ones to watch people,” the Colonel said “I was undercover for six years, awful job. This is the last of it I hope.”

John took out a spliff and lit it up and slowly smoked it, looking while the others signed the paperwork.

“We will of course, give compensation for your time and losses. Please remember though that it is illegal to smoke or possess cannabis and if you were to get arrested I would not be able to help, no matter how many zombies you say it protected you from.”

John, Kerra and the rest drove home to snuggle down for a well earned rest, until the story continues.