

Chris's greatest attribute is his imagination. I never know what story or poem he will bring in. He has a talent for writing short stories that leave the reader certain of the character's fate, without the gory details.

~Megan Selje, Tutor

Outbreak

By Chris McCullough

Danny Jacobs just finished pulling an empty tray from the rack to replace it with a new tray full of quarter pounder meat. Danny hated working at McDonald's, but it was a job and he needed money. He had been in debt ever since he bought his own car and had to start to pay his parents for insurance. Today he had looked through three newspapers looking for other jobs, but none seemed to pay nearly as much as McDonald's did.

"Danny, are you leaving?" Joan said in her usual annoyed tone.

"Ya, I have a date tonight and I've been here since eleven." Danny said as he removed his apron.

"Well you're going to have to stay until nine!" Joan belted out with the most evil smirk Danny had ever seen.

"That's not going to work, like I said I have a date, it's at eight."

"Then I guess your going to call and cancel your date if you want to keep your job!" Joan had this way of making every person on the world hate her, but Danny also knew Joan loved to torment him for her own amusement.

"Well Joan, then I guess I quit," Danny said as he threw down his apron and walked out with Joan screaming at the top of her lungs.

Danny started his car and had to turn down the volume of his radio. He had it loud earlier for his music, but since he just started the car the CD wasn't loaded in the player and it was the radio that was blaring. While he turned the volume down, the radio was talking about some disturbance two states over in Iowa. He didn't care and pushed the button to switch the player from radio to CD. He then relaxed and let heavy metal drown out the noise of the outside world.

Danny's drive home was filled with thoughts of the night and the date. When he got to his house he parked his car, went inside, and got dressed. It wasn't a "super formal dress occasion" as Danny would say it, but he still wanted to look nice. So he put on a button-up shirt and dress pants. He then went and sat down to watch TV until Cheri arrived.

Danny had it planned that Cheri would be dropped off at his house and then he would drive her home after the date. They were going to go to a semi formal Italian restaurant and a movie afterwards. At around eight he began to get worried, since she still hadn't arrived or phoned. They had planned on her getting dropped off at seven. He picked up his phone and dialed the number he had dialed many times before, but to his surprise, when he put the receiver to his ear, he heard a message he had never heard before, "We are sorry for the inconvenience but at this time all phone lines are being reserved for military and police personnel."

Danny's distress multiplied as he listened to the message, but he didn't know what to do. He decided that he needed to know what was going on, so he turned on the TV. A lot of stations had recently started their new programs, but more and more stations cut to breaking news casts, and they were talking about something that couldn't be true. He switched the TV to channel 15, the only news channel he liked.

"Good evening ladies and gentlemen, sorry to interrupt your regular programming, but we have breaking news. As of the current moment, the government has yet to release a statement on what some people are calling the end of days. As many of you, the viewers, already know, the dead are rising and attacking the living. At the current moment we advise all viewers to lock all windows and doors and move to the safest room in your house." Danny couldn't believe this, it was like one of those zombie movies, but real. He quickly locked the doors and windows and went upstairs to his room to use his computer. He turned the TV behind him to the same station and went on the Internet to learn more. He surfed and learned that those that are bitten by the walking dead die six to eight hours afterwards, and then they, too, rise from the dead. Since a single bite from any of the walking dead is infectious it is spreading very quickly. He then found the site he was looking for, a whole site devoted to killing the walking dead...again.

The site detailed events of minor outbreaks all the way back to the forties but most were covered up. In the reports the army trained groups of soldiers on how to battle the undead. But most of these reports were lost, but one sentence in bold caught Danny's attention. "The head is their weakness; destroy the head by any means!" That was all the info that he needed. He moved downstairs and went to the closet and found his baseball bat. Danny put on his coat and unlocked his front door. As Danny climbed into his car he saw the pictures of Cheri and his parents on his dashboard. He wondered if Cheri and his parents were alright, but he then remember that his parents were on a trip in Antarctica, so he figured that they would be safe.

The car roared to life, and Danny turned on the lights, only to get the biggest shock in his life. There in front of his car was a person covered in blood, moaning, and that person was his old neighbor, Mr. Erikson, who had to be at least sixty. Mr. Erikson was missing his left eye, and also the area was gushing blood, making it look like a fresh

wound. His left hand only had three fingers, and the ones that were missing look as if they had been bitten off. Mr. Erikson shuffled towards Danny and hit his car, and then began to climb on the hood of the car towards Danny. He had almost no time to react to the sight. He slammed the car into reverse and floored the gas. Danny shot back just as Mr. Erikson was about to slam through the windshield. Mr Erikson rolled off of the front of the car and onto the ground, only to rise and begin to move towards Danny again. Danny looked forward into the city he was about to enter. He saw a pillar of smoke that seemed to never end and knew that this wasn't about to be the easiest thing to do. He knew that he might die, but he had to do it. Mr. Erikson shambled after Danny's car and moaned once more. His slow walk with the slight limp prevented him from following very far. Suddenly he heard a scream to his right, and for Mr. Erikson, that meant that someone was going to become his next meal.

Driving through outer Milwaukee, Danny saw the horror in the reality of the situation. The dead were lying everywhere, along with the shambling bodies of those who were now undead. Almost everyone that was dead looked as if they had been devoured, those that didn't usually got up and slowly followed after his car. Only once did he hit a zombie, and it more or less bounced off the front of his car. This made Danny think of what Cheri must be going through, and every time Danny thought of that, he slowly pushed the pedal down more.

Danny drove over the big hill that was before the turn to Cheri's house, and he saw something that he really didn't think would be there and didn't expect. A road block, and a big one at that, made of buses and trucks. Danny slammed on the brakes but it wasn't enough, he slammed into the barricade, and knocked his head into the steering wheel and was out cold. He awoke some time afterwards and found that the only thing he could move was his head. Then he heard moaning and knew he was in trouble, but could do nothing about it. He was able to turn his head to the left to see the approaching undead. It was not what he was expecting, but something he would have to deal with. The figure stumbling towards him was Cheri.

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