



INFECTED

A SHORT STORY

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by

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Derek stared into the monitors as the memory of his little sister's head being cracked open like a melon flashed into his mind. It clawed at his soul knowing the last thing she would ever see was that ghoulish creature scooping grey matter out of her skull like a water-deprived man drinking water from a river. There on the monitors was that same brain thirsty creature that had taken his sister from him. It wasn't alone. The screen was filled with them shuffling, almost reaching out, toward where he sat watching.

Derek ran his callous covered hands through his blonde military cut hair with a huff. "They just keep coming."

Mark peaked over his shoulder at the black and white monitors. "Well, they can't get us in this old silo, no matter how much they might try." He patted Derek on the shoulder trying to reassure him. The two men looked like they were cut from the same marine cloth, both wearing iron creased fatigues and polished combat boots.

Mark disappeared for a moment and came back with two army green ammo boxes with yellow lettering on the outside. He plopped them down on the decade's old console next to Derek. "Let's get your mind off those things. We need an inventory of these boxes and those in the other compartment."

Derek looked up at Mark. "Logistics?" His lips contorted just from the thought.

"Unless you have something else to do?" Clearly, he didn't. Derek hadn't moved from the monitors for hours, and it wasn't healthy to be focusing on those ghastly things.

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Help?"

Derek took another lingering look at the monitors, grabbed the ammo boxes and nodded. "Ok." The two ex-gunnery sergeants headed into the adjacent compartment of the old Launch Control Center and began to do inventory.

Carl and Ellen, the actual owners of the old ATLAS-F silo, entered the LCC just as the gunnies were leaving for the other compartment. Carl was a bit overstuffed in the midsection and wore enough bright orange and camo to look like he was about to go hunting at any moment. He sported a Grizzly Adams style beard and had a Texan twang to boot. Ellen, on the other hand, was a petite woman in both size and stature. Clothing wise, she was less attention-grabbing than her husband with khakis and a simple brown tank top. The brunette kept her hair braided to make life simpler.

Ellen settled into the red chair behind the console and took to checking out the camera monitors. She turned her attention from the camera monitors long enough to nudge her husband in the side. "Hey Honey, look at this here." Her southern accent was as thick as molasses. Carl had picked up one of his gun magazines, not paying all that much attention to her. "Honey." She nudged him again.

"What?" There was a hint of annoyance in response. He looked up from the magazine to see her pointing at the monitors.

In the monitors, a group of people were heading quickly toward the silo grounds. It was hard to be sure, but by the way, they were running they didn't appear to be zombies. Carl slapped down his magazine and spun around to Mark. "I think we've got some company."

"Company?" Mark came in and marched over to the screen to take a look still thinking it was the zombies he and Derek saw earlier.

Mark pulled his M9 from his side and popped the magazine out to check his rounds. "Let's go take care of them."

"Now wait just a minute," Carl said grabbing Mark's sleeve. "They aren't zombies."

"How do you know? They sure looked like zombies to me earlier."

"Well, look at 'em." Carl pointed at the monitors. The 8-inch screens didn't show the same creatures he and Derek had seen in them before, but that didn't convince him they weren't.

"They could be infected."

"We need to help them." Carl might have been a whack job, but he did have a heart.

"No. It's too risky!" Mark didn't like being told what to do despite all those years in the military.

Heather, a brunette of average height and build, came walking in with a cooler under her arm and a loaf of white bread. "I've got-." She paused looking around at everyone. The mood in the room was thick. "Did I miss something?" No one said anything. Mark and Carl were in a staring contest with each other. "I guess so."

"I'm going up there and letting them in," Carl said.

"No, you're not."

Carl wasn't going to argue. "My silo. My rules." Carl started to leave, but Mark grabbed his arm.

"No."

Carl shrugged off his grip and left the room. Mark cursed and followed right behind him. Ellen looked over to Heather and shook her head. "We'd better go after them before they shoot each

other.” Ellen went into the adjacent compartment where Derek was sitting and grabbed her shotgun with Heather following right behind her.

“What's going on?” Derek asked.

“Company's coming,” Ellen responded while handing Heather a pistol.

Derek looked down at the ammo boxes. “Screw this.” He pulled out his sidearm and followed the ladies to the temperature-controlled stairwell that led to the surface.

All the way up the stairs, Carl and Mark argued about opening the Entryway door. Once they started up the last bit of stairs, they could hear people banging on the Entryway door and screaming to let them inside.

At reaching the door, Carl put his hand on the door's heavy-duty deadbolt lock. “Don't do it,” Mark said lifting his gun toward Carl.

“Really? You're going to shoot me?” The pounding on the door was loud. Their screams and yells were getting more intense. “You want to tell them they have to die? We can save them!” Mark didn't lower his gun. “Fine shoot me then.” Carl turned the lock and opened the door.

“Damn it!” Mark yelled. His finger twitched on the trigger, part of him wanting to pull the trigger and part of him understood why Carl wanted to open it. He didn't serve the US government anymore, and he didn't protect its citizens, but those old commitments never quite died. He lowered his gun. “If anyone is infected, they need to be quarantined or killed.”

There wasn't time to argue. "Fine." The daylight flooded the stairway along with the people from the outside. Mark didn't want to holster his gun, but there were so many of them who were flooding in. All of them were crying and thanking them for letting them in. Derek and Heather were directing them inside and how to get to the unfinished medical ward. Ellen was trying her best to comfort them. One of the few last ones were in a roaring panic.

"They're coming! They're coming!"

Mark didn't need to ask who. "We have to close the door!" Carl was still helping people inside. "Carl! Now!"

Mark was getting antsy. He wanted the door closed, and then he wanted everyone inspected for bites or infection. If they were infected, it might already be too late. He tried not to think about it. Carl was about to close the door when he saw a little girl running toward the door in the distance. She was squalling for her mommy. From below Heather, a woman spun around. "Emily? Emily!"

Heather cursed knowing what she needed to do. "I'll get her for you. Just keep going." Heather darted up the stairs. Mark grabbed her arm.

"Where are you going?" He looked up to Carl. "Close it!"

"I can't! There's a little girl out here!" Carl yelled back.

"I'm going to get the girl; cover me." Heather broke free and raced past Carl to get to the girl. Carl could see the zombies coming.

"Hurry! Hurry! They're coming!" Carl yelled.

Heather scooped up the little girl and fired a few shots at a nearby zombie that was quickly making its way to them. From the doorway, Mark began firing rounds trying to keep the zombies at

bay. There were several taken out uncomfortably near the door, and their numbers were growing. Heather winced as she hopped over one to get to the Entryway. She felt a tug on the back of her leg but managed to get clear of it. Carl slammed the door and bolted it behind Heather. The little girl's mother rushed to her little girl and held her tightly in her arms. The zombies on the outside began banging on the door. There was no way they could get in past that point, but it didn't make them any more comfortable hearing them beat on the door.

Mark was cautious. He trained his gun on the ragtag group of people as they were funneled down the stairs and towards the medical ward. Ellen was already administering first aid when Mark got down there. Carl was trying to help his wife, but he wasn't even close to being a nurse. But luckily for Carl, the people appeared to be more psychologically hurt than physically. Mark, Derek, and Heather were visually inspecting everyone as best they could.

As far as they could tell, no one appeared to be infected. Feeling there was no immediate threat, Mark and Derek returned to the LCC to see what was going on outside. The security cameras confirmed their hunch that the zombies hadn't left. They were just banging on the Entryway door hoping they'd eventually make their way in. Human strength, even if bolstered by the infection, wouldn't get them through those doors but they weren't going to stop. They panned the cameras around to see what else was going on outside. There were more zombies on the way and by the looks of it their numbers were growing.

Back in the medical ward, Heather's leg was burning, but she didn't say anything. She merely ignored it and kept helping Ellen with the others. They weren't sure what to do with them all. Having all those people would certainly impact the number of supplies they

had. That would be something they'd have to figure out in time. Right now, they needed a place to stay. The silo itself was still mostly unfinished, but there were a few levels they could use as housing in the meantime. "Carl honey, can you take those we've checked down to the next level and set them up with blankets and some food?"

"Of course." He said, happy to be free from what he was doing. "You two going to be okay in here?"

They both nodded to him. "Yeah, we've got this. Go."

Carl looked at the mass of people who were still somewhat panicked but relieved to be inside. "Okay folks, follow me. Those who've not been treated, stay here. I'll be back for you in a little bit."

The group of weary people followed behind him as he led them down to the next level where they'd be staying. The level itself was still fairly empty, save the cardboard boxes lined one corner of the room. The walls had a fresh coat of white paint to cover up the old seafoam green that they were before, and the room was newly carpeted in brown indoor-outdoor carpet tiles. The adhesives and paint still clung to the air like a new car smell. Carl walked over to a grouping of the boxes and opened them up. He pulled out several blankets and MREs, meals ready to eat, and began handing them out to everyone.

"I know this isn't much, but this is where you can stay." He could tell they appeared grateful, even if they only showed it in glimmers. "Just find a spot to call home, and I'll be right back." Carl left to go back upstairs to the medical ward while the others found their spots. Everyone that was left upstairs had been checked out by Ellen and Heather. He gathered the last lot of them and took them downstairs to be with the others. Once everyone was downstairs and had their

supplies, he gave them a quick tour of the level and where the bathroom facilities were.

Back in the medical ward, Ellen and Heather were putting up supplies into cabinets where the doors hadn't even been installed yet. The sheetrock walls were still unpainted, and on the counter next to where they had the medical supplies laid out, several putty knives and wall compound containers sat undisturbed since their last use. Ellen noticed Heather was rubbing her calf. "You okay?" She asked.

Heather nodded. "Yeah." As quick as the words left her mouth, Heather fainted. Ellen ran over to her side. "Heather! Wake up, honey. Are you okay?"

Heather was already coming around. "Yeah. What, what happened?"

"You fainted sweetheart." Ellen helped her get to her feet. It was immediately clear she was dizzy when Heather stood up. "Okay. Maybe it's best that you sit down for a bit." Ellen made her sit down on the newly installed exam table.

Heather rubbed her leg again while she was sitting there. "What's going on with your leg?"

"It's nothing."

"Are you sure? Let me see."

"That's okay. You don't have to."

"I know but let me have a look just to make sure." Heather was hesitant but did as Ellen requested. She hiked up her pants leg to let Ellen get a better look. There was a scrape across the back of her calf that had broken the skin but not enough to bleed through her pant leg. "Hmm. Just a scrape. We can fix that right up in a jiffy."

Ellen turned and went back over to the cabinet where she had just returned the medical supplies. She grabbed a bottle of Peroxide, some cotton balls and a bandage from the open cabinet space. Behind her, Heather's eyes rolled back into her head, and she fell backward onto the table with a thud. Ellen dropped everything and rushed to her friend's side. "Heather!" Heather wasn't coming to this time. Ellen grabbed her stethoscope from the counter and began to check her vitals, both at her wrist and her neck. "Sweetie. Come on now. Heather!" Ellen leaned in to get a better look at her eyes as she opened Heather's eyelids. Suddenly Heather lunged forward off the table and took a bite out of Ellen's neck. Blood sprayed everywhere as Ellen screamed. She tried to pull away, but Heather's jaw was locked onto her neck. Ellen fought to get free, but in a few moments, she dropped to the floor, completely limp. Heather just sat there with blood all over her face and clothes looking down at Ellen. There was no expression. Ellen began to convulse on the floor. Just as sudden as it has started, it stopped. Her eyes opened. Ellen was just like Heather. Blank. The two of them got to their feet and began making their way to Carl and the other refugees.

Carl was still making sure everyone was getting settled in when blood covered Ellen and Heather entered the level. The people were trying to relax and eat something. Heather locked the door behind them. Heather turned toward the group of people, the same little girl she had rescued minutes before was first to come into view. Like a lioness to her prey, Heather stalked over to the little girl and her mother. The little girl's eyes got big at the sight of Heather covered in blood and let out a blood-curdling scream that drew everyone's attention. But it was too late. Heather and Ellen began their attack without remorse or care. No matter how the frightened people fought back, it was useless. They were dead. No, they would be undead. When the door to the level re-opened, every woman, man,

and child, including the little girl and Carl was one of them. The wave of them made their way up the levels toward the LCC. When they got to the LCC, they split off into two groups. One group would continue up the stairs to the Entryway door and re-open it, allowing the other zombies outside to get in. The other group would flood the LCC and take the men.

Ellen, Heather, and Carl entered the LCC. Mark and Derek were talking back and forth while looking at the monitors. "Look at them. They're just waiting. It's creepy." Derek said.

Mark shook his head in agreement. "I take it everyone is taken care of down there?" Mark said hearing them enter. He received no answer. Mark turned around to see them almost upon him. They were covered in blood and obviously not "human" anymore. He pulled his gun from his side. "Derek!" Derek turned to see Mark empty his clip into them. He too brought his gun to bear and began to fire. The slide on Mark's gun slid back with smoke. He was empty, but they were still coming. Behind them, he saw the control center fill with more of the newly created zombies. He reloaded his gun as quickly as he could. Derek and Mark retreated to the adjacent compartment of the LCC. Behind them was the ammo boxes Derek was inventorying earlier. Derek's slide went back. Mark covered for him as he reloaded. In the box, he saw several grenades. Mark looked down long enough to see Derek pick up a grenade. "Throw it!" Mark yelled.

Derek pulled the pin from the grenade and threw it as Mark continued to fire. The gunny Sergeants hit the deck as the grenade went off, taking several zombies with it. Ellen and Heather took the brunt of the blast, but to their amazement, it wasn't enough to completely take them down.

"I need more!" Mark yelled at Derek.

“Just a sec!” Derek got to his feet and tossed him two clips from the box. A zombie lunged at Mark as he loaded his gun and sunk its teeth into his arm. Mark fired his gun point-blank as he yelled. In that instant, in the back of his mind, he knew it was too late for himself. He was now infected. There was a chance he wasn’t but not a good one. He swallowed that dark truth and kept trying to take down as many as he could. Derek was trying to do the same, but he was wearing down. He grabbed a few more grenades and pulled the pins of each one. He hurled them toward the door and did his best to take down the rest of the ones in the room.

Boom. Boom. Boom. The grenades went off. A sheering pain shot up Derek’s leg. He hadn’t noticed that Heather’s torso had moved across the floor and had firmly bit his leg. He fired a few shots into her head, and she dropped. The grenades had cleared the room of zombies, but they were regrouping outside. Mark rushed toward the door, closed and locked it. They meticulously went to each zombie, including what was left of Ellen and Carl and fired shots into their heads to make sure they stayed dead. The zombies on the other side of the door began to bang on the door to get in. Mark and Derek looked at each other, trying to catch their breath. They both saw the wounds they each had.

“I don’t want to become one of them.”

“I don’t either Mark.”

Mark was starting to feel lightheaded. “You have to kill me before I turn.” Derek’s stomach was in knots as he gave his friend a fresh clip.

“Then you have to kill me too.” The two loaded their clips and raised their guns. “It was an honor serving with you, gunny.”

Mark nodded. “You too. On the count of three?”

“1. 2. 3.” The two men squeezed the trigger on their guns firing off a shot into each other’s head. The two men dropped to the floor, not to rise again.

THE END

NOTE: This story first appeared in the [Once Bitten ~ Never Die](#) anthology in November 2011.