

Coldland

United Kingdom, England

Year: 2064

I hear a ringing in my ears and moan aggressively. It's 5:00 am which makes me want to destroy this vicious little thing. *Why do I actually have to live this life?*

I leave my lovely bed with depressive and suicidal thoughts, only to go to the bathroom so I can join society without scaring it to death. In the meantime I watch the news on the screen next to the bathroom mirror. Yes, our world -I mean the government- thinks it's necessary to use screens everywhere possible. I have a little feeling that they might survey us with them. However, I may be a little paranoid about that.

My face begins to shine as I notice the bittersweet smell of Arabian coffee beans, while I enter my tiny sanitized kitchen. My second favourite place in this flat.

I wait till my breakfast comes out of the machine. It's pretty difficult to explain how this machine works if you don't know it yourself. As far as I know it makes your meal, which you select on the screen, with *healthy ingredients* – if you define powder-packs and disgusting-looking liquids as healthy.

Our world is irrationally anxious about diseases, pathogens and anything that can harm people and their efficiency. Unfortunately, this leads to wearing masks outside, having cleaning-robots everywhere and even temperature measurements through camera surveillance. The government, especially Harris Thompson, justifies its actions with an improved society that is healthier than ever. But that's just the tip of the iceberg. At the time you are born, you get thousands of checks; genetics, intelligence, motoric behaviour and everything like that. The schools have a similar system and categorise you accordingly. However, people with low intelligence and health problems don't exist in our world. They are sent to a different planet named "next opportunity" and you never see them again. Harris Thompson explains, that the world has to be separated into different colonies to exist in peace. Well, personally I don't think that this is the best way to live. Families get divided and destroyed. Just think about how you would feel if someone took your new-born away because it has a high risk to develop cancer. Sounds crazy and cruel to me.

The machine makes a weird noise which tells me that my breakfast is ready to eat. Unbelievable how that powder mixture creates a beautifully cooked omelette. I wait about 30 minutes after eating, so I can brush my teeth again. *Ugh I am so tired of this routine.*

After brushing my teeth, I hand out my swab test to a small machine in my flat, which analyses my health. Each time the test shows a health percentage of 80 to 90 percent, I get a mandatory doctor's appointment. I don't think that this is a coincidence.

Well, I have 94 percent. Yey.

Before I leave my flat, I attach my digital sign on my blouse. It's a screen which tells everyone, how healthy you are. Crazy, right? Even more absurd is the fact, that there are places that you can only enter if you have a specific percentage. My friend didn't want to meet me, because I had 85 percent on one particular day. I have never seen anyone with a percentage under 70 so far- maybe I just live in a healthy city. I don't know.

While I close my front door, I see my neighbour looking into my direction. I greet him with a smile and make my way to the university. Every time I walk this path, I feel like something is watching me, but whether I turn around or not there is nothing. As I walk through the forest, I get a strange feeling in my stomach. Have you ever had the feeling that something is going wrong? Because that's how I feel right now and I can't figure out why. Normally this way calms me down- but not today.

I leave the forest and keep walking on the footpath. Strangely, I see people running towards me and I frown. *What is happening here?* While slowly walking on, people run past me with fear in their eyes.

Suddenly a shrill scream echoes in the air and my heart starts to race. I try to go a little further and notice something, which causes a shiver running down my spine. The air gets cold around me and I begin to tremble.

A woman lying on the ground with a man sitting on her while he bites her neck. The woman is screaming for help but everyone is running away. I see how she gets unconscious and decided to walk to her. But suddenly icy hands grip my arms and pull me away. "Come!" yells the man.

I follow him but every second my head turns to the woman on the ground. The man -or whatever this is- is attacking other people now. I see the corpse stand up and run to others. I am frightened. What is this?!

While the man and I are running away from this disaster, the sirens are starting. The helicopters are flying to the crime scene. Explosions, cold dark air and people screaming everywhere. My eyes are wide open and I watch the man pulling me to a red car. Why is he helping me? "Get in the car!" is all I am hearing right now. As I open the car door, I recognize that my university is burning and people trying to escape the creatures.

After closing the door, the man on the driver's seat hits the gas. "Jesus. Did you see what happened there?!" he asks. "I-I don't k-k-know. What was that?! Why did they attack each other and why the f*ck did this woman rise from the dead? Like... HOW?!" I yell. I am so confused and scared. How is this even possible?

"You saw that too? OMG. It doesn't make any sense at all! Where they ever human? Vampires? Aliens?" the man replies. "They seemed to be something like zombies actually. Like- like in the movies, you know?" I stutter. "What are we supposed to do now? Shall we hide?"

"Don't worry, I have a big house outside of town. It's safe but we should get some groceries. I don't know what the f*ck is going on and what happened there, but I don't feel good staying here," he says. "Something bad is going to happen and I can feel it in my bones." , "My name is Grayson by the way."

"Delilah," I whisper.

"What?"

"My name is Delilah. Delilah Scott," I repeat.

"Cool. Okay, I know a big grocery store here. It should be... right here. Look!" he replies and points with his finger to a store. The doors are open but it seems to be empty. "We have to be quick so get yourself a trolley and collect everything that we could need. And hygiene products of course," Grayson adds.

I walk through the sections and get everything that could be useful.

Grayson and I fill the trunk with everything and drive to his house in an hour.

Everything is so quiet and peaceful here and I note that Grayson didn't lie about the safety of his house. It's surrounded with high fences and many cameras.

He parks his car into his garage and the doors close behind us. "Now let us get everything in the house. I would like to see what is going on out there," Grayson says.

"This is not a test. This is the emergency broadcast system announcing the attack of mutated people. According to the police the species is extremely dangerous and infectious. Please stay in your house, shut the doors and activate security systems. May god be with us," says the reporter on television with a scared face.

Grayson sits down and covers his face with his hands.

I shake my head. "This can't be true."

"How do you think did this happen?" Grayson asks. "I mean, something caused this mutation, right? Did they get a virus, consume contaminated food or was this a laboratory accident?"

"I don't know." I reply, "My professor in biology talked to me about a project and asked if I wanted to join it for my PhD:"

Grayson looks surprised and raises his eyebrows. "You are doing your doctorate?"

"Yeah. I do research about humans and the effects of viruses on their DNA. But I don't believe, that this mutation was caused by a virus. I don't want to believe it." I confess.

I feel nauseous. This whole situation seems like a bad nightmare. While I am overthinking everything, I hear a ringing sound from my phone. Why does my professor call me?

I take the phone and hear heavy breathing noises from the speakers. "Ms Scott?! Are you there?" he asks quickly. "Yes. I am. What's going on there?" I respond loudly. "Does this mutation have to do anything with the project?"

"Ms Scott, I don't have a lot of time to tell you what happened. But yes, the viruses we experimented with, infected another lecturer at the university and attacked everyone. It spreads quickly and most likely via bites." he takes a break and I hear glasses shatter. "I don't know how much time I have. The whole city is infected. I-I had the theory that- that people get infected so fast because of their weak immune system. Aahhh-," he screams painfully. I panic, "Mister Williams?! Hello?! Can you hear me?"

Abruptly his screaming ends and all I can hear are animal-like noises. I hang up the phone with trembling hands. Grayson looks at me with curious eyes. "You- You were right. The virus comes from the laboratory," I explain to him.

I want to cry about this awful situation. This is the worst-case scenario I could have imagined. What should we do now? Stay in the house? For how long?

"Grayson, I am so afraid. I-I don't know you. I don't know what our next actions will be. I don't want to die." I break down. It feels liberating to let everything out.

Grayson gives me a soothing hug while he tells me, that everything will be alright but my brain is so numb that I can't say anything to him back. We've known each other for less than an hour but it feels like I've known him for ten years. I am glad he picked me up. Otherwise, I would be dead by now.

We flinch as we unexpectedly hear a crash outside. I run to the windows and see a huge crowd of zombies on the street. The mass reminds me of a tsunami.

I let out an extremely loud scream and move away from the window. Synchronously the creatures turn their head in my direction and look straight into my eyes like an animal looking at its prey.

Shit.