

Chapter 4

Liz and Pat

Pat slammed the bolts on the door to the Fort. Liz stood doubled over with her hands on her knees, breathing hard, her backpack still strapped tight. The heavy load heaved up and down like a nylon camel's hump. The golf club hung from her wrist by its lanyard.

"Are you okay? What happened? Why were you coming from the south?"

Liz straightened upright without a word and gave Pat the hand. She loosened the straps on the pack and walked out of the entry room towards the galley. Pat peered out through the wire reinforced door window, seeing nothing. He stowed the shotgun in the ready rack and followed Liz.

The three wood and backpack lay on the galley table as Pat entered. Liz was tilting back a nalgene water bottle. With half a liter down, she let go one last deep breath and turned towards Pat.

"Hi Baby."

"Hi Baby? Hi Baby? What the hell happened out there? Are you okay?" Pat was a little agitated.

"I'm fine now. Thanks for having the door ready. Thanks for having my back."

"Okay Baby, you're welcome. Can we please stop the Chip n' Dale routine? What happened? Please."

"I got jumped by a Re-Am on my way back down Queen Anne."

"Why were you coming down Queen Anne? You know I can't see you if you're not on the First Ave route."

“That’s sort of the point of alone time Sweetie, being alone. If I know you’re tracking me from the roof I’m not really alone, am I?”

Pat was so relieved he was forgetting to be pissed off. Besides, Liz wasn’t acting angry with him. Right now it was ‘Baby’ and ‘Sweetie.’ What the hell was going on? Pat was now relieved as well as confused. Think, think! Pat knew that he had to play this carefully. Maybe he wasn’t in as much trouble as he thought.

“Okay, I get that, the alone thing, really, I get it. So you were coming back down the hill on Queen Anne and...”

“I got jumped by a Re-Am, like I said. She came at me from behind a car. It was like the bitch materialized out of the goddamn bumper.”

“So it was a fast one? Did you have some distance?”

“Yes, Baby, she was pretty fast. Probably a gym bunny when she was human. And yeah, I had a solid three step clearance from the car, but it was just barely enough. I clipped her with the first shot, but it bought me some time. Took the bitch’s forehead off with the second swing.”

Do not mention the Glock. Do not mention it. The warning was like neon glowing in Pat’s brain. So she had left the pistol behind, it was her choice. Clamping down on the stupid words that were trying to bubble past his teeth, Pat watched Liz hit the water bottle again. A few drops slid from Liz’s mouth and trickled down to her beautiful throat. Hey-Zeus, he was so crazy for her.

“So, okay, you got her with the club. Cool. Good work. That year of junior varsity paid off. Then what happened? Was the Re-Am solo?”

“Well, it happened so fast, you know? I clocked her, knew she was down for good, and I took off. I never saw or heard anything else. It felt like a solo, but we can’t count on that anymore, right?”

Don’t mention that one thought Pat. Let it go Man!

“So you cleared out and, what, circled south? Why?”

“I was scared, I was running, but I still didn’t want to make it easy for any other Re-Ams did I? I made sure nothing was behind

me and then doubled back at John Street. I was getting a little winded.”

“Smart Girl. Good job. And you didn’t see any others?”

“Nothing, but I wasn’t slowing down either.”

Liz pulled out one of the kitchen chairs and sat down. She motioned Pat to do the same.

“Let’s talk, Baby.”

Uh-oh, thought Pat. Here it comes.

Liz settled in and gave Pat a long look. He was so cute when he was confused. Ah, well, let him wonder for awhile. He deserved it.

“I’ve been thinking about the Re-Ams again, why they are all so different and how they seem to be changing.”

“How the Re-Ams are changing?”

“Yes, Doofus, the Re-Ams. There isn’t anyone else, at least not around here. So remember when there were fat Re-Ams, fat and slow? And pretty stupid as well?”

“Yeah, they were easy. I like the fat ones. They must have all been car salesmen, or receptionists.”

“Or call-center ghouls. But they weren’t gym bunnies, that’s for sure. But what happened to them? The slow ones seem to be gone. Gone in what, six or eight weeks? Now it’s all the skinny ones, the fast ones.”

“Maybe they’re getting thinner. I mean, they’re all on a diet now. Fat pigs. What was that fad thing called? The Paleo diet?”

“Cute, Honey. I don’t think that’s it. I think that the fat slow Re-Ams have died off. More and more I think we are seeing the survivors, the ones that are learning to find food. I think the things are evolving.”

Pat had thought the same thing, but he had never dared to give voice to these thoughts. He always tried to put a positive spin on whatever the situation was, even if the situation was being the only two humans in a neighborhood of flesh eating monsters. At least Liz wasn’t going to dump him for a Re-Am. That was positive.

“So you think we are dealing with evolving Zom...”

“Do not say that word!” Liz said, her voice sharp.

“Sorry, evolving Re-Ams?”

“That’s it. Evolving Re-Ams. I think only the fast ones are surviving. The ones that are quick enough to catch whatever it is they are eating besides humans. Dogs, rats, birds, they have to be eating something. We don’t see them foraging at the Mety Mart.”

“I wish they would eat those fucking crows. That would be a plus.”

“What is it with you and crows? Are you listening to me?”

Focus, focus, thought Pat. “Sorry Baby. Yes, I’m listening.”

“So, if only the Re-Ams who are good hunters are surviving, it’s going to get tougher for us. There must be other human survivors out there, but we haven’t found any in our range. Almost three months without seeing or hearing a soul. All of them gone or hunted down. Except for those bastards that tried to murder us.”

Pat let out a long breath. Liz was right, of course. She was smart, Liz was. She could think long-term, plan things. Pat could fix stuff, plan immediate actions, but he knew he wasn’t a long-term guy.

“We’re going to have to plan this out.”

It was as if she was reading his mind, an all too familiar feeling for Pat.

Liz pushed back from the table and stood up.

“Have we got enough water for a splash bath?”

“Sure Baby, I stocked up the tank in the courtyard.” Pat was proud of his water management skills.

“Cool! I’m going to clean up. Why don’t you stow the shopping?”

Liz leaned down and kissed him on the forehead. She smelled of sweat and adrenalin. Her scent washed over him. She turned and walked out into the concrete courtyard, giving it a visual once over before moving out of sight to the makeshift shower.

Pat sighed and turned his attention to the backpack. He

popped the fastex buckles and started sorting through the heavy canned goods. Liz had done a good job. There had to be forty pounds of food in the growing pile, enough to keep them well fed for a week. Unzipping the top pouch of the pack, he let the more fragile treasures slip out onto the table. There were batteries for the flashlights. Those were getting scarce. A few bottles of girl stuff and, what the hell? Two boxes of condoms.

“Hey Big Boy, you gonna sit there all day?”

Pat looked up to see Liz wearing only a T-shirt and a few drops of water, water which fell to the floor of the galley. She locked the door to the courtyard, threw a perfect smile over her shoulder, and disappeared into the depths of the Fort. Pat was confused, but he wasn't stupid. He grabbed one of the boxes of condoms and followed her.

As the day waned, they lay in a tangle of themselves and the sheets, safe in each other's arms and in the windowless bedroom of the Fort. The sheets were somewhat further along the progression between starchy new and nasty. When the bedding slipped too far towards the nasty, new sheets popped out of packaging and the old ones were stockpiled in the machine shop off of the courtyard. Doing laundry, at least sheets, was as dead as civilization.

Liz pushed herself up on one elbow and began fiddling with Pat's sandy hair, pushing it around with her fingers. “You need a haircut My Love.”

Pat gazed up at her, seeing her dimly lit in the half-light filtering through the open door, light that was fading with the evening. He adored her, would do anything to protect her.

“And you still have some ‘splaining to do.”

Oops. Gone but not forgotten. “Baby I...”

“Not now Pat. Later, okay?”

“Um, Okay.”

“Can we talk about the smell?”

“The sheets seem alright to me.”

“Not the sheets, Goofball, the stupid Re-Ams.”

“Oh, that. So we’re being serious again?”

“Yes Baby, serious. Try to keep up.”

Pat felt his head spinning ever so slightly.

“You noticed it first, that bittersweet smell. Like almonds or something.”

“Yeah, but I haven’t noticed it lately”

“Maybe if you laid off the cigars you would be able to smell other things.”

“Hey, a man needs at least one vice.”

“Beer?”

“Okay two. And I’m going to have to switch to scotch. The beer is too heavy to carry.”

“Me?”

“You’re not a vice, Liz.”

“Yeah, whatever. So we know the Re-Ams seem to have a smell. Why? I think it’s important.”

“It might be, but I don’t know why. We don’t usually stick around the dead ones too long. But when we found that nest, or whatever it was, that had the smell. I still think it was a Re-Am’s hiding place, or sleeping spot, or something.”

“Right, see? But I remembered something when I was leaving the Mety Mart. There was a rack of those TV magazines near the old checkout. Something on the cover of one of them caught my eye and then my brain clicked.”

“What? What was it?”

“I wasn’t stopping to read, but on the cover there was something about a new Sherlock Holmes show.”

“Holmes, the detective? Like, with Dr. Watson?”

“Yes Baby, Sherlock Holmes, BBC, British accents, elementary.”

“So?”

“So, I remembered an old episode that I saw. Holmes solved some mystery by figuring out there was a smell of almonds in the

room.”

“What did he solve?”

“The murder was done with cyanide.”

“But cyanide is poison, right?”

“Right, which is why you murder people with it.”

“Okay, okay, but are you saying that the Re-Ams are, what, breathing out cyanide? It’s poison, like we said, so wouldn’t they die?”

“I don’t know Pat. We only know what we heard at the end and lots of that was bullshit. Poison food, everyone dying, news reporters freaking out on camera. The bible thumpers were blaming the Gays and Lesbians, like it was God’s wrath. Bullshit, all of it. So what happens?”

“Everyone died Baby. Almost.”

“Not quite, and I’m glad we didn’t. But almost everyone did die. Some humans survived, like us. Who knows how many? Then the goddamn Re-Ams appeared. They re-animated Pat, from corpses. Dead and then not dead.”

“And you think that this cyanide smell, if that’s what it is, has something to do with the Re-Ams being able to come back?”

“I don’t know, Baby, but I think it’s a clue. What do you think Watson?”

“Shit Liz, that’s crazy! Cyanide? Re-Ams breathing cyanide?”

“Not breathing it in, breathing it out. Maybe.”

Pat’s brain was reeling as it tried to process this possibility. Everything that had seemed impossible was now a reality. Civilization was gone, wiped out by some man-made genetic malfunction. They were alone and fighting sub-human monsters. Why wasn’t the cyanide thing possible?

“You know something else Pat?”

“What Baby?”

“It’s time for you to tell me how a pacifist can handle a pistol the way you can.”

That goddamn Glock. Pat blinked at Liz, caught in the gaze of

her sea-gray eyes, those eyes that seemed to look right through him, right into him.

“It’s going to be okay Pat, but you need to tell me. I need to know that I can trust you.”

Pat rolled over to face Liz, trying to figure out where to begin.

“Start at the beginning, Baby.”

Damn her, how did she do that?

