

UZN
(RD 2.0)
by
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Prologue

Sunlight streamed through the only unblocked window of the small portable building. Matted, acne-marked carpeting underneath me was harder than I had been used to, but the material kept warm during the night and I had more space to move, which more than made up for the cramped conditions of the many vehicles I had crashed in since the world went to hell. I stretched my legs and felt my big toe poke through the hole in my sock. I felt good... hungry, but good.

I stood up and felt my tiny companion start to stir, his overgrown fur part of how I stayed so warm through the night. He rolled awkwardly to his feet and did that walking stretch dogs do after a good night's rest, complete with the sharp-toothed yawn. When he saw me his tongue fell out of his face, and I smiled. I dropped back to a knee and scratched him behind the ears, then reached for my bag and poured out some of our water with him in the massive cap that doubled as his water dish.

With him lapping away I looked around. The desks had helped barricade the door, and the blinds of the windows were all drawn as tightly shut as possible (except for one high-up window that had no blocker). The light that came in was warm against my cheek, even as the stray memories of school life filtered back into my head. I looked to the dry-erase board and what I had drawn there the night before in limited lighting, a half-haphazard happy face with its tongue out in bright-blue ink. The ink had run dry before I finished drawing the tongue. So it goes.

My small friend has finished his drink quickly, and I tied the cap back onto the large bottle. As thin as I had become I could feel my footsteps bounce on the floor like a professional wrestling ring. I could hear each step as well echoing in the small "building" the size of a studio apartment. I straightened up and bounced again, this time focusing on the straps of my backpack digging into my shoulders. I carefully walked to the window and carefully, slowly, lifted one of the blinds to peek out the window.

A milky-white cataract met my gaze, or at least it looked like it did.

I dropped the blind, and I started hearing the movement against the window, complete with its ensuing deadpan moaning. I looked to the dog.

"It's time to go, Icarus," I whispered to him. His tail started to wag. My hands quietly worked my backpack down and pulled out my only weapon, the stabbing end of a broken golf club. I never did learn to golf, and without a more "functional" club I supposed I never would.

I pulled the desks away from the door, and I could hear sliding footsteps leading up the ramp of the portable. Icarus froze, and from his tiny throat I could hear the growl. I put my finger to my lips to quiet him down. It didn't work.

Down to one desk, and the shuffling was right outside. I moved it quickly, then unlocked the door and rested my hand on the handle. I turned back to my friend and tightly gripped my makeshift weapon.

"Ready?" I whispered to him. Icarus growled again. We were on the same page.

I twisted the knob and yanked open the door, finding the half-rotted abomination standing tall. Its face was mostly gone, each eye swimming in its milky-white bath of cataract nastiness, the other half like a skeletal burn victim, dressed in what could only be described as a decayed incarnation of a principal-chic tattered sports jacket and dirty white dress shirt. The sight was bad, but the immediate small was worse. It wasn't as though the Once-Dead were aware of basic hygiene, or that being a Once-Dead means you were no longer wearing clean underpants. And this had obviously been the situation for this one for some time.

My weapon stabbed straight through his left eye, and the Once-Dead became Twice-Dead. The arms slackened and it sank like a stone, pulling my arm still holding my shiv with their weight before the pointed end slid back out of the face hole, the metal warping further. I looked around with the door open, seeing a few stray Once-Deads wandering around down the hall and distracted in the nearby quad. Neither of them were pointed in our direction.

I turned to Icarus. "Time to go," I said. His tail was a sweeping broom, cleaning as though we were never there.