

From What's Leftover

by Ashlee Winters

“Levi, am I going to die?” Auggie asked. My little brothers paled face was soaked with tears. I didn’t want to look in his direction in fear of seeing the prominent bite mark spreading infectiously on his left bicep, so instead I counted the splinters on the wooden fence protecting us from the walking death lurking on the other side. He was leaning against the foggy glass window of the motel we were trapped in, weak and falling apart.

“I’m scared,” he said. I moved away from the back door and wrapped my shaking arms around his shoulder and legs. I picked him up and sat him down in my lap. His bones touched my fingers through my grip, and it chilled me to think how easily a person could snap them like twigs.

“It’ll be ok, I’m right here,” I said. “I love you, Auggie.”

The small breaths I felt from the thin body pressed to mine stopped.

“Auggie,” I said, pressing my forehead to the side of his. “Please don’t leave me.”

I gasp awake when a bolt of lightning strikes a nearby light post outside sending vibrations of thunder through the motel room. I sit up and another strike illuminates the peeling walls and the worn-out door connecting to what was our parents’ room. The only thing keeping the door shut is the desk I pushed in front of it to keep our dead parents and old staff in their makeshift cage.

A wet warmth sprouts from my right side and a whimpering Auggie pulls me out of my thoughts. I move the blanket he was using as a shield to the storm and rub his back.

"I'm here, everything's alright," I say, as the small seven-year-old crawls onto my lap, nuzzling his face into my shoulder. I rub my hand along the side of his thin but untouched left arm as I double check my nightmare was only so and I sigh in relief.

"Let's get you cleaned up, okay?"

Auggie wipes his nose with his sleeve and nods. As I stand, a pound on the door stops me from taking another step toward the bathroom. I set Auggie onto the floor and grab the knife I keep under the mattress.

"Bubby, who's at the door?" Auggie asks, his small hands clutching on to my joggers.

"I need you to hide under the bed for me and be very quiet," I say, as the pounds became stronger. "Can you do that?"

He crawls under the bed without hesitation and I rise to my feet dashing to the door. Right as I was about to put my weight on it to hold it shut a drenched woman kicks it open. I stand bewildered by how quickly she enters, shuts the door, and points a gun at me. Although, she doesn't give me a second glance as she sees that I'm still living and runs past me.

"Quickly the desk," she says. I whip around to protest, but Auggie beats me to it by jumping on the woman's leg.

"No," Auggie says. She reraises her gun in an instant and points it to his head; just as fast as I jut out my knife pressing it against her neck.

"Lower your gun," I say. She tilts her head slightly.

"There's a group of infected coming. If we don't move this desk and block the door, we are all dead." She says, putting her gun on her belt and attempting to move the desk again. I push back with my arm and grab Auggie with the other pulling him behind me.

"There's infected on the other side," I say.

"How many, can we kill them?" she asks.

"Six or Seven and I'd rather not," I say.

The woman starts to pace while spilling curse words as she thought.

"How many are out there?" I ask.

"Too many for us to fight."

"Where were you when you saw them?"

"I was driving home from a raid. I turned the corner and the street was filled."

"Do you-"

"Stop asking me questions," she shouts, causing grunts and gurgles to grow louder outside. "Shit, we need to leave. They followed me out here so the car should be cleared by now."

"Are you insane?" I ask.

"I broke the door open it can't protect you anymore. Would you rather die here or die trying to survive?" she asks.

"Well, if you broke down a different door my brother wouldn't be in danger."

"If we survive the run to the car we'll be going back to my camp and you wouldn't have to worry about him being in danger."

"How can I trust you?" I ask. She grabs her gun and hands it to me. I take it and give her my knife.

“Great, now stick together,” she says. “The kid will stay between us.”

I hurriedly grab my backpack and Auggie's and secure them tightly on to us.

“Levi, I'm scared,” Auggie says. I give him a weak smile to hide the fact that I am too.

“Stay quiet and close to me.”

We decide the best option was to leave through the backdoor and climb over the wooden fence. I ignore the splinters in my hands and follow the woman while watching our surrounds.

We make it to the end of the building that connects with woods.

“We'll follow the road through here,” she says.

I glance over my shoulder as we continue, and the motels parking lot was full of decaying people walking like a herd. They grow small and blurry in the distance and rain. It was silent as we continued, none of us daring enough to make a sound. Until a branch snaps and the thud of a falling body echoes with Auggie screams.

I turn from walking backwards to see an infected baring his teeth to Auggie's left bicep. I snatch him away from the arms of death and kick it in the face so the infected lays on his back. A small spark shines at the end of the gun from the round I fired into its head leaving him dormant.

“We need to run,” she says. I pick up a crying Auggie and sprint after the girl while dodging trees and branches. “It's not too far, we're almost there.”

We run for about ten minutes that felt like an hour and my lungs heavy and damp air scratches at my throat. An old blue station wagon sits on the other side of the trees with only two infected a short distance in front of the car.

She gets into the front seat as I get in the back with Auggie still clutched in my arms. She starts the car by twisting a screwdriver in the ignition and starts to speed off down the road. I pull

Auggie away from me and check over his arm and body. I don't see scratches or marks through his soggy clothes, and I felt I could cry. Why are dreams so evil?

"Is he alright?" she asks.

"Thankfully," I say.

"That must've scared you, but you can relax now kid. We're about an hour out from here."

I remove our backpack and put Auggie next to me so I can grab him my sweatshirt. The last thing we needed was him to be sick. When he's changed, I let him sprawl out on the back seat and rest his head on my lap as he sleeps. I don't trust the woman enough to close my eyes, so I watch the night storm in silence for thirty minutes.

"My names Maize," she says.

"I'm Levi and he's Auggie," I say.

"You look like you would've been in college by now."

"We were on our way to my dorm, we stopped at the motel and then the outbreak came out of nowhere."

"No kidding. Was it just you two?"

"No, our parents were with us, but they got bitten trying to distract the infected while I grabbed food. They made me lock them in the room as they pulled as many as they could in there with them from the main door."

"I'm sorry, I wish I came sooner," she says. "We're here."

Maize pulls up to a gate with post on either side of it and it opens and shut behind us. She drives down the street and I notice it was a fenced in neighborhood.

“I’ll introduce you to everyone. We like to work together, so we don’t point anyone as leader. As long as you help out and chip-in you’ll hold everyone’s respect. We’ll allow you to keep the weapon until you’re comfortable here, but after it goes in storage until we need it again.”

“Thank you.”

As she parks in the street by the house, I wake up Auggie. I plan to keep the gun with me as long as I can, but I have a good feeling about this place. I won’t have to hear my brother’s stomach growl every night and worry about infected people bursting through the doors. He’s safe here and now there’s more than just me that’s able to protect him.