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# ALTERNATE ENDING

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Lily Oldham

When Dennis's eyes reopen, Anna is wiggling into the cab. She is not herself. Her eyes are glowing red, her leg is dark purple, and her limbs are twitching uncontrollably. Jeremiah's eyes are shining with tears. Dennis can't tell if they're tears of fear or tears of sadness for Anna. Mac is frozen. His foot is on the gas because the car is moving, but his hands are on his head. Far from the wheel.

"Mac! The wheel!" Mac grabs the wheel, and makes a sharp right turn into the deserted parking lot of the radio station.

"Are you ok Dennis? I'm sorry. I don't know what I was thinking." Mac is gripping the wheel tightly, his knuckles turning white, even though they're parked. It's quiet. It's quiet! Mac thinks about the silence. Anna is still. Her body is half hanging in the bed of the truck, half hanging in the cab. Her eyes are rolled back in her head and a foamy drool is dribbling out of her mouth. Jeremiah is quiet too. He is quivering in the passenger seat. There is a glowing purple bite mark on his forearm.

"She got me. I- I can't feel my arm." His arm twitches like Anna's did. Mac steps out of the truck, soon followed by Dennis. Jeremiah steps out and immediately backs up a few steps from the two older boys.

"What are you doing buddy?" Mac asks.

"I'm sorry. I don't want to hurt you." His arm lashes out and strikes the truck bed. He cradles it now to stop it from twitching. There is rustling coming from the woods. All of a sudden, a crowd of zombies staggers out quickly, running toward the truck and the people around it. Out of nowhere, a guttural, unhuman shriek comes from the truck. Anna is conscious again. Her old self is all gone. In its place, a horrible monster, ready to do whatever it takes to get the taste of flesh in her zombified mouth. It could be the sound of the other zombies approaching, but Anna stares at them all for a moment before running into the crowd of mindless monsters.

Tears stream freely down Jeremiah's face now. His arm is deepening in color and the color is spreading. It twitches more and more, with his leg sometimes joining in the twitching. Without any warning, the arm swings and lands a sharp blow to Mac's stomach. He doubles over, groaning in pain.

"Jeremiah! What are you doing?" Dennis is yelling at Jeremiah now.

"I'm sorry! I'm not in control." As if to prove his point, his arm drags him towards the crowd of zombies that is approaching gradually. Dennis glanced at the crowd. Anna was at the

front, leading the pack. Before they could stop him, Jeremiah waved at them, and ran into the crowd, sobbing. Only Dennis and Mac are left.

Dennis starts walking toward the crowd of zombies, hoping to save them. “What are you doing you idiot? There’s no way to save them! They’re gone!” Mac screams at Dennis. He grabs Dennis’s arm and drags him toward the door of the radio station. Mac rips open the door and throws Dennis inside.

“What are you doing Mac?” Dennis is scared. Mac isn’t acting like himself.

“Isn’t it obvious what I’m doing Dennis? I started this! It’s simply survival of the fittest. It was too simple really. All I did was an experiment in the barn of the Greerson Farm until I found the perfect poison to turn the most normal person into a zombie. Then a few months ago, I snuck out after dark and poured all the poison into the water tower. And once our town was wrecked, it didn’t take long for it to spread. And now it’s your turn.”

Mac uncaps a small vial in the back pocket of his dirty, ripped jeans. “Please, Mac. Don’t do this.”

“I have to Dennis. But it’s ok. I enjoyed our time together. I’ll tell your mommy you love her.” Mac kicks Dennis in the back and he falls to the ground. He puts his foot down on Dennis’s chest so he can’t move. Mac bends down and smacks Dennis so hard that his head swims and he sees stars. Dennis can’t focus enough to even stop Mac from wrenching open his mouth and pouring the vial of poison down his throat. He feels nothing different for a solid minute.

The last thing he sees before he closes his eyes is Petey Coltrain's body a few feet away. He clearly didn't notice before. He closes his eyes to Mac's laughter and the last thing he thinks about before he loses himself to the poison is his family. He loves them. And then, *flesh. He needs flesh.*