

Those Left Behind: Patsy McNally

Patsy hated working early shifts. Though she'd done it often enough, she had never been able to reconcile the timing. When should she eat? When should she sleep? Up at 3 AM, she quickly dressed and headed downstairs for a cup of coffee. As she passed her sisters' bedroom, she heard one of them cough.

In the kitchen, she found her dad. He was sitting at the table with a cup of steaming tea. The twenty two inch television was glowing on the countertop. A haggard reporter was bringing the news from in front of a downtown hospital. There were people lined up outside the emergency room but it was tough to tell what was happening. The camera work was subpar.

"All right, Dad?" she asked him. It wasn't like him to be up so early.

"Touch of the sniffles is all," he said, though there was little strength to his voice.

As she popped the little coffee pack into the single cup brewer and positioned a "to go" cup underneath the dispenser, she tried to get a better sense of what was going on on the television.

"Sniffles," she mused, finding faces in the crowd on the small screen. People were wearing heavy jackets despite a forecasted sixty five degree day. They had blankets wrapped around them. They carried their children and supported their loved ones.

The sniffles.

"I heard someone coughing in Theresa and Catherine's room."

Kyle McNally nodded. "Your mom's got it, too. Blasted bug is everywhere."

Patsy became suddenly worried. "Maybe you should see a doctor. I'll take the day off."

"No you won't!" There was a bit of strength to that. Whenever Kyle got upset, his long dormant Irish accent reemerged. "They'll be shorthanded enough with all the sick people not showing up. You go in and do your job."

She looked at the TV. "But, Dad, this is serious."

"You're darned right it is."

"I'm worried about you and Mom and the twins."

Kyle's face set in a grimace. "Hurry up. You'll be late."

She lingered a moment, then went to the high cabinet. She had to stand on a chair to open it and pull out the strong box. Bringing it down to the counter, she unlocked it and pulled out her gun.

She loaded a fresh clip, checked the chamber, and laid the weapon on the table. Before going to get her jacket, she replaced the box.

"You'll call me if you need anything?" she asked as she picked up the gun and put it in a shoulder holster.

"Be safe, Patsy."

"You'll call?" she pressed.

"I'll call," he relented.

Leaning down, she gave him a kiss on his cheek. He was burning with fever. She was going to say something else but decided against it.

Out on the dark street, Patsy walked two blocks to the bus stop. It was just occurring to her that there probably weren't many buses running when one pulled up. The driver, a large man with a grimace on his dark face, pulled to the side and opened the door. As Patsy started to board, he put up a hand.

"You sick?" he asked.

"What?"

"I ain't picking up anyone that's sick."

Patsy took a step up, challenging him. "I'm a cop."

"Good for you. If you ain't a *healthy* cop, you don't ride. I'm doing my last run and then I'm gonna go home and barricade myself in my basement."

She started to laugh. "I'm a healthy cop."

"You got a gun?" he asked her.

"Of course."

"Then you can ride for free."

Normally, Patsy wouldn't bother with something like that, but something about the driver's attitude was infectious. She kind of wondered why he'd stopped at all.

The bus was completely empty. She knew there were six stops on the route before her own. Despite the time of the morning, she usually saw one or two people on a daily basis. She took a front seat and watched the dark road as the serious faced man drove.

"See that?" he said as they approached a stop. There was a person there, a sick person. He was swaying back and forth on the balls of his feet. When the bus went by, he looked up but didn't try to wave it down. Patsy got a look at his eyes. They were glazed, lifeless.

"I've seen four of those. I don't stop for those."

Patsy reached for her phone and then decided against it. She didn't want to fight with her dad again.

At the next stop was a family. They were bundled up even though it wasn't really cold. The mother was sitting on the bench with a child wrapped around her. The father waved frantically at the bus as the driver went by.

"You don't stop for those, either? Who do you stop for?"

"Healthy police ladies. Besides, those people are better off going home."

Patsy stewed but didn't say anything. She didn't want to take him on.

"What's your name?" the driver asked her. "I'm Marv. Marv Jackson."

"Patsy McNally," she answered.

"Really?" he laughed. "Really?"

"Yes, really," she said, reddening. "It's a traditional Irish name."

"Yeah, no kidding."

"This is my stop," she said.

He looked at it as he drove on by.

"Hey!"

"The trains ain't running. Which precinct are you going to?"

"Twelfth."

"That's what I thought. It's on my way back to the depot. I'll drive you."

This seemed even more unusual, but under the circumstances, Patsy didn't argue. They talked a bit as he drove. He passed stop after stop whether there were people there or not. She could see that he was eager to be done with his shift. When they finally pulled up in front of the station, Marv gave her a smile.

"Hope you enjoyed the ride."

"I don't know what to say," she answered.

He waved dismissively. "The world is about to get a whole lot meaner. This is my way of saying goodbye to the old."

"Well, thanks, Marv."

"Just a second," he called as she started down the steps. He took a transfer slip from his book and a pen from his pocket and scribbled something down.

"What's this?" she asked.

"That's where I live. A young girl like you can't protect the whole world, but I like you and there'll always be a place for you and yours when it all goes to hell."

Sweet, she thought, not necessarily buying his whole end of the world theory. *Melodramatic, maybe, but sweet all the same.* Odds were, he'd get back to the depot and have to face a whole bunch of complaints from riders who didn't get to take the bus.

She pocketed the slip. "Thanks, Marv. You take care of yourself."

He smiled. "That's what I do."

She felt uncomfortable then and got right off of the bus. He lingered a moment before closing the door and pulling away.

Inside the precinct house, all was quiet. At 4:30 AM it was usually quiet, but this was downright eerie. There was no one at the front desk.

"Hello?" Patsy called out.

When there was no answer, she went back to the locker rooms to change. She put on her uniform quickly, taking comfort in the feel of it, and then moved to the squad room. There, finally, she found people. McColl, a detective that had transferred from the south side, was busily tapping away on his computer. McColl was one of those hard boiled types. He had a perpetual frown on his face and a deep gravelly voice. He had a square jaw that was always covered in just a day's worth of growth. Older, he was a bit overweight without being fat and he always wore his tie with an impeccable knot that was never pulled up further than his sternum. Every time Patsy saw him, she expected him to appear in black and white. Another young officer was milling about, seemingly unsure of what to do. Patsy had seen him before, but she didn't know his name. He was a rookie, which meant she had two years on him. The last person in the room, just coming out of the captain's office, was Jake Kumasi. Jake was a tall African man who had come to the United States at the age of ten. He had a strong deep voice with just a tinge of an African accent. He was one of the most well liked officers at the precinct. Even her

dad liked him and was thrilled that they were partners. She wondered how he would feel if he knew that they'd actually been out on a few dates.

"Did you talk to the captain?" she asked him quietly so that McColl wouldn't overhear. He was a busybody.

"About what?" Jake asked, the picture of innocence.

"Don't start with me, Jake. It's not the day for it."

He threw his arms into the air. "I don't get it. Why do you want him to split us up?"

"You don't...you know, where you eat. You can be my partner at work or outside of work."

"Whoa, pretty lady. We've only been on a couple of dates."

She nodded. "Decide."

"Okay," he conceded. "I'll think about it."

Patsy pulled a face and stepped past him, heading for the office.

"Oh, oh," Jake warned. "No captain in there. He's out sick. All you get in there is the big, bad sergeant."

"Hey!" McColl shouted from his desk. "Don't you two have someplace to be?"

"In fact," Jake said, grabbing Patsy by the arm. "We do."

He marched her out of the squad room and to the garage. He signed out their vehicle even though there was no one to receive the signature, and got in on the driver's side.

"Where are we going?" Patsy asked.

"*Sisters of Charity Hospital*," Jake answered. "Crowd control."

Patsy made a face that mirrored her father's whenever he was inconvenienced. Crowd control was one thing when it involved a public event or a protest, but herding sick people like cattle was definitely not on her top ten favorite things about the job.

They drove through the empty streets without conversation. Patsy saw lights in windows, but wondered who the light was for. It was as if the world was already dead.

The hospital was a mess. It was after five and the sun was beginning to illuminate the horror that they would face that day. There were people everywhere. The police had set up barricades so that there could be some order to the mob, but few people were respecting the lines and there

were even fewer police to enforce them. Jake flashed his lights and sounded the siren to get people to drag themselves out of the way so he could park.

"Are we supposed to report to someone?" Patsy called out over the noise of the moaning and groaning.

Jake shrugged. "Let's check inside."

They fought their way through the crowd, passing in front of a television camera held by a tired looking cameraman. The haggard lady reporter, who had probably been well made up and beautiful when her day had begun, tried to stop them for an interview, but they rebuffed her as politely as they could. Inside the lobby of the hospital, there were families huddled in the few chairs and all over the floor. A lone security guard stood at the station's podium looking completely lost. There was no one at reception. Jake and Patsy smiled and nodded at the guard and then moved past him.

"Sweet Jesus," Patsy mumbled. "Is everyone sick?"

Further in, they found a doctor in a white coat walking briskly from the labs toward the emergency room. She looked exhausted, but was clearly not sick. Jake ran up behind her and asked who was in charge. She gave him an exasperated shrug. She'd seen some cops in the ER before going to run her tests, but that was all she knew.

Jake and Patsy followed her to emergency, where they were assaulted with a scene that was incalculably worse than the front entrance. Here, people weren't just sick. They were dying. They'd laid themselves out on tables or on the floor. Many were unconscious. Some might have already been dead. The smell was terrible.

There was a solitary plain clothes cop with a badge hanging around his neck on a chain. He was standing in the middle of the room giving orders to the hospital staff that could still stand. When he saw Patsy and Jake, he beckoned them over.

"Good to see you," he said. "I've got my hands full down here, but there was a call from the sixth floor a couple of minutes ago about some sort of violence. I hate to do it to you, but could go up there and see if you can sort it out?"

"Sure thing," Jake said after a quick glance at his partner.

Patsy didn't feel like trying to mediate a violent dispute between strung out hospital staff and sick people, but the job was the job. She and Jake headed over to the elevators.

"I wish you'd reconsider about splitting up," Jake said while they were waiting.

"This isn't really the time," Patsy complained.

The door opened and they went inside. Jake pushed the button for six and the doors closed, leaving them alone.

"Look, Pat," he said. "We're pretty lucky. We've got two good things going and I can't understand why you'd want to mess either one of those things up."

"I just don't want it to get too difficult."

He laughed. "Then don't get involved with *anyone*. I say we let it ride for a while. If it all goes to hell, I'll transfer across town and you won't ever have to look at me again."

She smiled shyly.

Jake leaned forward and gave her a kiss on the lips, which she returned with a warmth that threatened to overwhelm her.

When he stepped back, he was smiling. "I'm telling you, sweetheart, we've got good times ahead."

The elevator bell chimed and the number six light lit up. There had been no stops on the intervening floors.

The car came to a full stop.

The doors opened.

And they were assaulted by a stench so vile, that Patsy reared back and swept her arm over her nose.

There was no life on the sixth floor. All throughout the corridor were the scattered remnants of linen and equipment. Two bodies lay on the floor, one facing toward the elevator and the other facing away as if it had been crawling toward the heavy ward doors. The bodies were torn apart, hardly recognizable as people. There was blood everywhere.

Drawing his gun, Jake stepped out of the elevator.

"I think we need some backup," Patsy choked, sticking her head out of the door.

"There is no backup." Jake said.

Knowing he was right and not liking it one bit, Patsy drew out her own gun and stepped after him. Together they moved toward the doors to the ward. The two windows at the top were smeared red. One of the doors was slightly ajar. Looking down, they could see a foot sticking out from the ward, holding the door open.

Jake motioned Patsy off to the side and went to the door. They were silent. He reached forward and pulled the door open. It pulled with resistance, its power trying to force it closed. The leg rolled away, no body attached.

Patsy desperately wanted to cry out, but did not. She was afraid to make any noise.

The two bodies on the floor were patients. The leg, too, was completely bare from the foot to the severed knee. Bloody prints were stamped all over the tiles. Whatever had happened, it had to have been done by more than one person. All Patsy could think of was a mob of sick people finally losing their patience and rioting.

But it was so quiet now. Where had they all gone?

The ward itself ran in a loop with two shoelace ends. The two police officers entered in the middle of the loop. The corridors ran to the left and the right around the nurses' station. They met up around the other side and crossed, continuing for a bit. All throughout were hospital rooms. From where they stood, Patsy and Jake could see a few of them. A couple of doors were shut, but most were open. There was a roadmap of bloody trails all throughout the ward. Some were simple lines, as if something or someone had been dragged through. Others had footprints dried into them.

Jake moved in, leading with his gun. Patsy followed, stepping gingerly over the severed leg. They swept the area with their eyes. There was nothing but carnage everywhere. Jake indicated an open room and Patsy nodded. This time she would lead. She had just about reached the opening when a tiny sound issued from behind her. She and Jake turned as one to find a nurse cowering behind the desk. She had clucked her tongue to get their attention and was now shaking her head vigorously and holding a finger to her lips.

Jake went over and beckoned her out from behind the desk, but she was reluctant to come. Patsy let her attention go back to their surroundings. It would be too easy to get involved in the exchange between Jake and the nurse. With all of the danger, Patsy had to keep her guard up.

Without the ability to communicate, there was little they could learn from the nurse. Both Patsy and Jake desperately wanted to question her, but it wasn't going to happen right away. Jake signaled to Patsy that he was going to take the nurse back to the elevator. Patsy nodded, swallowing her fear, but the young nurse was unyielding. She absolutely refused to come out from behind the desk.

They were getting nowhere.

Crouching down next to her, Jake whispered, "Where are they?"

"Everywhere."

Patsy turned as someone emerged from the room behind her. Thinking that this was where they had originally intended to begin their investigation filled her with dread. The person coming

toward her was clearly dead. That's right. Coming toward her. Dead. Even if it wasn't for the glazed eyes and bloodless complexion, the gaping belly wound and missing vital organs was a real giveaway.

"Don't let it touch you," whispered the nurse in a little girl's voice.

Patsy raised her weapon and took aim. Her police instinct told her to give warning. Her survival instinct told her to shoot. But shoot where? How do you kill, or even hurt someone who's dead?

"Try the head," Jake said, sensing her confusion. "Maybe the head."

Patsy was wondering why Jake didn't just shoot it himself. Still, there wasn't an argument in her. Raising her gun, she fired just as the nurse hissed out a warning.

The shot echoed loudly around the loop. The bullet hit the dead thing right between the eyes. Much to Patsy's relief, this seemed to do the trick. It crumpled in place, dropping to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

All at once, there was the sound of scuffling everywhere and all around them. From the other open rooms appeared more of what could only be classified as zombies. They were in various states of...disrepair. Some were badly wounded while others were hardly wounded at all. Every one of them had blood on them. Even those that seemed unhurt had faces that were devoid of expression. They were zombies in every sense of the word.

Jake grabbed the nurse by her arm and tried to pull her away from the desk, but she resisted. A zombie in scrubs got very close to them. Jake let the nurse go and took a step back. The zombie was bending down to bite the nurse when Jake shot it in the head.

"Let's get out," he told Patsy.

She moved away from the hospital room, popping two zombies that got in her way. Jake had the door open and was watching Patsy. He didn't notice the large group coming around the other end of the loop. Patsy cried out a warning. Jake turned just as a large orderly grabbed his gun arm and lifted it toward his face. Startled, Jake dropped his gun, but managed to wrestle his arm away without harm.

He had to retreat to the door. There were a dozen zombies closing in. Patsy rushed forward. Grabbing the young nurse by the arm, she yanked her to her feet and dragged her toward Jake. Jake, though, was focused on the approaching group. They were close but Patsy was closer. She would have made it. They could have escaped together.

Jake didn't look over until he was already through and had the door practically shut. Maybe he realized that he could have waited. Maybe he didn't. Either way he didn't stop. He pulled the door shut and the locks clicked into place. It couldn't be opened again except by pushing the button at the nurses' station.

To her credit, Patsy didn't give even a moment to shock or contemplation. She pulled up, understanding that he had closed off their only avenue of escape. Not only that. By not anticipating that he would do that (and how could she have?) she had put herself and the nurse in between two approaching groups of zombies.

The world drained away from Patsy McNally. The past and the future dissolved into nonsense. They weren't even concepts. Instead, she was focused only on the moves she needed to make. Squatting down, she grabbed Jake's gun from the floor. Patsy was ambidextrous so firing the two weapons simultaneously and with accuracy was no problem. She was also a brilliant shot, like her policeman father before her. Even before she'd regained her feet, she was firing at the closest of the zombies. She found that she did not think of them as human. Taking them out was, in her mind, defined as essential and lacked any sort of moral consequence. Since shooting the first one in the head had worked so well, that was where she placed every bullet she fired.

Head shot.

Head shot.

Head shot!

There were too many. She pulled the nurse from her stricken paralysis and charged to a closed door, clearing the path with her free gun hand as she ran. She slammed against the wide hospital door handle and fell into the room, dragging the nurse after her. Pushing the door shut behind her, she went for the first heavy object she could find, an arm chair, and pushed it up against the door. Then she sat down.

"You okay?" she asked the nurse.

The nurse nodded as Patsy looked around her.

"And who are you?" she asked the small elderly man sitting in the other arm chair. He was next to the bed, sitting very calmly, holding the wrinkled hand of the old woman laying in it. She was on a ventilator, this woman. A monitor at her bedside beeped out the steady rhythm of her heart while the machine pushed air into her body.

"No heroic measures," said the man. "That's what she always said. But when it was time to do the right thing, the really heroic thing, I was nothing more than a coward. Poor Emily has been like this for ten days now and there's nothing I can do about it."

There came a thump on the door behind them and Patsy's chair jolted.

She looked from the old man to the nurse. "I'm Pat McNally," she said.

The nurse seemed confused at first, then offended. It was as if having an introduction at such a time was so utterly ridiculous. And yet, this is how people bonded.

"Geri Falco."

"Nice to meet you."

Geri didn't answer. She didn't know how to answer.

"Do you have any ideas, Geri?"

Geri shook her head. It didn't surprise Patsy. If Geri had spent the last hour hiding behind the counter, then she wasn't exactly the proactive type. Patsy could relate. Jake often laughed at her because, for a cop, she was the least confrontational a person could be. She could hold her own in a fight, but you had to move heaven and earth to actually get her into the fight. And when it came to decision making, well, Patsy needed a spreadsheet just to figure out what she wanted for lunch.

Now, though, she saw things with a clarity that had never before presented itself. She knew that if they tried to get out the way they had come in, the zombies would bottleneck the door and overwhelm them. She knew that Geri Falco was a liability. She knew that the old man, though physically fit for his age, would never leave his wife while she was alive. She knew that, as she was sitting there, working through all of her observations, all of the sick people on the ground were dying and becoming these things. That's what had happened. That was the only explanation. This sickness that had consumed the population had murdered it off and converted it into bloodthirsty zombies.

And what of her parents? What of her sisters? In her mind's eyes, she saw them at home, sick and weak and having to fight off a multitude of these horrific things.

Getting out of the chair, she instructed Geri to have seat. The nurse complied without protest. Patsy headed over to the window, touching the man on his shoulder as she did so. He didn't even look up. Patsy hadn't realized that the room was situated in an inner portion of the building. Instead of looking out at the street, it looked out onto a courtyard. The hospital was built in a ring around the courtyard. One floor below was a service ledge at least as wide as a whole floor. There was machinery built into it and an entrance to the left. Opening the window, Patsy leaned out as far as she could. It was a tight fit. She wasn't fat, but she was no rail. Geri was tiny and she wasn't likely to fit either.

Studying the window frame, Patsy identified a couple of spots where the frame was thin. If she could break the glass, she could probably knock out the frame and gain access. Looking around the room, she didn't find anything that she could swing with any force. The stand on which sat the elderly lady's monitor was too thin and light.

"Heads up," she warned, taking aim with her gun.

The man had just enough time to throw himself over his wife when Patsy started firing. Concentrating her fire, she managed to punch weaknesses into the glass. She only took a few shots, knowing that conserving ammunition would be essential. When she was done, she stood

on the heater in front of the window and began kicking at the frame. All the while, Geri's chair danced underneath her as the creatures just outside the door were incensed by the noise.

"What kind of a police officer are you?" the man complained.

She looked at him, a wide gap leading out behind her. "You need to say goodbye to your wife now, sir."

It was probably the most callous thing she'd ever said to another human being. But the world had suddenly changed all around them. There were the healthy and the sick. The sick were the enemy.

Except her parents.

Except her sisters.

Patsy stripped the blanket and sheets off of the empty second bed. Pulling a pocket knife from her belt, she began to cut them into wide strips. When she was done, she tied the strips together expertly. It was another skill she'd learned from her dad.

"You first," she said to Geri.

Geri glanced over her shoulder at the door.

"They don't know how to open it," Patsy told her.

"How can you be so sure?"

She didn't know why she was sure. She just was.

Grabbing Geri by the hand, Patsy helped her to her feet. Without the additional weight, the chair began to rattle around, but the door remained closed. Patsy tied one end of the rope to the heater, tugging on it several times to make sure it was tight. Then she tossed the slack out the window.

"You'll have to drop a few feet," Patsy told her.

Geri leaned out the window and gulped. "Okay."

Holding onto the rope, Geri lowered herself out the window. Patsy spotted her, keeping two hands on it so that there was less pressure on the knot. After three minutes or so, the rope went slack and she fell back.

Patsy looked out the window and saw Geri on the ledge. She was talking to someone. He looked like a maintenance man.

"You next, sir."

"Go to hell," he replied.

With infinite calm, Patsy sat on the corner of the bed and faced him. "I'm Patsy," she said.

"Hmph," he replied.

"Do you know what's behind that door?"

As he looked over, she saw his anger slide a bit to make room for the fear. Fear was good. Where there was fear, there was a will to live.

"They'll get through eventually," Patsy told him. "Even if they don't, there's nowhere for you to go."

"Someone will come," he answered defiantly.

She shook her head. "There is no one. I'm the rescue party."

"I can't just leave her!" he cried, squeezing his wife's hand ever more tightly.

Patsy understood. It would be cruel to leave her to die at the hands of those monsters.

"Pull the plug," she told him. "Do something heroic."

He looked up at her with tears in his eyes. Had he ever really expected her to recover? No. He just needed to grieve. But that time was done, now. Standing, he went to her and kissed her first on the forehead and then on the lips. He said goodbye to her, uttering her name over and over as if in prayer. Then he went to the wall and pulled the chords from their outlets.

All at once the machine stopped breathing for her and she stopped breathing altogether. It could have taken a few seconds or a few minutes for her to die, but there was no way for them to know.

"Are you ready?"

"In a minute," he said, pulling the ring off of her finger and slipping it into his pocket. Then he stepped onto the ledge, took one last look at his wife, and started down. Like before, Patsy spotted him, by putting one foot up against the heater. Like before, when the rope went slack, she fell down.

There was no one left to spot her so she would have to rely on her knots. She double checked to make sure the rope was secure to the heater and then stepped up onto the ledge. As she did so, the old woman sat up in bed. She looked over at Patsy with dead eyes.

Holding onto the rope with her right hand, she drew Jake's gun with her left. She fired just once, hitting the old woman right between the eyes. The woman crumpled back into the bed. The zombies outside the door renewed their attack with vigor. Patsy started down the rope.

"What happened?" Geri asked, when Patsy had completed the final jump. "I heard a shot."

Patsy glanced once at the old man. "I was wrong about the door."

"This is Eli," Geri said, pointing at the maintenance man. He was a thin guy with three days of stubble. Patsy put him in his mid fifties. Though he had round shoulders and a small beer gut, he looked strong enough.

The old man took Eli's hand and introduced himself as Mordecai Faber. Patsy was a little insulted that Mordecai had not felt compelled to introduce himself to her, but her rationale recognized that this was not the time for social protocol.

"Where does that door go?" she asked, pointing toward the white service door at the end of the ledge.

"It goes to Stairwell C but I locked that door tight. A bunch of crazy people chased me out here."

"Did they bite you?" Geri asked fearfully.

He looked at her strangely. "No. They never got that close."

"They're infectious," Geri said. "You know that, right?"

Eli looked away sheepishly. "Well, I knew they were sick."

"They're dead," said Patsy. She looked him up and down. He was wearing a tool belt that was heavily laden with screwdrivers and screws and nails. He had a hammer and a heavy wrench. "Can you swing that wrench?"

He looked at it on his belt, confused. "What? Like a weapon?"

"You've got to hit them in the head."

"That could kill them!" he protested.

"They're already dead," she said.

He opened his mouth to argue, but she shushed him. "I'll cover you." Drawing out both of her pistols, Patsy set her legs apart and faced the door.

"Why can't we just shoot them if you want to kill them?" asked Eli.

"I don't want to waste my ammunition."

Eli pulled out the wrench and hefted it. He looked at the door and then at Patsy. "Tell you what," he said. "You go bash their heads in and I'll cover you with the guns."

"Do you know how to shoot?"

"How hard can it be?"

She looked at him for a moment. "Open the door, please."

More than a little reluctant, Eli went to the door, put his key in the lock, and slowly turned the knob. He was completely unprepared for the surge of undead that slammed through. The door flung open, hitting him in the chest and knocking him backward. He fell to the ground, dropping the wrench.

Without hesitation, Patsy opened fire. Not a bullet was wasted as she picked out her targets. The first two were down before they had really cleared the access. Those behind them struggled to come through. A woman in a hospital gown was limber enough to do so. Patsy put her down as she reached for the slowly recovering Eli. Some of the others coming through started for Geri and Mordecai.

"Get behind me," Patsy ordered them and they hurried to comply.

Eli finally managed to stand and started for them as well, but Patsy told him to get the wrench. It was a moment of courage or cowardice for Eli. Patsy foresaw the outcomes of both decisions. If he chose to arm himself and fight, she would be able to defend him with her pistols, saving bullets as he bashed in skulls. If he chose instead to hide behind her she would most likely be able to protect them all, but the cost would be high. They still had to get down the stairs, out the door, and through the crowded street to get clear. Even with her weapons fully loaded, it didn't seem likely that they would all make it. With no guns at all...

Eli chose courage. To a certain extent. He went for the wrench, crossing paths with a dead nurse in torn and bloody scrubs. Looking both disgusted and mortified at the same time, he shoved her away and grabbed up his weapon. Patsy, who was ready to fire, was impressed by his resolve. Still, when he went in to actually use the wrench, he proved that he was not yet up to the task. His first blow, which went to the same nurse, hit her in the temple. The attack, though, was awkward and lacked any real force. All it really did was put him off his balance while the zombie moved in for the kill.

Patsy took her down with one bullet.

Fortunately, Eli was a quick study. Realizing where he had failed, he conducted his next attack with much more confidence and stability. He crushed the skull of a patient in a hospital gown, a police officer in a shredded uniform, and another maintenance worker.

"Sorry, Ed," he said as he brought the wrench down on top of the zombie's bald pate.

Only when he came to a child, a small boy in pajamas with cartoon giraffes in space suits on them, did he once again balk. Patsy could see the trouble right away. Eli kept avoiding the little boy, moving on to less troubling quarry. But that extra step ultimately put him at a disadvantage.

Patsy took care of it.

After almost thirty minutes, the only people moving on the ledge were the four live humans. Eli stood panting, his hands on his knees, the wrench dripping blood onto his shoes.

"You okay?" Patsy asked him as she went to the cop and took both his gun and spare ammunition.

"Can I have that?" Mordecai asked.

She looked at him queerly.

"I'm a veteran," he said.

She handed it over. "Don't waste the ammunition."

Patsy went over to the door, a pistol in each hand, and leaned inside. It was a main stairwell. Access to the fifth floor was just to the right and the door was wedged open with a body. Through it she could see a short corridor that was painted in blood. The stairs were well lit and looked to be clear.

She looked back at the others. "There are probably survivors in rooms on all of the other floors. We'll sweep them on the way down."

"What?!" Eli protested. "I know you're a cop, but look around. We aren't near strong enough to go around rescuing people."

"I won't leave anyone behind."

"Patsy, see reason," Mordecai said. "Going from floor to floor is suicide. We'll run out of ammunition and likely not even get ourselves out."

Patsy leaned back inside and looked at the corridor. "Fine," she said. "Fine. But let me at least check out this floor. I think we probably cleared most of the danger. Eli, you and Mordecai cover the exit while Geri and I go inside and look for survivors."

"I'm not going in there," Geri declared.

"Fine," Patsy repeated. "Whatever. I'll go alone."

"You get five minutes," said Eli.

Patsy glared at him. "I'll take as long as I need. You three are welcome to try and make it without me."

Without another glance at them, she pulled the door open completely and wedged it into place. The short corridor led to a much larger hallway. Just inside was another bank of elevators. Doing some quick figuring, Patsy placed herself on the side opposite to where she and Jake had come up. To the right was another set of ward doors. These were closed and presumably inaccessible. To the left was an opening that, though she didn't know it, led around to another set of doors that would give access to loop for authorized personnel. She went that way and found those doors wedged open, this time intentionally. Someone had stuffed some folded cardboard underneath. This was how the zombies had gotten out of the ward.

Heading into the loop, Patsy hesitated. She was wary of stragglers hiding in the corners, but doubted that there was a large group. They had killed so many.

As she moved around, she inspected the doors to the rooms. Some were open and some were closed. She thought twice about how to handle them. She didn't want to get boxed in.

Ultimately, she decided to check the open rooms toward the end of the loop. She covered both sides of the doorway. The first room was empty. There was some blood on one of the beds, but that was all. In the second room she found a mostly devoured body. It was thrashing about but far too damaged to be a danger. Patsy desperately wanted to put it out of its misery, but she didn't want to make any noise. Besides which, the concept of misery is very much a subjective thing. Maybe the thing writhing on the floor was more content than the person it was had ever been.

As she was heading out, she noticed that the bathroom door was shut. She paused next to it, listening. When there was no sound, she tapped lightly on the door.

"Is someone in there?" she said quietly. "I'm a police officer."

"Is it safe?" came a young girl's voice.

Patsy looked behind her at the thing on the floor. "Yes."

The door opened and a girl of perhaps fourteen years appeared. She was wearing a white blouse and a pair of jeans. She'd been crying and there was a piece of gauze wrapped around her arm.

"What's your name?"

"Kierra...Watterson."

"Are you all right?" Patsy asked.

"My mom...she attacked me. She bit me."

"Is it bad?"

The girl flexed her arm. "Not really. Just sore."

"Come on, then. I'll get you out of here."

"My mom?"

Patsy shook her head. "I'm sorry."

Rather than drag the girl further in, Patsy gave her directions back to the staircase where she would find Geri, Eli, and Mordecai. Then she moved in, checking the other rooms in a slingshot pattern.

Patsy found four more survivors in the rooms. One was a hulking man from somewhere in South America. He didn't speak English, but made it very clear that he wanted to assist Patsy in finding other survivors. The other three, a doctor and two orderlies, went right to the staircase. The doctor, too, had suffered a bite on his leg. He was limping badly, sure the wound was infected. It made Patsy wonder about what Geri had said, that the dead were infectious. But the dead were all victims of a disease that had infected none of them. That must mean they were all immune and the bites would be meaningless.

The main area by the nurses' station looked the same as the one on the sixth floor. There were bodies and blood. Patsy encountered four zombies and was forced to fire her weapons in order to defend herself and her companion. There were no more survivors. Still, as she looked at the layout of the floor, she was struck with an idea.

Coming back to the staircase, she said to Geri, "Are all of the floors laid out the same way?"

Geri nodded. Patsy explained that they could lure the zombies to the elevators on the opposite side and corral them in between the locked doors. Then they could rescue the survivors. As she was talking, she noticed Mordecai whispering to the big South American man. She was distracted by it until she realized that he was translating her idea. The big man kept nodding as if he liked her plan. When she was done, and Mordecai was done, he flashed her a smile and a thumbs up.

"You're crazy," said Eli. "We'll get swarmed."

"It's not that far fetched," Mordecai said. "It's really no different than what you did, Eli, in leading them out here."

"There's no outdoor exit like this on the fourth floor," Eli said. "If we get trapped on the stairs, we're done."

But Patsy was shaking her head. "I'll go in and lead them around. One of you doctors or whatever can follow after the bulk of the zombies have come after me and shut the doors. Mordecai, you and Pedro can pick off the stragglers."

"Domingo," the South American said, pointing to himself.

Patsy continued. "Just be ready to let me through the doors on the opposite side. Then we can take any survivors and head down to three."

"Crazy," Eli said.

"If anything goes wrong, you can come back up here and lock yourself out again. In the meantime, I plan on rescuing as many people as I can."

"I'll help," Geri said. "I'll come in behind you."

Patsy smiled at her. "If we're careful, we should be all right."

They headed down to the next floor. Through the window in the door, they could see a couple of zombies wandering beyond the short corridor. Patsy asked Eli if he would take care of them with his wrench so that they could avoid the noise. She'd back him up with her pistols.

Grumbling, he opened the door and stepped through. The zombies came at him instantly, but he didn't hesitate. As if he'd been doing it for a lifetime rather than under an hour, he waded in and took each down with one well placed blow to the head.

Patsy came in close behind him, but didn't have to fire her guns.

"Do you have keys to those doors?" she asked, indicating the sealed ward.

He nodded.

Getting her bearings, Patsy found the passage that would lead her to the other bank of elevators.

"I need you to stay with me," she said. "If there are more locked doors..."

"Fine," he snapped. "Let's just get it over with."

Geri was hovering just inside the short corridor. Patsy told her to head back to the staircase and keep out of site until she saw the mob go by. Then they could head into the loop and wait for her and Eli at the nurses' station.

As Geri retreated, Eli went over to the door and put his key in the lock. There were no windows so they had no idea what to expect when it opened. Patsy stood ready with her guns.

The first thing to hit them was the odor. Though the loop seemed clear behind the door, they could tell that there was a tremendous amount of death just out of sight.

"Should we try and..."

Patsy fired past him, taking down a zombie that was fast approaching. Really fast. So fast, in fact, that she'd almost mistaken it for a survivor. All of the ones she'd seen hadn't displayed any real speed or coordination. She was just beginning to rethink the plan when several more started coming around from both ends of the loop. They were responding to the gunshot.

Eli hesitated, raising his wrench as if he planned to wade into the fray. But he thought better of it and joined Patsy on the other side of the elevators.

The approaching mob was made up of the ordinary, slow and stumbling zombies, not that Patsy had any idea what ordinary was. For all she knew, there could be giant zombies whose muscles were like iron and zombies with long tongues who burst into vapor when you shot them. All she had seen, though, were the clumsy shambling kind and one fast zombie. She hoped to hell that one had been an aberration.

Eli wanted to bolt, but she held him back. She wanted to make sure that the bulk of the mob was following. Wasting a few bullets, she fired on the lead zombies. They went down quickly, giving her and Eli some more space and presenting obstacles to those behind.

"Keep watch behind," she shouted over the hissing and moaning of the undead.

Eli put his back to her. Despite the lights and the width, the connecting corridor seemed foreboding to him.

"Okay, let's move slowly," Patsy ordered.

Eli began walking, one eye in front of him and one eye behind. He didn't want to get separated. Patsy fired a few more times. She needed to make some room.

"We've got some coming up ahead of us," Eli said suddenly. He sounded terrified.

"How many?"

"More than I can kill."

Patsy quickly emptied her guns into the approaching mob. Several zombies fell. Then she ejected the clips and deftly maneuvered both weapons as she reloaded. Turning, she assessed the situation, and began firing.

"We're pinched," Eli cried, sounding ever more hysterical.

Patsy made some quick decisions and fired. "Let's go. You take out the ones you can with the wrench."

Together they began marching into the stragglers ahead of them. With the group behind them, they were pressed for time. If they let the zombies ahead build up, they truly would be pinched. So Patsy used her pistols often, firing at those that got too close, firing to thin the crowd. When they completed the circuit and reached the ward doors, Jake's gun was empty and she didn't have a clip for it.

Eli rushed up and banged on the doors. Patsy had never seen anyone so perpetually close to panic without actually panicking. Eventually, he cursed his own stupidity, realizing that he had the keys that would disengage the lock. Sheathing his wrench, he pulled the keys off of his belt and began riffling through them. Patsy fired off her last shot and tucked the gun into her belt. Drawing her nightstick, she stood ready to meet the assault.

The doors opened just as Eli found the key. He looked up to see the pale face of Geri. When she saw the mob approaching, she was struck dumb with terror.

"Patsy, come on!" Eli shouted, stepping through the doors.

Patsy turned and, as she did so, the doors slammed shut, trapping her with the horde.

For the first time since stepping out of the elevator with Jake as her partner, she was truly frightened. She couldn't open the doors on her own. She was out of ammunition. She couldn't hope to tackle a group of zombies that size with just her nightstick.

Still, she was hardly likely to give up.

The dead closed about her like a fog. She attacked the first two with her nightstick, finding that it was too light to do any real good. All it really did was reinforce her hand while she basically shoved the zombies away. Frustrated, she tossed it away and drew out her pistols. Gripping them by the barrels, she waded into the fray.

Though the guns were more effective than the nightstick, they hardly kept her safe. She quickly realized that the way ahead of her was cut off and the way behind her was sealed. She could hold them off for a bit, but would eventually tire. She was just at the point where she was wishing that she had saved a bullet for herself when she heard gunfire. Her first thought was, *hit me, please*, but then realized that someone was trying to save her?

"Jake!" she cried out.

There was no answer, but there were more shots. Then the zombies were falling away from her as they were destroyed. The gunfire was accompanied by the sound of a heavy object whipping through the air and impacting with soft dead skulls.

It was Eli. He cleared a path for her and dragged her back and out of the thick of the zombies. They were only a few feet from the doors. She thought she'd gone much further. Mordecai was there providing covering fire. He was a pretty good shot.

Eli dragged Patsy into the ward and tried to pull the doors closed. The zombies were right on them. Mordecai fired three more times and Eli had to throw the bodies into the paths of the others just so that he could get the doors shut. They stood there afterwards, the silence broken only by their quiet panting and the incessant thumping of the wolves at the door.

Patsy looked at the faces around her. Geri was standing at the desk. She wouldn't make eye contact. Mordecai stood three steps from the doors, his gun trained right on them. Eli was looking at Patsy, his wrench dangling from his right hand.

"You shut it, didn't you?" Patsy accused Geri.

Mordecai broke out of his spell and looked at them. "Let's not do this now."

Patsy turned to him. "How many survivors did you find?"

"Two. They're in the room over there."

Patsy went over to the room Mordecai had indicated and saw two men. One was sitting on the bed. He was a middle aged black fellow with a close haircut and large eyes. His name was Cam Frost and he wore a sullen expression, as if life was just one endless game of poker. The other man, Domenic Farizzi, was much smaller. He was losing his hair on top but wore a goatee that hadn't been properly trimmed.

"Were you bitten?" Cam Frost asked.

"What?" Patsy asked. "I'm fine, thanks."

"No bites?" he pressed. "No cuts or scratches at all?"

Patsy stripped off her bloody uniform shirt, leaving her in a dark tank top. She checked her arms for wounds, but there were none.

"Your legs?" he pressed.

Patsy looked at him impatiently. "I'm fine. What's the difference?"

"The difference is life and death, or undeath. Whatever you call it. You get bitten, you get sick. You get sick, you die. You die sick, you become one of those things."

"Hold on a minute," she said, raising her arms into the air. "If we weren't immune, we'd have gotten sick long ago, wouldn't we?"

Domenic was shaking his head sadly. Cam Frost joined him and said, "Think about how many people are sick. Everyone got sick at the same time. So whatever this thing is it was engineered to be either dormant or incubating for an extended period of time."

"Are you a doctor?" asked Patsy.

Cam Frost ignored the question. "In the victims, it's no longer in that dormant or incubating state. While you and I may have been immune to that first wave, we are not immune to the active organism."

"How do you know this?" Patsy cried, exasperated.

Cam Frost went on as if he was an expert of microbiology, yet presented no evidence. He wasn't wearing scrubs or even a shirt and tie. He was just a regular guy in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. The most infuriating part was Domenic, who just paced, nodding whenever Cam Frost said something that might be construed as relevant.

Continuing to ignore her questions, Cam Frost asked, "Were any of the others bitten?"

She thought of the doctor with the infected leg and the young girl with the tiny bite.

"This is ridiculous," she complained, then stalked out, throwing her hands into the air.

In the ward proper, she saw that Domingo had joined them. The zombies were still thumping at the door.

"Are you guys ready?"

They nodded.

"How much ammunition do you have left?" she asked Mordecai.

"Four shots if I counted correctly."

She was doing the arithmetic her head.

"Patsy, we can't do this again," said Eli, reading her mind. "If we get pinched the way we did, we'll never get out. As it is, the ground floor is going to be a zoo."

She knew that he was right, but was reluctant to leave the hospital. When she didn't answer, he took it as assent and started into the loop. He stopped at the room where Cam Frost and Domenic still remained to ask if they were coming. They looked at each other as if there was much of a decision to be made. They followed.

Geri was carrying a tote.

"What's in there?" Patsy asked.

"Medicine. Antibiotics for Dr. Felix."

"You're stealing them?"

Geri pulled a face. "They can bill me."

Back in the stairwell, they found the doctor sitting against the wall. He was in a cold sweat and barely conscious. He wasn't going anywhere on his own. Cam Frost and Domenic exchanged glances.

"It's infected," Patsy told them defensively. She looked at the young girl. "Are you all right?"

The girl nodded. "Shouldn't I be?"

"Of course," Patsy said with a sideways glance at Cam Frost.

"What do we do with him?" Mordecai asked, indicating the doctor.

"Put him out of his misery," Domenic suggested. It was the first time he'd spoken.

Patsy got right in his face. "He's a human being, you twit, not some lame horse."

Domenic took two steps back and almost slipped down the stairs. Cam Frost got between them.

"He's going to turn," Cam Frost said. "You can't save him."

"I won't leave him," Patsy replied.

"Are you going to carry him?"

"I'll help." She looked at the two orderlies and at Domingo. "Will you help?"

"We should give him a pill," said Geri.

"Don't waste it," Cam Frost said. "There won't be any more made for a long time."

"What is wrong with you?" Patsy cried. "I think you might be enjoying this just a little too much."

Something dark passed over Cam Frost's face. "Just because I can recognize the end of civilization and respond to it doesn't mean I'm having a good time."

"Give the doctor whatever you think he needs, Geri," Patsy said, never looking away from Cam Frost.

Geri rummaged through her bag until she found just the right bottle. Slipping one out, she pushed it into the doctor's mouth. Then she took a bottle of water from the same bag, opened it up, and forced some water into his system.

"Anyone want some?" she asked, offering the bottle around.

"I wouldn't," Cam Frost said just as Eli reached for the bottle. "He's infected. One slug of that and you'll be right there with him."

Patsy didn't like hearing that, but wasn't about to take chances.

The two orderlies lifted the doctor and supported him as they made their way down the stairs. At the third floor landing, Patsy paused but Eli nudged her gently. There were dozens of infected people roaming those halls. They were insatiable and unstoppable. And trapped in rooms and under desks were survivors. They were men and women and children who probably wouldn't survive the day.

And Patsy McNally was abandoning them.

As they started down the last flight of stairs, Eli stepped into the lead. The door at the bottom was closed, but he could see movement through the window. Holding up a hand, he snuck down and peaked through. What he saw made his skin crawl.

Whatever had happened down on the ground level was long since over. While Eli saw traces of blood on the walls, everything was calm as the zombies, and there were a lot of them, milled about. Crouching low, Eli went back up to the landing where the others were waiting.

"It's bad, isn't it?" Cam Frost asked.

Eli nodded. "It looks like a thin crowd, but everything we've seen tells me they'll swarm us as soon as we show our faces."

"Then we'll have to fight our way through," said Patsy.

"With my wrench and no bullets?" Eli argued. "Not a lot of hope there. Especially with Doctor Felix."

Despite the antibiotics, Dr. Felix didn't seem to be any better. If anything, he was declining rapidly. Though he didn't say anything, Cam Frost gave her a knowing look. Why was it up to her, she wondered. If she told them to leave him behind, they would and that weight would be on her shoulders.

"What about going up to the roof?" she asked. "If we go to the roof, is there..."

Eli shook his head. "This stairwell doesn't go to the roof. We'd need to cross to the other side of the hospital. Even if we did, going up won't solve our problems."

"That's it, then," said Mordecai. "We'll have to fight our way out."

"Maybe you didn't hear me," Eli began.

"Maybe you didn't hear yourself," Mordecai completed. "We don't have another option."

"Yeah," said Eli, realizing the truth. "Yeah, okay. Fine. If we make a break for it, some of us might make it."

"Some of us?" Kierra asked.

"Don't try to kill them," Cam Frost told them. "They're going to swarm you so you've got to keep them back. Shove them into one another. Let them trip each other up. Make sure you've always got room."

Eli said, "Patsy and I will cover you."

Patsy nodded in agreement.

"What about the doctor?" one of the orderlies asked, but no one had an answer.

Patsy looked from face to face. They were all thinking the same thing and waiting for someone, her, to take responsibility for it. Eli had said that she wasn't a cop anymore, but that badge felt heavier than ever.

"Give me your wrench," she said to Eli.

He complied before even thinking about what she meant. Patsy took the wrench and tested the weight. Dr. Felix was sitting against the wall on the landing. She wasn't sure he was conscious. She knew that what she would do now would forever change her. She said a silent prayer to a power she had long ago forsaken, and swung the wrench with all of her might.

No one tried to stop her.

Something inside of Patsy McNally shut down just then and would never be restarted. She did not cry and she did not feel sick. She just handed the wrench back to Eli and went down to the door.

Eli followed, whispering. "Head to the right. There's a hallway that leads back to the labs and diagnostic exam rooms. They won't have let patients there so hopefully the crowd will be thinner. We can go out a fire exit and make a break for it."

"That's your plan?" asked one of the orderlies.

"That and try not to make any noise. No screaming. Mordecai, save those bullets for us."

Patsy drew her empty guns. "Let's go."

Eli hefted his wrench in his right hand and opened the door with his left. They moved out together, Eli hanging back to prevent as many zombies as possible from rushing them and Patsy leading them forward to the hallway. Despite what they expected there was not an immediate reaction to their presence. Some of the nearest zombies turned their heads and sniffed while those furthest away continued their meandering. Eli actually had close to fifteen seconds to stand there, bouncing on the balls of his feet, before one came close enough for him to attack. He fought with the zombies while the others moved toward safety.

He'd been right about the hallway. Patsy led them straight inside and found it mostly deserted. There was one just inside. He was a tall fellow wearing a lab coat over a brown suit. He didn't seem wounded so Patsy assumed he'd been a dedicated doctor who had come to work despite his illness.

She beat him mercilessly with the butts of her guns.

The next person they met was a police officer. She had multiple wounds to her arms and legs. Perhaps she had gotten caught in the madness when people had started to die and turn.

Patsy took her out, too.

The woman had two spare clips on her. Patsy loaded one into her gun and put the other on her belt. Ejecting the clip in the woman's gun, she checked to see that only two bullets had been fired. She loaded that one into Jake's gun.

"How about sharing?" an orderly asked.

She did not respond.

Eli came running up the corridor. He was dripping with gore.

"I couldn't get the door closed," he said. "We've got loads of company."

It was too narrow for them to make a stand. They picked up the pace, moving rapidly past the signs that said oncology and radiology and zombiology.

When someone jumped out of one of the labs, Eli nearly brained him with his wrench. But the man's hands came up and he spoke.

"I heard voices..." he began to explain, but Eli just turned him around and got them moving again.

They made a quick turn and then another. Finally, they had reached the exit Eli had mentioned. They'd put some distance between themselves and the approaching mob, but there was no time to lose. He threw open the door and was confronted by a throng of zombies.

He was going to shut the door, but Patsy warned him not to. There was nowhere to go. Bringing up her pistols, she began firing.

"Follow us," she called back. "Last one shut the door!"

Eli joined her as she stepped over the threshold and out into the world. The entrance was behind the hospital. Though Eli had been right about it being a generally clear area, he hadn't counted on the mayhem that had ensued when the sick had become the dead and the dead had become the undead. Survivors, once they had realized what was happening, had run as fast as they could from the scene. A few got away, but they'd also led off some of the zombies, spreading them out all around the hospital. There wasn't any place even remotely safe within a one block radius.

Patsy and Eli fought hard to clear a path through the mob, but it was a futile gesture. They couldn't protect the entire group. The zombies closed in behind them even before they had all gotten through the door. Both orderlies and Domenic were forced to shut them out and head back into the hospital. They fought well when they encountered the group that had followed Eli but it wasn't enough. Only one of the orderlies lasted long enough to barricade himself inside of a lab, but he was so bitten up that he didn't even live three hours.

Cam Frost, ever the opportunist, broke away from the group as soon as he was through the door. A few zombies took notice of him, but he was able to shove them aside and clear two blocks before resting. Safe, he traveled on alone.

Geri, Kierra, Domingo, and Mordecai kept close to Patsy and Eli. Unarmed, Geri and Kierra were of little use offensively. Mordecai became quickly winded, but continued to fight with the butt of his gun. It did little good however and he was forced to fire, quickly running out of bullets.

"Patsy," he cried. "I need a clip. Give me your spare."

She would have but she refused to put away one of her guns until it was empty. She wasn't firing all that much but more than she would have liked. She caught sight of one of the fast zombies running through the crowd. It was knocking the others aside as it came for them. She had a thought that they might be able to use it as a weapon against the others, but things were happening too quickly. It was impossible to maneuver into position. In the end, she wound up shooting it in the head.

"There!" Eli shouted.

There was a break in the group, a place where they could make a run for it. Geri, Kierra, and Mordecai took to their heels while Patsy and Eli fought off the zombies. They gave it a few seconds before turning and running themselves. Eli spun into a zombie that he hadn't noticed approaching. The two of them became entangled and dropped to the ground. Patsy didn't notice at first or she might have been able to help. She might not have noticed at all if she hadn't heard the wrench banging against the pavement.

Another zombie had joined in the fray. She couldn't tell whose blood was whose. In a minute, the writhing bodies would be just as indistinguishable. For all she knew, none of it was Eli's. Perhaps he was perfectly unscathed. Patsy took aim and fired.

It was all over for Eli.

Turning on her heels, Patsy dashed forward shouting at the others to keep running. She took cover behind a parked car, the barrels of her guns smoking. She had forgotten to keep count of her ammunition.

The zombies were giving chase, but they were slow. Without firing another shot, she turned and went after the others. She found them huddling on street corner. The area was mostly clear, but she could see someone wandering around at the end of the block. At this distance there was no way to tell if the figure was dead or alive.

"Are you all right?" Mordecai asked Patsy, but she didn't answer. She just kept staring at Kierra.

"What?" the girl finally cried. "What did I do?"

Patsy paused a few more seconds. "How's your arm?"

Kierra shrugged. "Okay, I guess. It's no big deal."

"We should get off the street," Geri suggested. The figure at the end of the block was coming towards them.

Patsy shook herself back into the present. "We'll go to the precinct. It's pretty secure and we can arm ourselves."

The police station was a few miles away so they broke into a car and Mordecai hotwired it. He seemed to be full of useful skills. As they drove, they stared out at the streets in awe. It wasn't what one would expect from an apocalypse. There were no roads flooded with stopped traffic. There was no random debris floating about. The abandoned military vehicles that appear in all of the movies were absent. No, this apocalypse had come upon civilization so rapidly that no civilian had had time to flee, no military had had time to mobilize, and no clergyman had had time to pray. No. Everything looked so very ordinary. Just empty.

The precinct stood as it always had, solid and rectangular, four stories of strong brick. The doors were shut and there was a woman in a pretty sun dress leaning up against them. She was dead. As the four survivors got out of their stolen car, she turned and started toward them. She fell down the steps.

Patsy turned, looking for Eli. She had come to rely on him and his wrench. But Eli was gone. Whether condemned by zombie bites or not, her bullet had made sure of that. She had killed two people today. Two living people.

Where was Patsy McNally?

The doors were unlocked so they went in, Patsy leading with both handguns. She wasn't worried about ammunition. There was plenty in the basement armory.

No one accosted them as they passed through reception and into the squad room. Sitting at his desk, drowning in paperwork, was Detective McColl.

"Where's your boyfriend?" he asked.

"He didn't make it," Patsy growled.

"What's that supposed to mean?" McColl looked at the group that had followed her in and his face changed a bit. "Who are all these people?"

She shook her head. "Why don't you fill him in, Mordecai?"

As they looked on, Patsy slipped out of the room.

Finding her way down the stairs, Patsy went first to the evidence room. Usually, there was someone on duty down there, but she didn't see anyone. It was closed off by one of those doors that was split into a top and bottom half. The top half was open so she lifted herself over and into the room.

Inside, Patsy began looking through the boxes for anything useful. She had just pulled out a wicked knife that had been confiscated from some gang boss when she heard a noise. She was expecting McColl but was confronted by a zombie. He had white hair and was wearing a policeman's uniform. It was Dooly, the guy who was supposed to be guarding the evidence. He must have been sick and died at work.

Patsy jammed the blade into his eye. He dropped slowly to the ground. She wondered how many others were wandering around. There probably weren't many since McColl had spent the whole day doing paperwork and had managed not to get eaten. The holding cells were probably full of them, but they would be in cages.

Patsy reached down and pulled out the knife. Then she unclipped Dooly's keys and went to the armory. That was where Mordecai found her a few minutes later. She was stuffing clips into an ammunition vest. There was an assault rifle sitting on a shelf in easy reach.

"How's McColl?" she asked.

"Adjusting," Mordecai answered. "He's an interesting fellow."

"He's a jackass."

Mordecai shrugged. "He seems to have a good head on his shoulders."

She shrugged. "He'd better. I'm taking him with me to go and get my family."

"Oh," said Mordecai, surprised by her response. "I didn't realize...were they sick?"

"No," she answered just a bit too quickly. "Well, they had colds."

"Colds," mimicked Mordecai. "Patsy, I only know you for a few hours, but you've definitely managed to accept the parameters of this reality. What you did for Dr. Felix...and for Eli...those were courageous acts by a person who is not harboring any illusions about the nature of things."

"What's your point, Mordecai?"

He looked her squarely in the eyes. "Your family didn't have colds. You can't save them."

She didn't answer him, just continued to look at him.

And then, as if they were simply discussing the weather, he said, "Anyway, this place is as good as any to hide out for a while. We can scavenge some food, board up the windows on the ground floor, and maybe link up with some other survivors. We need people with other skills. I know you don't like Geri, but having a nurse with us is going to come in handy. Long term, we'll have to leave the city, find someplace where we can farm and breed livestock. For now, though, we should be okay."

He turned to leave.

Patsy thought about all that he had said in a heartbeat. "Mordecai?"

He turned back. "You'd better arm yourself. I found a zombie down here. There may be more. The cells are probably full of them."

"Hmm," he said, grabbing a pistol off of a rack.

"And keep an eye on Kierra. She said she was bitten. If she gets sick, let me know."

That sounded much too ominous for Mordecai's comfort, but he nodded anyway and headed up the stairs.

Patsy followed a short time later. She was carrying a tote bag in one hand and the assault rifle in the other. The whole of the group was sitting in the squad room. They were huddled around McColl, who was surfing the web.

"Find anything interesting?" Patsy asked.

Mordecai looked at her, but said nothing.

“Most of the web sites are still up,” Kierra said. “But there’s not a whole lot of news that isn’t hours old. We found a few people in chat rooms and people are posting on *Facebook*. Mostly pictures from before. Mostly people saying goodbye.”

“Some people are calling for help,” McColl added.

Kierra nodded.

“Can you come with me?” Patsy asked him.

He nodded. “Mordecai said something about it.”

“I also asked you not to go,” Mordecai added.

Patsy passed him a sour look.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I understand your feelings, but you’re abandoning us and taking our strongest defender with you.”

“Just lock the door,” McColl grunted. “We’ll be back in a couple of hours.”

“Most of the zombies are probably trapped in their houses,” Patsy said. “The streets are virtually empty. Besides which, you have Domingo.”

At the sound of his name, the big man looked up. “Go?” he asked.

Patsy shook her head. “You stay here. Try and learn some English.”

He frowned.

She and McColl went back downstairs and into the garage. McColl had a favorite car and he chose it now, not even giving Patsy the option of driving. She didn’t mind. Driving wasn’t on her mind at the moment anyway. There were too many other things getting in the way. When she had her family safe and at the precinct, she hoped she would be able to calm down, shake off the frantic feeling.

Still, though, there was Jake.

As before, driving through the streets was eerie. McColl didn’t seem fazed by it, but Patsy could really feel her control slipping. With nothing to do but sit in the car and watch as they passed through empty block after empty block, she was barely able to sit still.

“McNally,” McColl mused. “That’s Irish, right?”

She didn’t say anything.

“What’s your first name?”

Patsy swallowed. “Patsy,” she said.

He laughed. “No kidding.”

“What’s funny about it?” she growled.

He looked at her, still chuckling out of the corners of his mouth. “Don’t be like that. It’s funny. If half of what Mordecai said is true, you’re one tough sister. Then you go and tell me your name is Patsy?” He laughed a bit harder. “That’s a name out of a fifties sitcom.”

“It’s a traditional Irish name. What’s your first name, *McColl*?”

“Ha ha,” he said. “Brick.”

She looked at him with wide eyes. “And you’re making fun of my name? What kind of person names his kid Brick?”

“Fair enough,” he said. “My full name is Burton Richard McColl. People started calling me Brick when I was a kid and it stuck.”

Patsy thought about it a moment. “Well it’s stupid.”

He shrugged. “At least it doesn’t say *Patsy* on my birth certificate.”

She didn’t answer but realized that that wasn’t going to matter anyway. Who was ever going to check her birth certificate again?

“Turn left here,” she said.

McColl cut the wheel and pulled into the outer streets of her neighborhood. This area in which she’d been born and raised, now seemed so alien to her. Twenty four hours before it had felt like home. Now... now...

Now was all that mattered.

Patsy gave him a series of quick directions and, before she knew it, they were pulling into the driveway. Next door, Mr. Landon was sitting on the lawn. She stared out the window at him and he turned to look back at her. She had never liked Mr. Landon. He was the guy who told the kids to keep off the lawn. He was the guy who never returned your ball or your frisbee. He was the guy about whom the kids made up stories. Patsy stepped out of the car and raised her pistol, taking a small bit of pleasure in blowing his brains out.

“I think you want to be careful about using that pistol,” McColl said as he got out of the driver’s side.

“He was already dead,” Patsy answered.

“I don’t mean that. Take a look around you.”

Patsy looked and saw faces in all of the windows. Friends and neighbors had gathered to see what the noise was and whether there was a fleshy meal associated with it. They were very frustrated by the fact that they couldn’t seem to get through their walls and windows. Stricken, Patsy looked up at her own house and saw empty windows. She wasn’t sure what she would have done had she seen a familiar face there.

“Let’s get this over with,” McColl said, heading up the front steps.

Pulling her keys out, Patsy rushed up ahead of him. She reached the door and found, to her dismay, that it was partially ajar. “Hello?” she called out, stepping inside without caution.

The house was silent.

Brick stepped in behind her, closing the front door. He had his gun out now, an old time Smith & Wesson revolver. Patsy was already moving quickly down the hall toward the kitchen.

“*McNally!*” McColl hissed. “Don’t be stupid.”

She was about to say something unflattering when she thought better of it. He was right. There could very well be zombies that had broken into the house. If her family were there, they would have already come to her.

In the kitchen she found her father’s mug of tea still on the table. It was cold now, of course, and still mostly full. The television on the countertop was off. Light streamed in through the back door, which was wide open. Patsy poked her head out.

Their stretch of backyard was pretty tiny. There was a square of grass just off the small patio. Some of the furniture had been knocked over. Someone was out there with a shovel, patting dirt onto a small mound. He was wearing a shirt that had been white, probably at the beginning of the day, and a pair of slacks. His head was balding, but there were still a few wisps of hair sailing across the top of his head.

He became aware of Patsy suddenly and turned. He was older than he appeared from the back. He had been living on the block since Patsy had been in her early teens. When he saw her, he began to relax.

“Pat,” he said. “Thank God.”

“What are you doing, Mr. Hours?” she asked him.

Roland Hours looked at the mound and dipped his face. “It’s Tennessee. He died protecting me and I wanted to give him a good burial.”

“What?” she said. “The dog? You’re burying your dog in my yard?”

Hours stood up and dusted off his hands. “I couldn’t do it in my yard. Clara’s out there. She’s the one that killed Tennessee.”

Patsy was about to say something. Then something else. Finally, she asked, “Did you see my mom or dad? Or Theresa or Catherine?”

He nodded. “I saw them. I was coming down here to see if they were all right and they were running down the street. I called to them, but they just kept on going.”

Why would they do that? Patsy wondered. “Were they being chased?”

Hours shook his head. “Not that I could see. It looked like your mom was still in her pajamas.”

McColl had come out the back and was listening to their conversation. “We should get back.”

“We’re not done here. I want to grab a few things and then we’ll circle the neighborhood.”

“Where are you going?” asked Hours. “Can I come?”

“Of course,” said Patsy.

Roland looked relieved. “Thank you so much. I’ll run and grab some things, too. Is that okay?”

“You’ve got three minutes,” McColl said. Then he looked at Patsy. “So do you.”

“Shut up.”

Five minutes later, they were in the car and cruising the neighborhood. They circled through the streets, looking for stragglers. They didn’t have much to say to each other, but they were all thinking the same thing as they looked at the faces in the windows. All of these people that had grown sick and died were trapped in their houses. Clearly they were too stupid to open doors or windows. Ultimately, though, they would break out. Eventually, they would flood the streets and the human race would become an endangered species. How long did they have? A day? A week?

They didn’t find Patsy’s family. They drove for two hours. The afternoon began to grow old and McColl insisted they head back to the precinct house. Patsy reluctantly agreed, but was uncommunicative afterwards.

The garage opened remotely. It occurred to McColl that they would have to find a way of sealing it up. Any squad car could open it. His best bet would be to cut power to the system. He asked Patsy if she knew anything about it, but she just shrugged. It would be up to him.

He brought Hours up to the squad room and then went to try and find the circuit boxes. The others were trying to make things comfortable for the upcoming night. They were surprised to see the new man, especially Mordecai, who felt somewhat ashamed. He had begged Patsy not to go, but they had saved a life. After welcoming Hours, Mordecai slipped away and went to find Patsy.

She was sitting on the floor of the armory, an ammunition vest laying next to her. She had one of her pistols in her hand and she was carving something into the grip with the knife.

“Roland seems like a good man. It’s a good thing you went out after all.”

Patsy didn't answer. She just continued to carve.

"What's that you're doing?"

"This is my partner's gun. I don't want to get them mixed up."

"I see," said Mordecai. "Are you planning on giving it back to him?"

"Something like that," she said. All rationale told her that Jake was dead. But Patsy knew him too well to believe it. He was a survivor if there ever was one. She'd half expected him to be at the precinct when she'd returned.

This time he didn't say anything. He just nodded and left her to herself. She went back to her carving. She was just about halfway through the K, the J sloppily scrawled to its left. JK. Jake Kumasi. If she ever did see him again, she wasn't likely to return the gun. Not the whole gun anyway. Just one bullet.

Right between the eyes.