

Survive

By Madison Nordick

Did the world *have* to turn out this way?

I can feel the sun glaring down on my back as I trudge through the bushes. It's reflecting off the stream of water that I've been following for the past few hours. I wish I hadn't lost my sunglasses at the beginning of all this.

But, let me backtrack for a second.

Two years ago, two brilliant scientists, one by the name of George Hayes, and his friend, Micheal Flisk, were challenged with the idea of bringing back victims of crimes from the dead for a short period of time, so they could give testimony's in court. The idea was that the government would never imprison an innocent person again.

A good idea for a good cause was how it started out. How George Hayes wanted it to be.

Then it got out of hand.

There was a group of people who we now call the Radioactives, Radis for short. They decided to try and take the invention one step further. After the experiments first successful run-through, the Radis, (at this point in time, they were just ordinary people with a nack for science) formed and proposed a way to further the development.

They wanted to make it so the machine could bring back anyone. Permanently.

People who died of natural causes, of natural disasters, or people from the many wars, from *Roman times*, even.

Surprisingly, Micheal had immediately agreed with them, saying that it was a revolutionary achievement to bring back someone from the dead, and that they should put it to use.

Of course, the government would not agree to that. That would mess up too many fundamentals of life. And if one person had a loved one brought back permanently, everyone else would be clamouring to get to the machine. Wars could break out over the damn thing. And no one would care if they died in the war, cause they believed that they could be brought back.

By that damn machine.

George Hayes decided that the best course of action, to protect the people, would be to go against his friends wishes, and hide it away, in a vault deep underground, where no one could find it. Of course, the public didn't know it was under ground at that point. We found that out later.

And, well. Let's just say that Flisk didn't take that well.

Flisk had him imprisoned in a high security prison for the criminally insane, where he was put through multiple interrogations. Consisting of what, we don't know. A newspaper reporter caught wind of this, and soon enough, it was pasted and broadcasted on every news outlet there was. The community rioted at the information, starting protests labeled "Free George Hayes" and "Flisk No More".

The only problem was, hardcore supporters of Flisk and members of Radis fought back.

And on June 11th, 2016, was when they made their first major strike.

A large part of my community had gathered at a park in the middle of the city, two blocks down from my family's simple suburban house, protesting the unjust imprisonment of Hayes. Suddenly, seemingly out of the blue, men and women wearing all black, with the Toxic symbol — fitting, don't you think? — in red imprinted on their chests, stormed into the crowd, striking down any and all civilians in their paths.

That was my first time seeing the Radis in person.

It was terrible.

No matter how many people they injured, how many people they *literally walked over*, they wouldn't stop moving.

The worst part is that it was only a diversion for their *real* goal.

After what seemed like hours, the Radis left back into the shadows that they came from. The injured lay on the ground, groaning and occasionally wailing in pain as people called doctors and tied tourniquets around limbs with jackets and scarves. While the Radis had fought these people, a far larger portion of them had stormed into the underground vault and stole the machine. They announced this on live television that night, by hacking into frequency's and broadcasting it on every channel.

I still remember what they said.

"Hello, fellow inhabitants of earth. I am Liam, the appointed spokesperson for the Radioactives." The man, Liam, was lanky, with carefully tousled chestnut brown hair swept slightly to the side. He was grinning at the camera, his bright blue eyes twinkling with pure delight.

I had seen him around my city before, he worked at the pharmacy on 12th street. He didn't look like a member of an organization who would harm innocents, and he was just a few years out of high school, but I guess we really should never judge a book by its cover.

"You might be asking yourself, who are the Radioactives? Well, we, also known as the Radis, are the revolution of the century. Just now, we have gotten a hold on the lovely Machine invented by Micheal Flisk, the famous and renowned scientist who has found the power to bring the dead back to life."

He didn't mention George Hayes.

"Micheal has entrusted us with the information of where this machine was sitting underground, collecting dust, and we decided to put it to use."

He didn't say how Micheal found out where the machine was.

"Micheal and the scientists of Radis have made some adjustment to the machine, to make it so anyone can be brought back from the dead, and it will be permanent. So, we will be broadcasting the first ever mass bring-back tonight, using the upgraded machine now called: Revolution."

“Better keep you television feed going, you wouldn’t want to miss this.”

Later that night, the catastrophe happened.

“Revolution should have finished her work by now..”

A woman with long brown hair and glasses had said nervously, chewing on the end of her pen. She glanced at the camera, before straightening up and schooling her face into a professional mask of indifference. “Open the capsule!” She declared as the light from the silver machine dimmed. Four people stepped out from the sidelines, gloved hands clasping the grooves in the fogged over door.

“On three.” A blonde woman whispered.

“One..”

It was like the whole world was either holding their breath, or counting with her.

“Two..”

“Three!”

They hauled the door up, and for a moment, all anyone could see was billowing steam.

Then, a skeletal, green-tinged hand shot out of the machine, and grabbed the side of the wall. It pulled itself up, and with horror, the world took in the creature. It’s eye’s were glazed over and unfocused, and there was blood splattered over it’s dirty, once white shirt. It’s mouth was agape, and it’s nose was crooked. Chunks of it’s short, sandy hair seemed to have been ripped out. It’s skin was decaying, and missing in some places, bones visible at its collarbone, and a rip in it’s shirt revealed a set of cracked ribs. There was complete silence for a moment, as people stared, before a Radis member yelled;

“It’s a Zombie!”

That shocked everyone out of their stupors.

Screams erupted all around the capsule, as people ran. The Zombie hefted it’s legs over the wall with jerking, uncoordinated movements. The screens continued filming as the people who filmed ran. A second Zombie — this one female, with stringy ginger hair and a simple green cocktail dress that was stained with dirt and blood, and shredded at the bottom — climbed out too, her ankle twisted at an odd angle that no one should have ever been able to walk with, causing her to stumble and nearly fall to the ground every other step. A third Zombie piled out of the machine, this one younger than the others, with jeans that had ripped mid-thigh, exposing pale, gangly legs that had scars, and wounds that were still bleeding. More came pouring out, one after the other, some even missing limbs.

That was about the time that the world realized one thing: we’re screwed.

But, hey. It could be worse.

Oh god, I hope I didn’t do that thing in the movies where the person is like; *“it could be worse!”* And then it, like, immediately gets way worse. Though, that stuff doesn’t actually happen in real life, so I’m probably safe.

(The key word in that sentence is probably.)

Or, well, as safe as anyone can be, with a literal Zombie Apocalypse happening around you. But let me get you up to speed a little. It's been two years since the first Zombie emerged from that damn capsule thingy-mabober — *And no, I don't care that that is not a word. It is now. And plus, where am I supposed to find a dictionary in the Zombie Apocalypse? Eh? You don't know? Yeah, I thought so.* — and the date is June fifteenth, 2016.

At least, I think it is. I was never any good at keeping track of the day's date. Whenever summer break came along, and I didn't have school to remind me when it was, I was constantly asking my neighbours and parents and *anyone* who would listen to a little, jabbering thirteen year old: *what's the date?*

I'm getting off track.

I'm currently following a stream in this tundra looking place, that's, like, out of every single stereotypical Zombie movie-slash-comic *ever* — Seriously, where is the originality, world? — and it's slowly expanding in size. I watch the water run through the grooves in the land, occasionally splashing up and spraying my bare legs. I look above it at the trees on the other side. I wish I could name them all, there is Spruce, and Poplar, and then there are some that look like ancient oaks from the fairytales my Dad used to tell me about before I fell asleep.

I wonder where he is. Or if he's still alive.

I don't really care what happened to my mother. For all I know, she died the day after she left when I was seven. The grass is yellowing beneath my feet, though it looks more alive than it had a little ways back. It seems that the water is slowly helping the surrounding plant life. I glance ahead of me, looking for paw prints. I smile as I see them, coming out of the water a few paces ahead of me. I inhale deeply, before letting out an ear splitting whistle. I pause for a moment. The only sound I can hear is my breathing and the rushing of water. Then, a faint thumping starts, and before I know it, a fur ball is thrusting itself into my arms.

I laugh, kneeling down. "Hey, boy. Where'd you run off to?" I tease, as he pushing his snout into my neck, making me laugh again.

My dog's name is lucky, — original name, I know — and he's a Border Collie, Jack Russel Terrier mix. His ears point straight up, and his face is black, except for a line in the middle of his snout, which reaches down to fully take over his nose and mouth. His front completely white, and his back completely black. His warm brown eyes sparkle in the sun and his tongue lolls out the side of his maw. I press my head into his chest, grasping the tag attached to his blue — and very worn — collar. I gaze down at it, running my thumb over the cool metal, like I've done a thousand times before. The familiarity of it is soothing.

*Property of Sharina Kennelly.
If found, please call (1) 982-332-4683.
His name is Lucky. Thank you.*

It was sunny, the day me and Dad had gone to the shop to get the tag engraved. I remember eleven year old me holding a squirming puppy in my arms, giggling as he licked my face. The shop keeper was an elderly man, with greying hair and a kind smile. His family had run that quaint, pastel green with peeling paint pet store for many decades, and his children were eager to take over for him when he retired.

I lift my head as Lucky bounds ahead again, and I smile as I watch his springing figure splash through the stream, scaring birds and squirrels out of the Poplars and bushes.

Oh yeah, I'm Sharina Kennelly. So-far survivor of the Zombie Apocalypse. That's a pretty good introductory title, don't you think?

As I look ahead, I gasp. A few meters in front of me, the stream branches out into a large pond, it's clear blue water twinkling in the sun light. I grin, before charging at it, the ache in my bones from walking so far forgotten. I stop at the edge to slip my pack off my shoulders, before yelling, "Cannon Ball!" And diving in.

I go under with a *sploosh* as the water envelopes me, bubbles floating up in front of my face until my head breaks the surface, my lungs greedily inhaling. The waters cool, and it feels amazing on my most-likely sunburned skin. The ripples slowly calm as I tread water, before swimming to the edge again to crawl out. I sling my leg over the edge and hoist myself up, flopping onto the ground. The sky above me is clear, no clouds in sight. I breath deeply, and then stand up slowly. I here a splash as Lucky dives into the water, barking happily as he surfaces again, dripping wet. I chuckle as I look down at the water pulsing below me. I stare as I catch sight of my reflection.

my dirty-blonde hair — I'm not calling my hair dirty, — though it probably is — that's just my hair colour — is loose and dripping, and my light green eyes look tired, but they still look bright. My camouflage green tank top is wet and slightly to small, but I haven't found another shirt to change into, other than the spare one in my pack, but I switch them every day, so I'm not wearing the same one each day. My shorts are blue, with a small *Superstore* logo on the top right. My skin is tanner than it had been before this catastrophe, but still rather light. I really, *really* don't tan easily. I remember my classmates had given me the nickname "Vampire" because—

I'm knocked out of my thoughts by a loud, long groan.

My head whips around so fast, for a moment I wonder if I'll get whiplash, before my mind focuses on the more important thing in front of me. Three Zombies are standing a meter or two in front of me, all slowly limping forward, hands — or arm stubs, for the one on the left — outstretched. I back up a few paces, and without taking my eyes off the approaching undead, I grab my bag by the zipper and throw it over one shoulder, slipping my other arm in to grab the silver pocketknife I'd taken from an abandoned grocery store awhile back.

I glance behind me, looking for Lucky, to spot more zombies standing behind me.

I look back in front of me, to where the first Zombies are, to see that they're marginally closer. I take a deep breath, and run to my right, narrowly avoiding the scabbed and decayed groping hands of the one on my right as it swipes at me. I continue sprinting for a moment, before I remember:

Lucky.

I pivot on my heel as I gaze frantically around for him. I can feel the dread mounting in me and I start to wonder wether he ran off, and if I should continue away from the zombies, when a yelp brings my attention back to the now-stopped Zombies. They've formed a circle, and in between the oddly bent legs of a rather squat one, I see him, whimpering as they slowly encroach, occasionally snapping at a hand that gets too close, causing them to fall back a few steps, before continuing forward again. I stare, and as my brain begins to function again, one thought echoes through my head: *Lucky cannot die.*

I run forward, but stop a moment later. There's no way I can get to him, without getting mauled myself, which will *not* save my dog. I look around for anything I could use.

There's a shady tree to the left of the zombie circle, a few rocks in front of the lake to the left of the circle, and—

There is someone in that tree.

I did a double take. Crouched among the branches stood a hunched figure. The leaves obscured most of it, and shadows covered the rest. The figure continued to shift for a moment before tensing, and without a sound it slipped down on top of the nearest zombie while simultaneously impaling the one to the right of it through the chest with the large and engraved glossy black staff it — no, it's a he. The figure's a He — held. He then threw his staff into the neck of the taller Zombie across from him, and I wince as the blood spurts out of the artery. He dove to one side, his hands grabbing the two legs of a short, male one as he rotated to face the sky. Suddenly, his legs kicked up, wrapping around the zombie's midsection, flipping himself onto his stomach and his legs pinned the zombie down. With a swift kick to the underside of the jaw, the zombie's head snapped back with a quiet yet sickening *crunch!*

The man sprang up gracefully and roundhouse-kicked the fifth one — a female with greying hair — and jabbed his elbow and knee at the sixth — one so mutilated that I can't even tell the gender — in the neck and Where-The-Sun-Don't-Shine respectively. He shifts into a normal standing position as he turns to face me, crouching to pull his Staff out of the tall Zombie — *I now dub you, Tall-E. Get it? Tall-E? Wall-E? Oh, forget it.* — without breaking eye contact — at least, I don't think he did. It's kinda hard to tell with the hood. Is kinda an actual word? Like, kind-of mashed into one?

Damn I miss Google.

Anyway.

He yanks his Staff — yes, that *does* deserves to be capitalized — out of the Zombie's neck as he stands up. The man then twists his arm around to jam his Staff into what I presume (*cut to me with a fancy accent*) is a holster made specifically for it, because that thing is like a sword carrier, but wider and looks even fancier than the Staff itself. That's a pretty impressive feat. And the dark green is a *really* nice colour.

I'm rambling, aren't I?

Whoops.

Before I find something to say, he pulls down his black hood.

He seems to be about my age, maybe a year or two older — where can a sixteen-slash-seventeen year old learn fight like that? — he's African-American, rather buff looking, but not in a body builder way — more like he would have gone to the gym a lot, if it wasn't impossible right now — with a buzz cut and stormy grey eyes. What surprises me most — though I don't know why, this is a Zombie Apocalypse, people are bound to have marks — is the scar on his face that runs from through his left eyebrow, and ends at his jawline. His expression impassive as he looks at me. There's silence for a moment where we stare at each other, before;

“Are you going to pick up your jaw and get your dog so we can get out of this hellhole, or will I be waiting here for a while?” He asks, raising his eyebrow. I quickly snap my jaw shut as I scramble forward to get too Lucky, who had been alternating between whimpering and growling the whole fight. I drop the silver knife on the ground and I fall to one knee as he bounds towards me, licking my face in between yips as a smile at him, relief washing over me. I take a break from petting him for a moment to unzip my bag and rifle through it until I find the frayed, worn brown leash that Lucky luckily — see what I did there? — had had

attached to him when we first ran from our home two years ago. I clip it to his collar before I stand up, and turn to look back at the man — no, the *teen* — that saved me.

“So, not to be rude, but who are you?” I ask, which earns me a head-tilt from him. He looks at me for a moment, seeming to debate with himself, before finally responding with:

“I don’t see why you need to know that at the moment.”

I huff in annoyance. Well, two can play at *that* game. “Well, alright then. But if you’re not going to tell me *your* name, I shouldn’t have to tell you mine, right?” I ask, crossing my arms. He pauses for a moment, before grudgingly admitting;

“I do actually need your name.” Jackpot. I smile sweetly at him.

“Well, then I’m gonna need yours!” I respond. He huffs in annoyance, and I sigh. “Oh come one, it’s not *that* big of a deal. It’s literally just a name, dude. Would you rather you tell me your name, and get mine in return, or have me call you Mr. Stick-Man till the end of your days?” I rant. I’m about to continue my tirade, when his voice stops me.

“Cal.”

I pause. “What?”

“My name is Cal.” Well that was easier than I thought it was going to be. I look back at him, before holding out my hand to shake, which he takes in a firm grip as I say:

“I’m Sharina Kennelly, and that fur ball over there is Lucky.” I let our hands drop and I tack on the last part as Lucky bounds towards Cal, looking for attention. I see a small upturn of Cal’s lips as he looks down at Lucky. That’s one of the best qualities about Lucky; he can make anyone, if the most stony-faced stoic person on earth, crack a smile.

Cal cleared his throat, before looking back at me. “Now that introductions are over, we need to get back to base; And before you ask, I’ll explain.” He adds on at the end, seeing my frown.

“I’m an agent of S-dot-U-dot-R-dot-V-dot-I-dot-V-dot-E, also known as Survive. Don’t ask me what it stands for, cause I do not have that information. My Mission — along with many others at the moment — is to travel throughout the world to find as many survivors as I can. Once Zeyla — my commander — and some other higher ups have found enough intel on where the Radis are operating and the location of the base that operates The Machine — yes, they are still producing more Zombies, like the asinine imbeciles they are — we will be sending out a squad to launch an attack on their bases and find out more. That’s why I have to get you back to society; we have found most of all living people on the planet, and every agent in this field was sent out one last time to find the last few — ever wonder why you haven’t run into *anyone* in years? — before we get transferred to the next division.” He explains. Now that I think about it, it was rather strange that I hadn’t run into a single person — a *living* person, I’ve run into many zombies — into two years. And— hold on, what did he mean by *society*?

“What do you mean, society?” I ask, and he raises an eyebrow.

“You know, like, Civilization? I’d guessed that you hadn’t had much contact with your species in a while, but to forget *entirely*? Wow, that’s a whole new *level*—” I cut his sarcastic reply off with a glare, to which he rolls his eyes at.

“You know what I meant. Why would I have to become some citizen in your little safe haven while you get to help save humanity? And if you say some rubbish about how ‘It’s not safe, you don’t have enough training’, I swear to god, I will strangle you right now.” I finish, taking in a breath. He chuckles and I glare harder. He raises his hands up in mock surrender and I drop my gaze.

“You wouldn’t have too, I’ve just learned to phrase it that way because every survivor that I’ve ever found has always wanted to go back to a normal life, and be safe — well, as safe as you can be in the Zombie apocalypse.” Cal says in a matter-of-fact tone. I nod.

“So, if I wanted to, I could also become an Agent of Survive?” I question, wheels spinning in my head as he nods his head in affirmation.

I want to say that I have to think about it, or that I need some time to decide, but I already know what my answer is;

“Well then, Cal, what do I have to do to become an Agent of Survive?”

THE END

