

Day 13 of the Apocalypse (I think)

By Mckenney Cornett

“God *damn* glare,” I swore, sending the Play Station 4 controller flying to the ground as I stared at the small crack in the window that sent a frustrating stream of light directly onto the TV. I walked over and looked through the slit, not expecting to see anything more than the empty cul-de-sac my parents had raised me on. I pulled up the piece of cardboard that had fallen, sending the room into a dull darkness. Turning my back on Millbury Court, I made my way through empty Coors boxes, chip bags, and bacon wrappers to the fridge.

Any time I opened the refrigerator, I felt like Indiana Jones discovering a treasure illuminated by a bright, white light. It sent a smile to my face, hearing the tones of a musical crescendo crashing through my brain in excitement. This time I felt like the Shia Labeouf remake as the light illuminated emptiness. A jar of pickles (which I hate), a small case of bologna, an almost two-week old chicken leg from KFC, and a two-liter of Sprite was all that was left. My stomach moaned as I stared at the remainder of food left to me, nearly biting my lip off as a crash jolted through my body, turning to look as Miss Johnson from across the street blasted through my window on all fours.

“Jesus, *fuck*,” I yelled, staring at the woman missing half her left arm and her blonde hair caked in blood. I scrambled out of the kitchen and down the hall to my parent’s old bedroom, hearing thuds as the middle-aged, suburban divorcee tore down the hall after me, barreling into both walls. She was unreasonably fast, coming to the doorway before I could pull myself fully under the bed. I reached for the pistol my dad had always kept belted to the underside of the mattress. Miss Johnson pulled herself under after me, contorting like a circus performer as I ripped the entire belt away from the springs and crawled out the other side of the bed. I sped

away on all fours, just like she had, until I got my feet back under me and lunged into the hallway.

“Miss Johnson, please, I know you’re in there,” I yelled, desperate, turning around once I came back into the kitchen to see her struggling to get out from under the bed. “It’s me, Parker Brigham! Nancy’s son!”

She was the first zombie I had seen in the last week, and she definitely looked a lot worse for wear than the last one. Two weeks of feeling no pain and not having the intelligence to stop yourself from ripping off one of your limbs in the quest for human flesh had not done the woman any good. She looked every bit the horror you’d expect from a zombie, her legs contorting horribly as she tried to pull herself out from the bed. I held the gun out in front of me, pulling the trigger but heard no blast, no sound of it meeting flesh, just as she pulled herself to her feet and continued tearing down the hall towards me.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck,” I yelled with every pull of the trigger that didn’t send out a bullet, finally casting the gun aside just as Miss Johnson was only a couple arm’s lengths away. Just before she could reach me, I caught her by the neck, holding her back as her arm swung at me, her nails seeking purchase in my face but just inches away. Her breath sent my stomach turning as the smell of blood, and two weeks without tooth paste, invaded my nose.

“Please, god, Miss Johnson it’s going to be okay, just calm down,” I cried just before the woman let loose a guttural scream, globs of spit and snot flying into my face.

My skinny arms started to give out as she pressed against me with unnatural force, feeling no pain from my strangle-hold over her neck but only noticing one thing: I was food. Her broken teeth were an inch away from my cheek as I screamed, putting as much force as possible into my arm and sending her back from me. I then reached with my right to open the fridge just

as she lunged back toward me; I grabbed her by the hair with my left and forced her head into the bright light. Before she could get out of my grasp, I slammed the door shut on her head with a dull *thud*. Repeat. Then again, and again, and again until the thuds were no longer thuds and the sound of Miss Johnson's inhuman noises were gone. The squish of the door as it hit decayed brain matter and my heavy breathing were the only sounds left.

"That's what I thought, you crazy bitch!" I yelled as adrenaline rushed through my body like cocaine. I grabbed a half empty bottle of beer from the counter, chugging it in one gulp, before spitting out the ant ridden, skunked beer with disgust. "Fucking seriously." I sighed, opening the fridge wider and looking at poor Miss Johnson, unrecognizable as even being human with her brain sprayed all over the fridge walls. A chunk of dull, gray brain sat on the case of bologna, churning the acid in my stomach.

The world had gone to shit almost two weeks ago, I think. It's hard to be sure exactly when it happened but the first zombie I met was thirteen days ago. My toilet had gotten clogged earlier that week and I had to pee, beyond belief, so I'd gone out into the backyard to take a whizz when I noticed it. My house was slightly on a hill and as I cast a look over the wooden fence surrounding my childhood home, I saw it. At first, I thought the little Hastings' girl was playing with her dog, just wrestling with it or giving him a hug until the monster looked up, blood dripping down her entire face and neck. Within milliseconds, she spotted me. She ran as hard as she could into her own fence, tearing at it with her nails until they were raw and sending me sprinting back into the house with my dick still hanging out of my pants.

After that, I found out Orlando, about thirty minutes away from my much smaller town, had gone to absolute shit. It seemed overnight everyone had lost their minds. It took me a couple days to realize the news was full of "I don't knows" and questions, rather than any concrete

answers, so I went for the one option that didn't result with me being chased by the bloody girl down the road: I decided to wait it out. What was the point of risking my life, right now, when it could all be over within the week? I grabbed the slats of wood and cardboard sitting in my garage and boarded up the windows, locked all the doors, and distracted myself from the noise of chaos outside the walls and played Call of Duty with my headphones on high. Single player only for the last week, unfortunately; the internet was out. An occasional bong hit, a thirty rack of beer, and no family left to my name kept me from the horror unfolding next door. But as I looked down at Miss Johnson, brain and blood splattered across my kitchen and what was left of my food, I began to rethink my survival strategy.

My chest heaved up and down, exhausted from fighting off the woman so I sat on one of the bar stools around the counter. My parents had been lucky, dying in a car crash just weeks before this mess. They had it easy, a quick death where they didn't have to watch their neighbors turn into mindless cannibals or even worse, had been one of the unlucky part of the country who had the virus themselves. I sighed. They left me to deal with this alone. The empty fridge, the broken window, and no-one but Miss Johnson for company stared me in the face, screaming, why are you still alive?

As my eyes traveled around my childhood home, my heartrate slowed and everything became clearer. Thirteen days and no change, thirteen days alone with no end in sight. I was running out of supplies and if my neighbor's jolting arrival showed me anything: the situation outside was deteriorating. As a gamer and a man in the twenty-first century, I had asked myself what I would do if the world ended and zombies came to eat our flesh many times. My answers varied somewhat, my weapon of choice shifting from a gun to a bow and arrow because of sound, or my realization that a boat is the best place to wait out the apocalypse. But, now, when

faced with that question without any friends to mull it over with, I could feel myself slipping into a different conclusion. Perhaps the only way to fight the undead would be to kill yourself before they could get you first.

And just like that, almost instantly, the decision to kill myself was made.

I would do it soon, today maybe, before I ran out of food and the situation got *really* desperate. Also, before the zombies could rip me apart which was getting more and more likely. That was my one requirement of myself – my body would not become food after I was gone. I would do it out of reach, where none of the undead could find me. I would use my father's gun, a fitting way to leave this world before I join him in the next. And, I would have a full belly and hopefully be at the peak of an awesome high. As my plans formed, the details I knew I needed to be okay with dying, a smile spread across my face. I was beating them. I reached for the bong in front of me and took a long hit, coughing with a large grin as my next few hours took shape in my mind.

First thing was first, I had to board back up the house and better this time. There could be no chance that another house wife was going to find their way in here to find my body. I would not allow it. I made my way back down the same hallway I had barreled through not ten minutes before, the dry wall cracked and dust creating a thin film on the wooden floors where the zombie had hit it the hardest.

Before reaching my parents room at the end of the hall, I turned to the right and opened the door to the garage. My mom's white Lexus took up most of the space that wasn't littered with boxes and boxes of stuff from my entire life. There were entire boxes of Beanie Babies and Pokemon cards that couldn't find their place in the house filling the sides of the garage. Three or four bikes, all different sizes stood in the corner furthest from me, detailing my growth like lines

on a door jam. My father's tools hung on the wall, his work bench underneath was covered in drawings of buildings that he'd thrown himself into developing, or so I assumed. Beside the table were pots, designated for the garden that would be going into the backyard that never came to light. The only empty space in the garage was next to the Lexus, enough space for another car, a car that had been so badly damaged there was no point even trying to bring it home.

I made my way over to my father's work bench and grabbed the necessary supplies: nails, a hammer, and duct tape. Closer to the garage door were wooden planks that he had used to make models of the buildings he was designing. I had used most of it when I first boarded up the house but there were still quite a few left. I grabbed them all, it's not like they would be used later anyways. I clumsily carried it all back into the house, setting myself up in front of the gaping hole in the living room wall and put myself to work. It was slow work, unable to hammer fast or hard for fear of drawing another zombie to my house. I whistled the Imperial March quietly with each nail I put into the wood, daydreaming of my last meal.

When the main window where Miss Johnson had come through was covered and the rest of the windows in the house were reinforced, I walked back into the kitchen, avoiding looking at the woman on the floor. "I should move her," I whispered, staring away from her but then shaking my head. After all, what was the point? I wouldn't have to look at her for much longer anyways.

I stepped over her body, and reached into the golden light of the fridge to grab the jar of pickles and bottle of sprite. The chicken leg was too rancid to stay down and there was no eating the bologna when Miss Johnson's brains had already claimed it. I quickly shut the door before I felt sick and moved to the pantry, opening the doors to reveal a paltry selection of food. There was a left open box of Cheese Itz, stale of course, a loaf of bread, a can of Campbell's Chicken

Noodle Soup, and a box of cookies. I pursed my lips to the side, and thought of the death row inmates who got to request all their favorite foods before they were put to death. If only I were so lucky. I grabbed it all; I would make it work.

With my headphones blasting My Chemical Romance's "Heaven Help Us," I crunched the stale cheese crackers over a cover of pickles, on a bed of bread. Setting on the stove was my favorite soup from my childhood, slowly coming to a boil. I grabbed the salt shaker and sprinkled it over my "sandwich," my smile dropping as I saw the bubbles from the soup threaten to burst out of the top just after the song shifted to another one of the band's greatest hits. A song and twenty seconds. That was all it took to prepare my last meal. I sighed, flipped over one side of the sandwich and flicked off the stove with a quick turn of the wrist.

"Bon appetite," I whispered softly.

I quickly poured the soup into a bowl, all of it, grabbed my sandwich and the cookies, and sat down at the bar. Choking down the first bite, I imagined the peanut butter and Nutella sandwiches my mom always made me as a kid instead of the pickle tasting, expired mess in my hands. To wash down the taste, I desperately sipped at the soup, blistering my mouth and bringing tears to my eyes. At least I won't be missing out on anything after I bite the bullet. After a couple more bites, I gave up, grabbed the cookies and set down in front of my bong for one last, amazing high.

Forty minutes later, I had become part of the couch. The only sounds in the entire house was the tapping on my controller, the occasional crunch of a Chips Ahoy! cookie, and my heavy breathing as I ran through Russia. In all my planning, I had forgotten it would be my last chance to battle in World War II. If anything was going to keep me here as a ghost, it would be the regret of missing the opportunity. I ran through the battlefield, firing shot after shot, my eyes

barely visible as my eyelids drooped. My body was completely useless except for my fingers which moved over the buttons quickly. I needed the feeling of competition, though, every shot I fired feeling pointless because there was no one to beat. The captain collapsed from a shot by one of the Russian soldiers. A perfect headshot, and before he could miraculously come back to life, I threw the controller to the side.

I rubbed my hands over my face and my fingers through my brown hair, like the brush of a feather along my hands. I was ripped, completely stoned, and the goal had been to end it before the sad, but inevitable, descent back to sobriety. Before I could change my mind or think about how wonderful one last shower would be, I jumped to my feet. All thought evaporated from my body, my muscles moving on their own and dominated by one, controlling urge. I bent down to pick up the gun that I'd thrown to the kitchen floor hours ago, cold and heavy in my hands. "See you on the other side, Miss Johnson," I whispered, walking down the stairs to the basement without a second thought.

My hands shook as they wrapped around the cold, metal of my father's gun. I slid down a wall of my basement, coming to a rest on the freezing cement floor, likely untouched by anyone but me for weeks, if not months. I had chosen this place for a variety of reasons. One, it was the least likely place for the zombies to ever find my body. Two, it was underground so in some ways, I was still being buried. The main reason, though, were the faces smiling down from the walls. My mom had loved pictures, but she kept the upstairs like a magazine article for the ideal family. Upstairs were lies for strangers. They were portraits that I had dreaded, school pictures that I'd been stoned in, and any other pictures we had taken that were devoid of any life or fun my family had. Down here, in the basement where nobody could see, was the truth.

Directly across from me was a picture of me sobbing, nursing a bloody elbow from falling off my first bike, and my dad doubled over laughing in the background. To the left of that was me as a baby, asleep on top of my mom, while she chugged a bottle of wine over my tiny head. And on the far-right wall was an entire wall of photos that I had taken when I was five, close-ups of my mom and dad in various places, taken with a cheap, Rugrats camera that I had begged for. All around me was my family, my true family, and if there was anywhere that I wanted to die, it was here.

The high evaporated as my body rejected any denial of what was about to happen, causing my eyes to fill with tears as I raised the gun to my mouth and tasted a horrid mixture of marijuana, pickles, and metal. My stomach wretched, vile churning in rejection of the intruder it felt in my mouth. My finger stumbled over the trigger and when it found its mark, my father's voice whispered in the back of my head.

"Let's go shooting, Parker," he said, but I could barely hear him over the sound of gun shots coming from the television and the tap, tap, tap of my fingers. "You'll love it, it's a real-life version of what you do every day."

"I'm busy, can you cl-," And before the second voice could finish, a voice I didn't recognize and rejected, I pulled the trigger.

I felt no bullet rip through my brain, no bang, no gun-powder smell, no death. I flung the gun away from me. The pictures on the wall stared down accusingly, and I vomited right next to the weapon. He would hate me killing myself with the gun, the gun I'd never even seen before his death. The gun he'd used countless times to try to bond. I leaned back against the wall and stared straight at the ceiling, gasping for air. Not here, not like that.

I scrambled to my feet and climbed back up the staircase, an image of my house ablaze popping into my brain as I reached the top. Well, it was one sure-fire way to keep the zombies from eating my body. Setting my house on fire would be a final moment of glory, I thought, the image of it standing alight in a nest of the other suburban homes, one final rebellion against this shit hole of a world. Blood rushed to my face in anticipation and I sprang into the backyard. The sun had begun to drop below the horizon and the sky was a mix of pinks, reds, and oranges but it barely caught my attention. I stared around desperately, my eyes falling on the grill that my dad had cooked me and my mom burgers on growing up. When I was in my teens he would hand me a beer when my mom wasn't around, laugh as I chugged before motioning quickly for me to hand it back just as my mom came back through the sliding doors. I shook my head, tears springing to my eyes as I grabbed the red lighter fluid container sitting next to the grill.

I was barely aware, running through the house, that I was laughing. A crazed, high-pitched laugh that I did not recognize, masking the splash of oil on the hard wood floors. The steady stream of gas ran through the hallway and over my parent's bed, over the couches and sprayed onto the walls. My laughter traveled through each room until the stream stopped, and I was out of gas. I cast the container to the side. Now, all I needed was the flame and it was all over. It was better this way, better than the gun. They had left the house to me for this reason, I knew it. It wouldn't be right for the house to exist without any of us in it. The house that I'd been born in, celebrated every birthday, lost my virginity, and the last place I'd seen my family in. It was an obligation to give it the send-off it deserved.

I stepped through the kitchen and over the zombie, tore off a paper towel and scrambled back over to the coffee table where I'd left my white lighter. My entire face was hot and red as blood rushed through it, frantic with anxiety that was injected by the gun I'd put in my mouth

just minutes before. The calm and resolve I'd had while the plans formed around me had vacated my body, replaced with an animal desire to flee into the danger. I had to die *now*, the thought repeated in my brain like an order from a higher power. I frantically flicked at the lighter, a paper towel hovering over its mouth, waiting for the dragon to breathe fire. My heart jolted as the silver spark erupted on the top, but no flame came.

"No, no, no, *no*," I screamed, rubbing my thumb raw on the metal striker in desperation. I waved my lucky lighter next to my ear, yearning for the sound of fluid that never came. I tore into my mom's room and over to her makeup drawer, the place she had always hidden her cigarettes and lighters before remembering she had quit years ago. I flung the drawer away from its home, screaming in frustration, "Let me *die*!"

My knees buckled out from underneath myself as I sprung back into the hallway, hitting the hardwood with a jolt to my body and a splash of gas. I kneeled over as if in prayer and leaned my forehead into the lighter fluid, screaming at the top of my lungs. Globes of spit flew from my mouth and gas sprayed into it as I wailed, my fists banging on the floor.

"I can't be alone," I screamed, looking up from the floor at the portrait hanging on the wall in front of me. "Just let me die, please, why do you get to just go and I have to stay here?" My parents stared back at me, vacant and emotionless. They didn't know what it was like to live through the world ending. The people in the meaningless picture on the wall could not understand what it was like to wake up and have nothing; they were a family that still felt it was important to spend eighty dollars on a photo that they would eventually come to hate what they looked like in. They had no clue how it felt to see their entire world change into a horror, and be surrounded by nothing but death. I fell out of my praying position and lay on the ground, one cheek resting in a puddle of lighter fluid, and sobbed as my fake parents watched.

When you go so long without hearing another person's voice, you start to not believe it when you hear it. So, when I heard a voice call out, overwhelmed by static and barely audible over my sobs, I didn't immediately react. "H-hello? Is anybody there?" the small voice cried, coming through the television I'd kept on low for a dull sound to keep me sane. I pulled myself up on my elbows, wiping my mouth of the gasoline, and crawled down the hallway toward the voice. I finally met carpet and looked into the TV, seeing my reflection for the first time in at least a week. Brown hair jutted out in different directions, slick with oil in some places and greased down in others. My eyes were wide, frantic, and surrounded by circles from a lack of sleep, or sunlight. My skin was unshaved, but somehow I looked years younger. I felt again like the eighteen-year old leaving for college, saying goodbye to his parents, and not the twenty-one-year old who had already lost them. "Please answer," the voice cried, the white bars that marked his presence on the television springing up and down with each syllable the voice used.

I frantically picked up the microphone that was thrown under the coffee table. "Hello? Hello? Are you still there?"

"Yes, oh my god," he cried, a teenage voice that rang high with fear. "Thank god."

I stared up at the screen, blinking slowly.

"Are you there? Please, don't go! I'm all alone," he screamed through the TV, breaking me from my reverie.

"Yes, yes, sorry. I'm just shocked to hear someone else's voice," I spoke into the microphone, my voice cracking from the exhaustion of sobbing for so long. "What's your name?"

"Todd, what's yours?"

"Parker. How old are you, Todd?"

“Thirteen,” Todd said back, the excitement of talking to another person evident in his voice as shock waves rang through my body. He was *thirteen*, and alone. My stomach churned before I asked him where his family was, knowing the answer before he said it after a minute’s pause. His voice was broken and I could hear the tears falling through his voice. “They’re gone, my mom got the virus.”

“Mine are gone, too,” I responded, rubbing my palms across my cheeks forcefully, completely cried out. We were quiet for a minute, or ten, or twenty. It was a comfortable silence, though, the most comfortable I’d been since the world ended.

“Do you want to play? The game, I mean?” he asked quietly, as if scared that he shouldn’t want to play the game. I wondered if it was a good idea, after all, the multiplayer level was fighting zombies and something like that could be scarring to a kid. But then I thought about how much I needed to play video games with another human being, and the urge overwhelmed any desire to protect this kid.

“If you want to, I’m game.”

“Single player blows, besides, I’d love to blow out some zombie brains.”

I laughed, *really* laughed and not because I was losing my mind, but because it felt good. It felt good to think about this thirteen-year old kid who had lost everything like I had, wanting to kill some zombies in what could be his last days. It felt like control, for once, and I sat on the couch ready to play.

“You know, the game is surprisingly accurate,” I said as I shot a zombie square in the face.

“Really? I haven’t seen any like, uh, as decayed as they are in the game.”

“Oh, definitely. This bitch broke into my house today, missing an entire arm – it was disgusting.”

“No way,” he laughed in disbelief. “How’d you get her out?”

“I, uh, smashed her head in the fridge,” I said cautiously, hoping I wasn’t dredging up any open wounds or feelings about his own family. I was too scared to ask what had happened after his mom had turned; too scared to ask what this kid had to do himself.

“No fucking way,” Todd cried, laughing like it was the funniest thing he’d ever heard. “That’s badass. Who says Call of Duty doesn’t teach you anything?”

We played for hours but it felt like minutes, showering zombies with bullets and coming up with plans on how best to eradicate the monsters from our own world. He told me where he lived, just a couple of towns over in Sanford – near the airport, he had said. His mom had turned into a zombie sixteen days ago, making my introduction to the apocalypse three days late. I felt sure that he hadn’t had to kill his mom himself when he told me that his father had left a week ago, going out to find food, and hadn’t come back. Todd had been hiding in a safe room with their leftover food until today, coming out to seek help in the only way the kid knew how.

“Nice shot,” I said as he fired off a bomb into the hoard of zombies chasing after us.

“Thanks,” he said, distractedly. “Hold on, I keep hear- I keep hearing this noise.” He paused the game and I could hear the thud of him setting down the microphone.

“Todd?” I called out, fear setting in as the one voice I’d heard in almost two weeks evaporated from my ears. I grabbed the remote and turned up the volume even louder than I already had, anxious to hear anything from the other side. With the volume up as loud as it could go, static filled the room as I waited for any hint of Todd’s return.

I was listening carefully to his footsteps, searching for the sound of the noise he had heard, when I heard a violent crash and a scream that could only be the kid's.

"Todd?" I yelled, holding the microphone in a vice grip that could break it with one tiny twist of the wrist. "What is going on?"

Through the TV came the sounds of several footsteps, a scrambling of bodies, and the sound of shards of glass hitting the floor. I stood up without thinking, moving closer to the TV as if getting closer to it somehow got me closer to Sanford, Florida. Suddenly, the sounds were much louder and a dull thud resounded through my house.

"Help! Come help," Todd screamed into his microphone, the sound of a struggle almost covering his voice. I listened as it sounded like he clambered to his feet, the snarling of a zombie following him just barely audible. Then, in complete clarity as if he was standing in the living room, Todd said, "1832 Lancaster Road, 1832 Lancaster Road 1832 La-" All sound was gone, no voices, no guttural noises from the undead, and no static to fill the void. It was completely disconnected.

"Todd?" I screamed, wailing at the top of my voice with spit flying everywhere. "*Fuck*, no!"

Without hesitation, I sprung back through the hall and slid across the gas, falling into the wall but pushing myself into my parent's room. I flung the closet door open and grabbed the ammo that was meant for the empty gun downstairs from the top shelf, clamping it in my right hand. Minutes later, after stumbling down to the basement to grab the gun I'd tried to kill myself with earlier, I was sitting in my mom's car. As I caught my breath, my thoughts finally came back to me and I realized what I was doing. The kid was probably going to be dead by the time I

got there or I'd die getting him out. I was *supposed* to be dead already and not by being ripped apart by zombies. I was supposed to die here, with my parents.

I stared around at all the boxes and items belonging to my family. The boxes of my trophies from playing church basketball when I was in elementary school, the toys that had been cast aside but not thrown away, and the newspapers of all the important days my mom had kept as mementos. There were board games stacked along the shelves that had gone untouched since the PS2 had found its way into our living room, entire puzzles that had never been made. My eyes fell on my father's drawings before turning to look at the vacant spot where his black, Mustang that he loved so much would have sat. There was an entire life in this garage, from my birth to my parent's deaths. I could start the car, go to sleep in this garage, and add one more piece to the memento that was the garage.

But then I thought of Todd, how scared his voice had been and how scared I had been to be alone just hours before. I thought of the calm it brought me, in the worst moment of the apocalypse, to hear another person's voice. The hour which I had forgotten my plans to die, all because I wasn't alone anymore. I thought of my parents and the pictures downstairs, the memories that were so full of the life we had. I missed them so much, so much it felt like I had died. But I hadn't, and they would hate me for acting like I had.

I hit the large, gray button to open the garage and twisted the key in the ignition, revving up the car. The garage door came to the top and opened to the neighborhood. Just at the edge of the garage, came one of the undead, staggering into the bright light streaming from the street lamps. It was a man this time, unrecognizable and wearing khakis. I shifted in reverse and stepped the gas to the floor, ramming over the zombie with a dull thud, his brains sprayed under the wheel of my mom's white Lexus.