

2136 – A Post Apocalyptic Novel

Sample Chapter

By Matthew Thrush

I heard the 15mg drip of morphine before I felt the cold liquid enter my arm.

My body felt on fire. Every inch of my body cried out in pain. I willed the numbing agent down the plastic tube, but the drip maintained its torturous detour as it remained constant. I tried to open my eyes but something was holding my eyelids in place. I raised my hand and retracted a wet finger. It felt like cold gel or slime as I rubbed my fingers together.

"You're awake," I heard a familiar voice say the moment my hand touched my skin.

I could feel my lips quiver and my tongue shift, but no words came out, just garbled up gibberish as I moaned my complaint. My neck immediately shocked my nerve cells with crippling pain. My body seized beneath the entourage of suffering just the mere attempt to speak created. My right thigh blazed as if it had been struck by lightning or had a raging fire licking my skin and bone with its hot breath. I couldn't feel my left leg or arm. Heck, I couldn't feel anything on my left side! I didn't know whether that was a good thing, or solely due to the overriding heat permeating from my right that dwarfed all other feeling.

"Don't try to speak," he said, this time right beside me. "Are you in pain?"

I heard a machine to my left flare to life as the readings skyrocketed with the sudden wave of pain imploding just under my kneecap. If the machine didn't tell him, my face certainly was. *Yes—I'm in PAIN! Do something...*

He moved next to me and within a few seconds the alarms stopped and the slow beep of my heart echoed in the room. The burning in my right side dulled slightly, but the ache in my neck remained.

"That better?" he asked.

I felt my cheek twitch.

"Good," he said. "I don't know how much you remember, but it's very important that you try to remember everything you can. You've been in an accident and you're in critical condition. What you say may help us save your life and the lives of others like you. Okay?"

Save me? I thought. Just kill me already if you're going to do it. Why wait?

"Just tap your finger if you understood what I said."

I tapped my finger.

"Perfect," he exclaimed. "You're much more cooperative than my other patients."

So I'm a patient. What does that mean? I don't remember going to a hospital.

"I'm going to ask you a series of questions. Some will be very obvious, while others seemingly random. But I assure you, every question matters as do your responses. It is very important that you answer every question truthfully, otherwise I won't be able to help you."

You mean save me I thought. Isn't that what you meant to say, Doc? Save me and the others like me? Great, I'm already assuming he's a doctor. For all I knew, I was his experiment and this questioning was just his way of getting off before he killed me.

"Answer yes with a tap, and do nothing for no. Do you understand?" he asked, completely ignoring the internal dialogue going on inside my head.

I tapped my finger on the steel table.

"Alright, let's get right to it," he said. "We'll start easy and work up to the hard questions."

I heard him take a deep breath and sigh it out.

"Is your name Willow Evelyn Washington?" he asked.

Hearing my name spoken to me sounded alien. Like I was an outcast or stowaway within someone else's body. I tapped my finger to signal that was correct.

"Is your father's name, Warren Washington?"

Tap.

"Is your uncle, Parker Samuels Rivers?"

I had no idea what Parker's full name was. He had only ever gone by Parker. Just plain, old, Parker.

I tapped my finger anyway.

I knew where this was going already. But how he knew all of my family member's names was disturbing. Almost as much as the fact my eyes were sealed shut with some kind of mucus membrane, half my body was either paralyzed or worse, while the other was undergoing a deprivation of peace that I was most likely fortunate enough not to see with my own eyes.

At the sound of Roxx's name I felt my hand shake.

I went to tap my finger thinking he was going to say my mother's name next, but he never did. Instead, he continued with, "Any siblings?"

My finger remained motionless against my side.

"Is your home of residence, Precinct 11?"

Well, Doc. You see; that depends. If you were to ask me a few days ago, I might have tapped my finger yes. But now—my thoughts hung in the air—home doesn't exist. So you tell me. Is Precinct 11 still standing or did you and your buddies see to it that the other quarter was demolished too with the flames?

The only way to block out the pain emitting from my face was to play on my sarcastic twine. It barely helped.

"I'll mark that as a yes," he said. "Do you know where you are? Do you know why you're here? Do you know who I am?"

Nope, nope, and nope.

I wished there was a way I could have shouted *TELL ME* but I couldn't. I just had to lie there paralyzed. That's what I had decided. Whatever happened to me must have paralyzed my left side and severely damaged my right. As for my eyes, I hadn't come up with a plausible hypothesis that made my predicament any better or kept me from curtailing straight into the oblivion of fear.

"Do you remember what happened to you?"

His tone suddenly changed. Had I been watching him, I might not have noticed the slight change in pitch. But seeing as the only senses I could still use were 50% touch and 100% sound, I noticed.

He waited for me to respond.

A tingling sensation crept its way into the back of my skull as the limbic system tried to relay past moments of immense emotion. It was then that the flashes came. First they were light blue flickers as if someone was pouring water onto my face from a pitcher. Each flash was a splash of memory coursing through my circuitry, trying to free itself from captivity before it was erased completely. My thigh burned hotter the more the flashes intensified.

"Do you remember..." I heard him asking again, but I was lost to his voice.

The temperature in the room changed. The throbbing in my shoulders subsided, and the pain in my thigh and neck disappeared. As my mind raced through the spinning shadows of my memory, my body reacted by secreting cool sweat. My heart quickened before nearly stopping, and then I was there.

Where it all took place.

My imprisonment took on the shape of a blue cylinder dome; the glass nearly impossible to see through. I noticed a white mist filtering in through an opening in the top of the chamber. The tube wound from the glass chamber and vanished beneath the floor. My body shivered, and my arms wrapped around me for warmth. I felt the icy touch of the glass against my back as I slid to the ground. And it was then I saw him.

Then the glass shattered and *they* rushed in.

My body started thrashing violently against the restraints of the table. My eyelids flickered, but remained sealed. I opened my lips to scream, but only a gurgling sound slurped its way from my vocal cords. I was choking. Their hands were all over me. I could feel their teeth bite into my flesh. My thigh erupted into flames as one of them sank their teeth into the fleshy muscle. I could feel the tendon stretch and tear from my quad, rippling the pain up my stomach. My neck cried out as another tore a large chunk away. Warm blood squirted from my ruptured carotid artery. I knew I was going to die even before more of their grey, decaying bodies poured into the shattered glass chamber now flopped on its side.

The memory of the little boy being torn to pieces beneath their claws and my helplessness to stop them from doing so flooded my vision. My finger rattled against the steel table as I pounded the edge until my fingernail split and blood oozed out.

I felt hands against my shoulders pressing down firmly. More soon grabbed my arms and legs. My chest caved in as the harness tightened. I felt the life fading from me a second time, and I prayed I wouldn't wake up. But I didn't fade into the nether. There were no bright lights to welcome me, or singing angels with harps and wings flapping in the clouds. No friends or families smiling for my arrival. There was just the black behind my eyelids as they held me down and waited for the memory to slip away. After awhile my heart rate slowed, and the burning dimmed.

Then I heard him speak again.

"The event you just saw is real," he said.

My lips quivered. Something sticky seeped from the crevice of my left eye and slid down my cheek. I never wanted to remember that moment again. I would have given anything for that memory to be torn from my mind and burned to ash. But I knew I was destined to remember it. It was my destiny. *Isn't that what my father had told me just before he died in my hands? 'You are destined for something great' he had said. Is anyone born for the purpose to suffer?* I couldn't believe it. I wouldn't. My life had meaning. I just needed someone to tell me what that was.

I felt the warmth of his breath next to my ear.

"You've been infected," he said.

Infected? I thought you could save me. What kind of infection? But I already knew—the bad kind. The kind that paralyzes half your body in a catatonic numbness and the other in blistering pain. The kind that people pray they'll never witness personally. The kind that a bullet would solve before it came to that. The kind that had killed Zoey, Skylar, and all those souls who attacked me. The kind that would change everything. The kind that was killing me.

He continued to speak, "The infection has spread throughout your body. You've suffered severe external trauma to both thighs, a large laceration below your fifth rib, and half your neck was removed. We tried to stitch you up as best we could, but the damage was..."

He broke off and looped around to my left side.

Irreparable I finished for him.

"By now you've likely noticed the changes in your body. *Infected* normally begin to show signs of mutation after day three, but in your case, your body began its change within minutes. We have not determined why that is."

He continued, "The first stage of infection starts with tingles in your lower extremities, which then leads to numbness before all feeling goes away. We call this the Tranquil State of the infection. Stage Two, the body continues to morph as cells die off and repopulate at ten times the rate in their genetically altered state. In this stage the body has lost all

sense of touch. The only thing holding you to this world is your mind, and that only has a short time longer before it too disappears. As you might have guessed, Stage Three is full catatonia. The body has completely shut down, all senses are gone, and the mind has shut off."

The burning in my right ankle stopped. I couldn't feel it anymore. *Guess that meant I was moving into Stage Two and heading for the end.*

"This leads to the last and final stage. Stage Four, or as it's known, Genesis. You're no longer living, but something else. We haven't been able to determine what causes the body to reboot itself after death, but the neurological pathways ignite. Each subject is different and sometimes the brain never reactivates. For some, it's within a few hours. With others, a few seconds."

So where's the good news? Or was that it?

"Which stage am I? I croaked.

The doctor didn't respond right away so I tried to speak again, but the words refused to come a second time.

"You're in Stage Three," he finally said. I noticed his voice cracked and raised in pitch.

I heard him whispering to someone else.

"How is it she's able to speak?" he said to someone else.

Another voice answered, "Perhaps she's mutating quicker than we anticipated."

"But her throat...it's..."

"I know," the second voice said. "I cannot explain it. We need to get Doctor A in here right away. The virus may be evolving."

The sound of his receding footfalls echoed through the room until the familiar hiss of the hatch slid open.

What did he mean, evolving? Was it unheard of for an infected in Stage Three, of whatever it was they claimed I was contaminated with, to speak?

I began tapping my finger to get the Doctor's attention. It worked.

"You have nothing to worry about," he said, which I found preposterous considering he had just told me I was in Stage Three of the same deadly virus that had killed Zoey. And this time there was no mistaking the fear in his voice.

I smacked my knuckles on the table with force.

"What's wrong with me," I forced out of my lips.

How the Doctor understood anything I said was miraculous. I couldn't even understand what I was saying. It was all garbled gibberish and noise to my ears, but somehow he understood.

"Your neck was nearly ripped off entirely in the attack," he said. "And, the fact you can speak is...scientifically impossible. Your vocal cords aren't even connected anymore. There is no way you should be speaking, and yet, you are. I don't understand."

The hatch hissed open again and the click of heels filled the empty space.

"What's her status?" I heard her say.

Her was Doctor A. There was no mistaking it. My fingers balled into a fist and the heat in my neck permeated to my chest in a ball of flame. She had done this to me!

"She's stable," he said.

"What about her vitals?" Doctor A asked.

"Steady. A few spikes here and there, but nothing out of the ordinary," he said.

The heels came closer and I could feel the coldness of her white lab coat pillow the cold air from the hallway towards me. My fist wouldn't budge.

She placed her hand on my forehead. She was ice to the touch.

"She's burning up," she said. "When was the last time you checked her temperature?"

"A few minutes ago," he said. "A constant 100.7."

"Are you sure these readings are correct?" she asked.

They were both standing to my left. Presumably, they were talking about the vitals on the screen. *What? Are they irregular* I asked mockingly inside my head? *What did you think they would be? Normal!*

"White blood cell count is abnormally high, but that's to be expected. Any pain?" Doctor A asked.

"I've increased her drip to 120mg," he said. "She can still feel it, but it's more tolerable. But that wouldn't cause..."

"I know," she said. "We need to get her to the genetics lab, immediately!"

Something in my stomach jolted my body.

The spasm ricocheted up my abdomen until my entire body rattled. The pain in my neck and thigh disappeared and was replaced by a heat unlike anything I had ever felt before. It worked its way through my blood and into my heart. Soon that muscly tissue pumped it to the rest of my body. My hips yanked against the restraints as they shot to the ceiling. This time I let out a groan.

I could feel my left side again, but I wished I wasn't. The pain transcending from every inch of it felt like someone ripped each millimeter of skin and bone bit by bit, poured gasoline on them, and set them ablaze. I began thrashing almost immediately the moment it reached my hand.

"Hold her down!!" Doctor A yelled.

I heard something shatter and pour onto the ground as my left arm came free of its restraints and sent the doctor sailing through the air. I swiveled my head towards the noise and blinked. The membrane adhered to my lids fell away and I could see.

Just then Doctor A was crawling on her hands and knees towards the exit. My head lurched back into the table with a violent thud as another wave of tearing coursed through my ribcage.

What was happening to me? Is this what Stage Three was like? Or had I skipped it and went straight to Stage Four?

Something crawled along my neck as the skin regenerated.

"What did you do to me!" I hissed as full mechanics of speech returned.

The Doctor's face turned pale white when she saw me ripping my right arm free of the straps. Only my waist and ankles were attached. Her hand reached up the wall and pressed the alarm. The room filled with red floodlights as a siren blared.

Men in black military gear rushed in, followed by a few white coats. The first soldier grabbed my arm to hold me down, but his body went sailing into the door, knocking over one of the doctors. The others dove onto me to hold me down with their weight, but the burning inside me roared to life. Their bodies launched into the ceiling, shattering the florescent lights overhead. Thousands of flashing sparks rained down on me as I tore my body free from the table.

The power resonating within me was incredible. My bare feet touched the cold concrete as I slid off the table. I stepped over the soldiers' bodies in the direction of the doctor. She fumbled through the broken vials and containers on the floor and rushed at me.

I didn't feel the needle when it entered my chest. I had my hands wrapped around her throat and lifted her off her feet. Her hands latched around mine trying to break free. I watched as her face bulged and turned purple. Her eyes were dimming and death was only seconds away.

"You will pay for what you've done," I said.

Then something stabbed me in the neck. I plucked away the silver dart with my free hand and examined it. More darts whistled through the air and jammed into my naked body. I looked down to see my stomach colored with five blue feathers. I stared at the entrance of the chamber to see the two soldiers reloading their guns for another volley.

I took a step in their direction, but stumbled. I smashed into the steel table, losing my grip on the doctor. She tumbled away gasping, with her hands clenched around her neck. She quickly scurried towards the soldiers. I tried to stand again, but my legs felt unnaturally heavy as if granite stones were tied to my thighs. The next lurch in my stomach sent me to the floor, writhing in pain as my limbs regrew. The door hissed as Doctor A escaped, the soldiers sending an array of tranquilizer darts into my spasming body. The world stood still momentarily as the pain echoed through every cell in my body. I

could feel the world shifting before my eyes before
it all went red. *It seems you were wrong, Doctor.*
Stage Four is not the final stage.

Stage Five - Mutation Complete.