

af's

INFECTED HEARTS



CHAPTER 8. MALL

DAY 30

The air reeked of decay. The streets were unnervingly silent, broken only by the soft thud of their footsteps on cracked asphalt and the distant groan of swaying metal signs.

Adam walked a few steps ahead, gripping a crowbar in one hand and a P365 in the other. Matilda stayed close behind, her eyes sweeping every corner. A small backpack hung from her shoulder, and she held a long, razor-sharp kitchen knife tightly in her hand.

He snorted, kicking a loose can aside as they passed. "Not exactly the life I pictured at eighteen. College, part-time job, maybe a girlfriend. Instead, I'm scavenging for antidepressants and trying not to get eaten."

Matilda let out a quiet, bitter laugh.

"Don't forget, you can't afford to get too worked up," she said. "I know we're heading straight into danger, but getting your blood pressure up won't do you any good. It's very bad for your heart, Adam."

"Even in moments like this, you still find time to care about me."

"You might think you are all grown up, but you still need your mom," she said with a tired smile. She looked utterly exhausted, with dark circles under her eyes from sleepless nights.

"Mom, can I ask you about your nightmares?"

She hesitated, her eyes flicking to a half-collapsed billboard above them: *"The Future Is Bright."*



"They're about your father. I dream of our bedroom, of him... and those three men. What they did to him. What they almost did to me."

"You know that I punished them."

"I know you did, but it doesn't erase the memories. It's not just Suzie who needs these antidepressants we are looking for—I do too. Don't you ever have nightmares?"

"Nightmares?" He blushed. "I have dreams... sometimes... about you... I mean... uh, nothing special."

"About me?" she asked, tilting her head.

"I... well." He couldn't say he was dreaming about their dance and their time together in the shower. He dreamed of her rubbing his back with her full gorgeous big breasts and purple hot hard nipples. Then mommy's hand going lower and lower.

"Adam?"

"I mean... when we danced," Adam said, deciding a little truth was harmless. But it was better to keep quiet about the other shower dreams.

"Yes, the dance really was lovely. I dream about it often too," she said, a smile playing on her tired lips. "You are a good dancer, sweetheart."

Adam ran his gaze over her figure, her butt in the tight jeans, her waist. Then suddenly their eyes met. She saw his gaze and smiled enigmatically.

She probably thinks I'm a pervert.

The ground beneath them shook.

Matilda nearly fell, but Adam caught her, his hand brushing against her right breast, seemingly by accident. He held her close as debris from small buildings rained down around them.

"This is the fifth earthquake in the past ten days," Matilda said, glancing up at the sky where flocks of birds scattered in all directions. Adam, however, was focused only on her breasts, trying to make out the outline of her nipple through the thin fabric. His index finger moved slightly, perhaps intending to reach and find it, but Matilda swatted his hand away.

"Stop touching me!" She stepped back as the tremors subsided, adjusted her shirt, zipped up her jacket, and brushed her fiery red hair from her eyes.

"Sorry, I'm..."

"I think we need to talk," Matilda said calmly. "It's going to be very hard for you to find a soulmate when things go back to normal if you keep being interested in me."

"What?" Adam turned bright red, clutching the crowbar to his body. He looked around as if someone might hear them, but they were alone on the quiet street. "I... no..."

"I'm not a fool, Adam. I still hold onto the hope that all of this..." She gestured at the ruined street around them, the crumbled walls and shattered windows. "...will



be over soon, whatever it is. We'll bury your father and try to rebuild some kind of normal life. But..." She paused and looked at him. "The way you look at me is wrong. And the way you touch me. I started having doubts after the shower, wondering if you were really being honest when you said you don't have a crush on me anymore."

"What are you even talking about?" Adam's voice cracked as he backed away. "That's disgusting."

"Is it?" Matilda's tone remained clinical. "You just touched my breast," she imitated his touch, but this time her hand rested on her jacket.

"I was trying to help you stay on your feet during the earthquake!"

"And in the shower?" Her eyebrows arched. "Were you trying to help me stay on my feet then, too? You got aroused..."

"You were naked, Mom!" Adam shot back.

"I'm your mother, sweetheart."

Adam turned away, unable to believe this conversation was actually happening.

"I'm not trying to embarrass you," Matilda said, stepping closer. She placed her hands on his shoulders, turning him gently to face her. "I just want there to be no misunderstandings or secrets between us, especially now. Alright? What if your attachment to me keeps you from finding a girlfriend? Is that why you were alone in college?"

Adam sighed and looked into her eyes "Jeez, Mom, you've got it all wrong. You are my mother. We were in the shower—you were naked—and, well... I'm a man. Of course, I got a little... distracted. But that doesn't mean I have feelings for you."

She raised an eyebrow. "So, you're saying it was just about my breasts?"

He hesitated, cheeks flushing crimson. "YES! I mean... you have—uh—beautiful breasts."

She took a small step back. "I think it's just because you're my baby, and you're still connected to them in a way. Your father... he used to tell me I was old. That my breasts weren't beautiful anymore. You know, saggy."

"You're not old, and your breasts are great. Mom!"

"You really shouldn't say things like that to me."

"And you've said plenty of things to me that you probably shouldn't have either."

"I'm sorry. I've been holding this back for so long, always finding reasons to avoid it. But then... when you touched my breast, it just—slipped out."

A silence hung between them.



"Can I ask you something? Back then in the shower, you said I had no reason to be ashamed of my body. Were you talking about... well, you know."

"Don't make this any more awkward than it already is!"

"Sorry. Huh. I always thought nothing could top the awkwardness of you trying to explain pistils and stamens—women and men. We were both mortified."

Matilda chuckled. "It *was* very awkward. You were twelve, and you'd started... exploring things that concerned me. I thought maybe a little education would put an end to... certain habits you'd developed at the time."

He felt his face flush.

She's probably talking about when I used to steal her panties.

"Let's just move on, shall we? And

if you're curious—you have everything perfectly fine down there. Despite the fact that your father... he wasn't exactly... well, never mind. Your future wife is such a lucky woman."

Could it be that Dad was smaller than me?

"And if I weren't your son, would you... um... with me."

Her eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Would I what with you?"

"Would... you... I mean... uh..."

She slapped him squarely on the ear with her palm. "WOULD I *WHAT?*"

"Nothing, Mom. Jeez."

"I think you've gotten a little too bold. Keep walking, Adam. Don't forget, I have a knife. Don't make me use it."

They walked in silence for a while. The mall loomed a few blocks away, its once-bright logo faded and peeling, its glass doors shattered.

He thought about the day before.



DAY 29

"This holiday music is driving me nuts. I'm going to start hating Christs," Carl grumbled as the static-filled stations kept circling back to Christmas tunes. He was sweating under the hood in a garage. "This car served me faithfully for more than five years. Now, after hitting a couple of freaks, the engine's shot."

Adam, smeared with oil, handed him tools and occasionally fiddled with an old radio on the car seat. He wiped his face with a rag, glancing into the rearview mirror.

A red-haired woman appeared there. His mother stepped into the garage, carrying Mark, fast asleep in her arms.

"Suzie's busy with dinner. Any progress with the car or the radio?" she asked, stepping closer to Adam.

"I've almost figured out the problem. I believe we'll soon be—"

After a spark, thick smoke poured out of the engine. Carlo coughed and stepped back. Adam did the same, pulling Matilda away.

"Damn hunk of metal! Cars have never been my strong suit," Carlo said, kicking the car before heading back into the house.

Matilda and Adam watched as the smoke was quickly sucked up by the ventilation.

"I guess we're not leaving anytime soon," she said, gently rocking Mark, who was starting to wake up from the noise.

"You're a natural at this," Adam said, watching her with the boy.

"Of course I am," Matilda replied. "If your father and I had another child, like I wanted, I would've raised them just as well. You'd have had a wonderful sibling."

She looked at Mark with a longing expression.

"And I would've loved to have grandchildren someday. But now... who knows if life will ever go back to normal? Will we ever have a real family again?"

Adam glanced at Mark, his expression mirroring hers—filled with memories of a life they'd lost.

"I promise, Mom, you'll have grandchildren. One way or another. I'll give them to you."

"Don't make promises you can't keep," she replied.

He noticed her nipples slowly showing through her sweater, maybe from the cold in the garage or something else.

She covered her breasts and went back into the house.

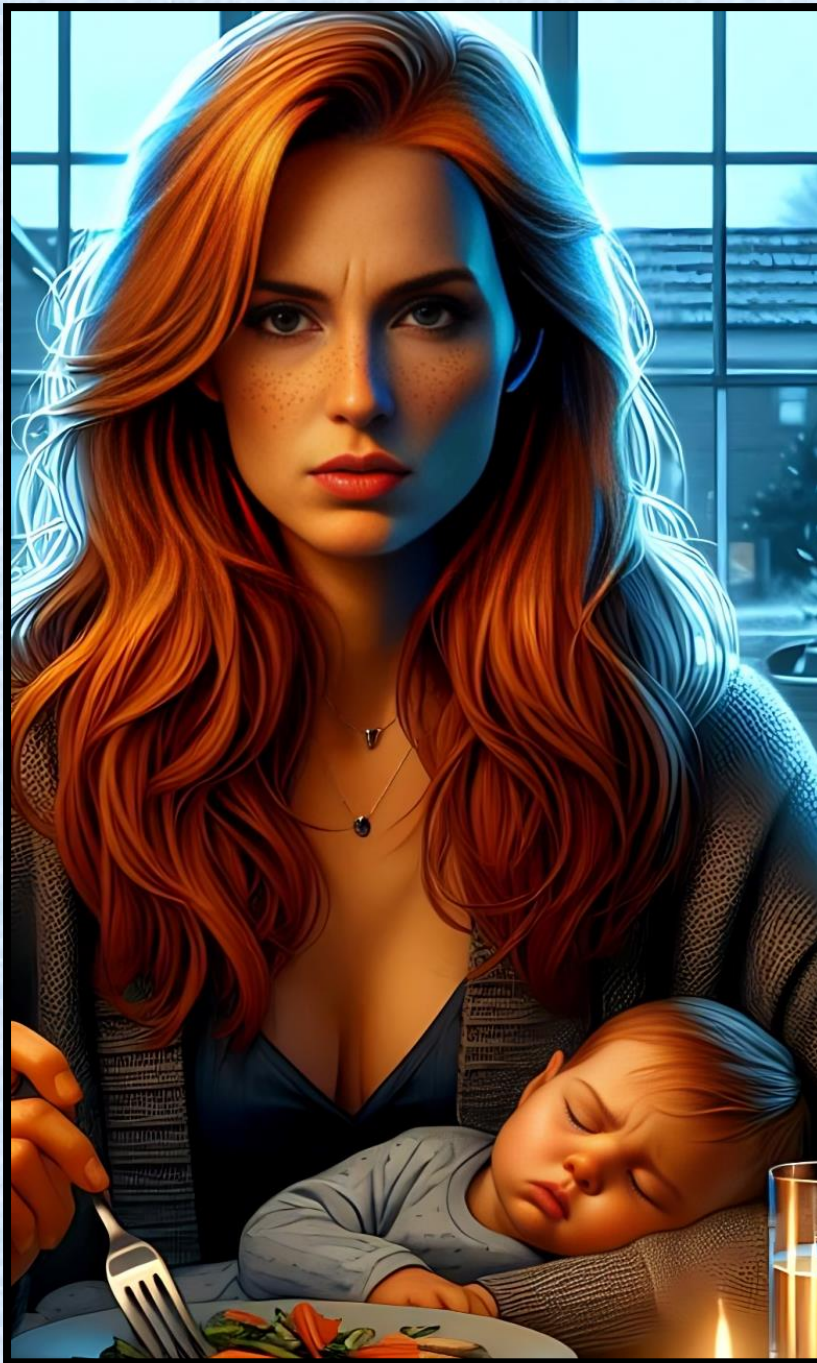


The four of them were having dinner in the dim light of the room, all the windows securely shut. Suzie didn't look at Mark or take him from Matilda's arms. Her fingers twitched nervously, tapping the table.

"Enough," Carl said, stopping her hand.

"Sorry." Suzie's voice was hoarse, her eyes sunken with dark circles. She looked nothing like the Suzie they met in the early days.

"How's your milk, Suzie?" Matilda asked, cradling Mark. His pale face made her heart ache.



"It's... almost gone," Suzie stammered. She flinched suddenly as a knock came at the window.

"What was that?"

"Just birds," Carl muttered without looking up.

"And Mark? Where's Mark?" Suzie's eyes scanned the room until she saw her son in Matilda's arms. She exhaled shakily. "Aren't you scared?"

"We are," Adam whispered.

The silence hung over the table again, and Adam, placing his hand on his head, thought about how good Matilda looked holding the baby.

Will I ever find someone? Or will I be a virgin for the rest of my life? Damn it.

When Suzie finished eating, she got up and went to bed without another glance at Mark.

"She's not getting better, is she?" Carl asked.

Matilda shook her head. "Mark's weak because Suzie's on edge. Her milk is either bad or gone."

"What about you? You don't have any milk?" Carlo glanced at Matilda's boobs, hidden under her sweater. "That would make things a lot easier."

Matilda blushed, her cheeks reddening with a touch of anger. "Excuse me? It seems you have a very vague understanding of how a woman's body works. In case you're unaware, I don't produce milk unless I've had a baby. I'm not a cow—I don't have any milk. Suzie needs medicine—antidepressants—if we're staying here much longer. She's too stressed!"

Carl frowned. "I'm almost done fixing the car," he said, then added bitterly, "And how would you know what my wife needs? You're a vet, lady, right? Don't forget that you're nothing to me, and that's my car in the garage. I only let you stay because my wife asked me to, and I could kick you both out anytime—and I'd do it gladly."

His tone softened as he glanced at Mark and Adam. "Sorry. I'm not feeling great either. The doctor said Suzie might get postpartum depression. It will pass."

"It might, but your son needs milk," Matilda said gently. "There's a mall not far from here. We could—"

"I'm not risking my life."

"Even for your wife and son?"

"No." He finished his dinner and left the room.

"It looks like Mark's only got us," Adam said, offering Matilda a reassuring smile. "I'll take my P365 and we'll go. Tomorrow, Mom."

"Thank you, dear."

At that moment, the earthquake started again. Their eyes locked, fear and uncertainty passing silently between them as the house groaned and shuddered around them. Mark woke up—hungry and exhausted.



DAY 30

As they neared the mall, the air seemed heavier, colder. The wind had died down, and the silence grew oppressive. A broken shopping cart lay overturned near the entrance, its wheels spinning faintly. Dark stains trailed into the store, smeared across the tiles like a warning.

They stepped into the store, the light dimming further as they passed beneath the threshold. Shelves were overturned; their contents scattered and looted long ago. But the pharmacy section was intact in the back corner of the store.

It was quiet inside. Even too quiet.

At the pharmacy counter Matilda started rifling through shelves. Bottles clinked, papers crinkled, and her heart pounded as she scanned the labels. Finally, she found something: a bottle of *prozac*, dusty but sealed. Her heart leapt.

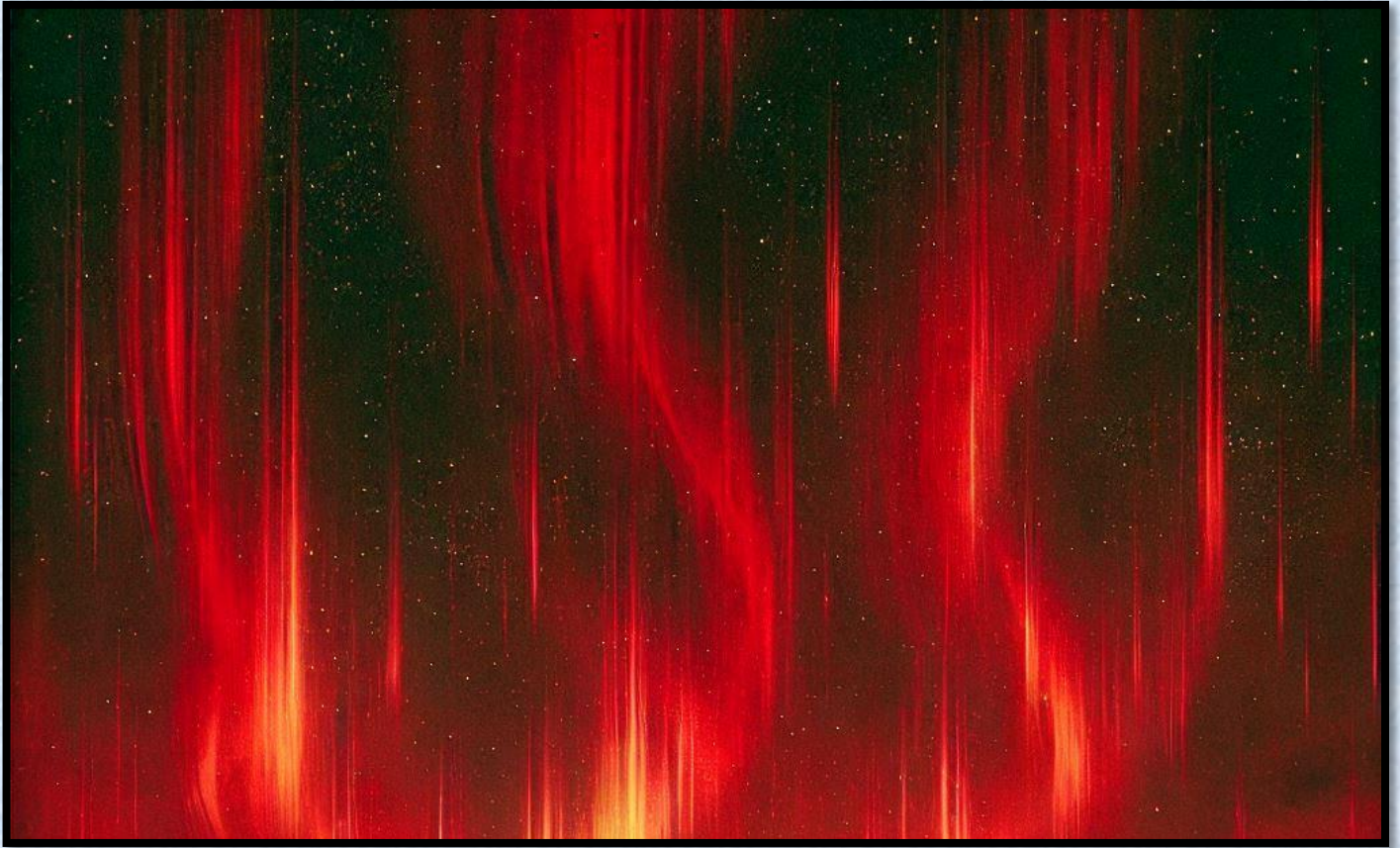
“Got it,” she whispered, holding it up.

Adam exhaled a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “Good.”

He looked around one more time and noticed a huge, bloodstained poster in front of him. It showed something like the northern light, but the colors were yellow and red, almost like in a thick fog. The light was hard to describe, but he could make out figures below, dressed in black, walking toward the light through emptiness.

The words at the bottom read:

"Bright is the Future."



For some reason, the poster gave him chills. Matilda placed her hand on his shoulder, and even through his clothes, he could feel how cold her hand was. She turned him around, and Adam saw someone ahead — one of the infected.

It was a woman, frothing at the mouth, with wild eyes and messy hair. Oddly, she walked normally and was holding a toy, as if looking for someone. Her crimson, bloody skin revealed that she was infected.

Adam raised the gun. For a moment, he was back at the house, pointing a gun at one of his father's killers. The cold snap of the trigger ended a life of someone's son.

The infected woman finally saw Matilda and Adam. The toy slipped from her hands, and she lunged at them. Adam shot — the bullet hit her in the stomach, but she didn't stop. He shot again, and the bullet struck her in the chest. The woman kept moving.

"Adam!?" Matilda tried to pull him away, but he gently pushed her aside. Switching the crowbar to his right hand, he swung it with all his strength, hitting the woman in the head when she got close enough. Her cold fingers were just about to reach his face.

The feeling was as if he had struck a huge dead pig carcass with all his might. He had never hit one, but he could imagine how it would feel to strike such a cold mass of meat.

His arm hurt, and he almost dropped the crowbar, but the infected woman stepped back, spitting out a bloody-black liquid mixed with white foam. The smell was horrendous.

He coughed and struck again, this time gripping the crowbar with both hands and dropping the gun. Once again, it felt like hitting a wall of meat.

A normal person would have died from such heavy blows, but she seemed unaffected. Adam felt like he was only hurting himself.

Matilda picked up the gun with trembling hands and fired a shot at the woman's head, but even the bullets didn't stop her. Only when Adam drove the point of the crowbar deep into her skull did the woman finally fall. She continued twitching; trying to say something, but the foam and bloody saliva blocked her vocal cords.

"Oh my God... we killed a person," Matilda said in shock, her blood-red hair falling over her eyes.

"Don't think about it... It was either us or her." Adam took P365 and checked the magazine. "One bullet left."

"I... I shot a person." Matilda still couldn't believe it. Here hands were shaking.

Before they could collect themselves, the sound of hurried footsteps echoed through the aisles. Adam spun around. A group of survivors appeared—three men, one of them about Adam's age, and another holding a shotgun.

At first, Matilda felt a brief relief upon seeing more people, but she quickly realized it was better to keep her distance from these three.

"Well, well. Wrong place, wrong time. So loud with gun shots," the leader man sneered. He had a scar running down his cheek. "Finally, a woman who's not your mother or my sister, Jamie."

"We don't want trouble," Matilda said.

Jamie, the youngest, looked uneasy. He glanced nervously between Matilda and Adam. "Can't we just leave them alone, Uncle Bob? Loud noises attract psychos. We should go back home,"



he muttered to the scarred man with shotgun. Jamie nervously fidgeted with a car keys in his fingers.

They have a car.

"The monsters are disoriented after the earthquake, so we have a little time," barked the scarred man. "Do you want me to tell your Mom that you're acting like a coward? They're on our turf. They are an easy target. You should learn if you want to be a man."

"I'm gonna call the police," Matilda said, knowing well she's saying a stupid thing. But she really tried to act as if the world were still normal, as if things hadn't fallen apart.

Uncle Bob laughed hysterically. The other man behind him also chuckled.



Adam's grip on the P365 tightened.

"Put the gun down before I blow your head off," Bob growled. He glanced over his shoulder. "Mike."

"Yeah?" A third guy with a gun, who had been quiet before, stepped forward.

"Keep an eye on these two while I grab what I need," Bob ordered, heading toward the pharmacy. He cursed as he stepped inside. "Fuck! Who took the last condoms and pills?"

Adam shockingly looked at the bag Matilda clutched.

Did Mom take the condoms and birth control pills? Why?

"Please," Matilda started again, "we'll leave right now."

"No, you won't. You've already helped yourselves to our pharmacy," Bob retorted,

turning back.

"We don't want your things," Adam said. "We'll give you what you want, and then forget we ever saw you."

Bob laughed darkly. "Forget? No, you idiot, I don't care about the condoms. I don't need them. I enjoy being with women the old-fashioned way. And I've got a thing for redheads. You getting the picture? Your Mom—or whatever she is to you—will be coming with us."

Jamie stepped forward. "Stop it, Uncle!" he said, his voice shaking. "Just let them go! They are not bad people."

Bob turned on Jamie, shoving him back. "You're either with us or against us. Stop being a damn liability! Don't you want a woman, or are you fine staying with your Mom all the time?"

A deafening crash cut him off. All heads turned toward the source: one of the supermarket's boarded windows had shattered, and shadows poured in like water through a broken dam.

It was them.

The infected.

Screams erupted as the creatures flooded the supermarket, their guttural growls echoing off the walls. Some crawled on all fours, others sprinted upright, their bloodshot eyes gleaming in the dim light.

Adam had never seen so many before in one place, not even on the day they attacked Carlo's car.

Bob spun around. "Fuck! Jamie, back to the cars!"

Matilda threw an empty can at Bob just as he aimed the shotgun at Adam. He missed, and the blast was deafening. Adam didn't cover his ears, already used to the sound from the shooting range. He aimed. One bullet.

The decisive shot.

The bullet hit Jamie square in the head, and the keys dropped from his hands.

"Come on, Mom!" Adam yelled, grabbing the keys and her arm.

The pull of the trigger simply ended the life of another person who stood in his way. And his mother's.

But this time the guy was innocent. Truly innocent.

Wrong time, wrong place. Indeed.

They bolted outside, the cold air hitting their faces as Adam jammed the key into the ignition. It was a brand-new, slightly scratched minivan. The engine sputtered to life, and they sped away from the mall, leaving behind the horrors.

The car bumped along the deserted road.



CHAPTER 9. ALWAYS LISTEN TO YOUR MOM

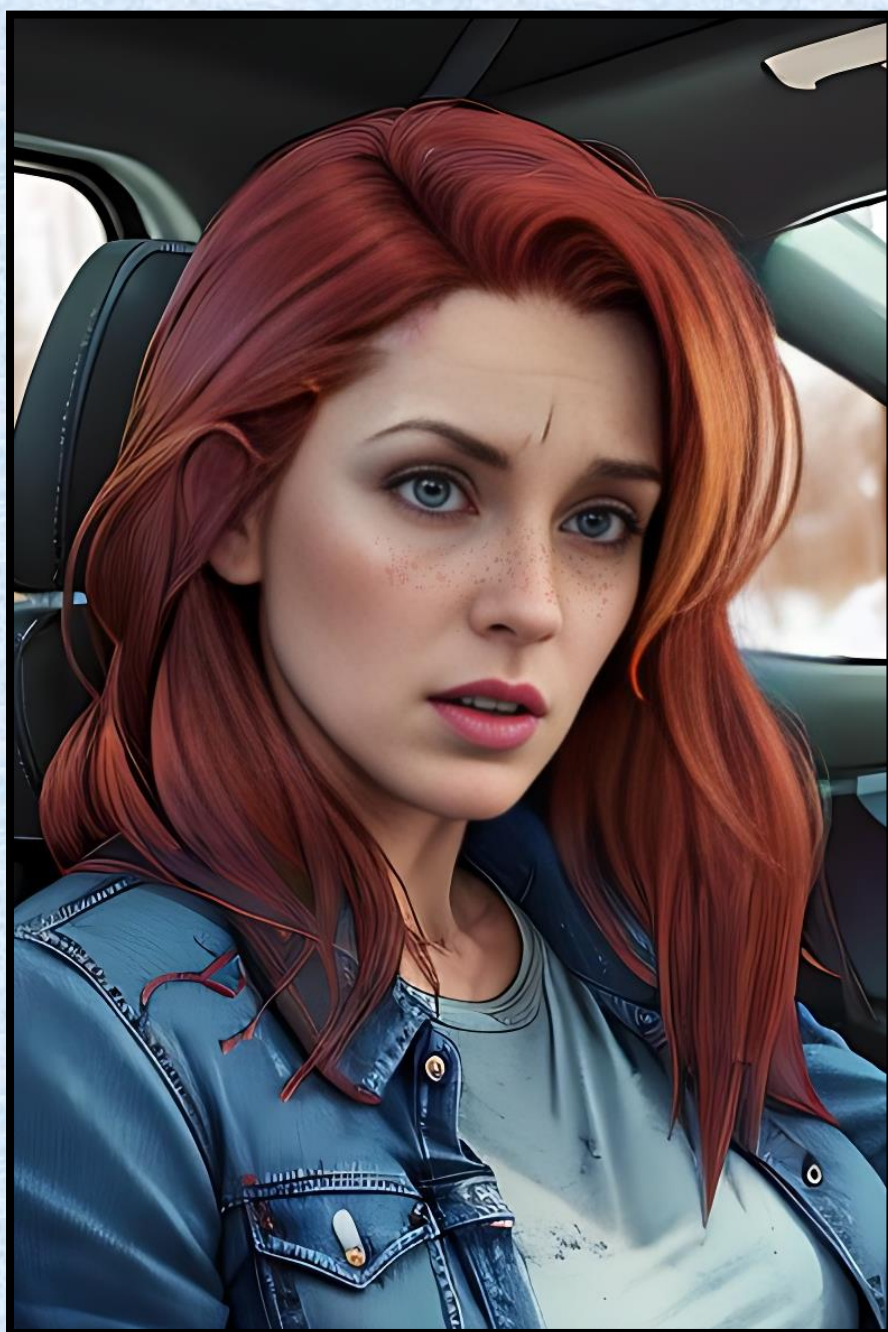
DAY 30

Adam pressed the pedal, driving as far away from the mall as he could. His hands didn't shake, only because they were gripping the steering wheel.

"Bright is the Future."

"What... What did you say?" Matilda asked with trembling voice.

"I... I didn't say anything," Adam replied, glancing in the rearview mirror and spotting another car. It was following them, weaving through the debris on the road.



"Why did they do it...? Why were they so cruel... And that poor boy." She looked at Adam.

He didn't meet her gaze. "They are following us. We're almost there."

The minivan was too slow. The car behind quickly caught up, slamming into the rear. Adam lost control, slamming the brakes, and the minivan skidded into a pole. The airbags deployed with a muffled *whoosh* from the light impact.

He quickly regained his senses and glanced at Matilda; she was recovering from the jolt. Adam glanced behind him and saw a man stepping out of the other car with a gun. It was the second man, Mike. He was covered in blood and looked battered, likely from his skirmish with the army of infected.

"You killed Ja—"

A gunshot cut him off. Mike fell dead.

Adam turned forward, spotting Carlo descending the steps of the house, rifle in hand. He approached the minivan and pointed the rifle at Adam.

For a tense moment, Carlo kept the rifle aimed at him. Then, with a grunt, he lowered it, slinging it over his shoulder. Opening the passenger door, he carefully helped Matilda out. She was groggy but upright.

"Looks like you found us two new cars. Let's get inside before the noise draws infected," Carlo said tersely.

Adam exhaled with relief. He followed Carlo and Matilda to the house as darkness swallowed the street. From the windows, faint growls and the sound of flesh tearing carried on the night air, the infected feasting on what was left of Mike.

Inside, Matilda regained her strength after a shower. The two sat at the table while



Carlo reheated the last remnants of a meal.

"That was reckless. Stupid, even," Carlo said, setting plates in front of them. "Adam, you should be taking care of your Mom, not dragging her into the middle of danger."

Adam swallowed hard but said nothing.

Carlo picked up a bottle of *prozac*, examining it for a moment. "But still, thanks for helping Suzie... I won't forget it."



He shook out a few pills, downed them with water, and disappeared upstairs to his wife.

Matilda and Adam ate in silence in the dim light. It had been a terrible day, horrifying and nearly costing them their lives.

She held it together for a long time, but eventually, Matilda dropped her fork and began sobbing.

"Mom? What's... wrong?" Adam pulled up a chair and sat beside her. She hugged him tightly, burying her face in his shoulder, sobbing.

"I'm so tired, Adam. I'm not strong enough... It's so hard without your father. How could people be so cruel? We almost died today. Why is this happening to us?"

"I don't know," Adam murmured, stroking her red hair. "We lost Dad, but I'm still here with you. Always, Mom."

"I know, baby. I owe you again for saving my life today." She pressed her tits against him, her fingers digging into his back as if she couldn't breathe without him.

I also need her like air.

After a while, Matilda stopped crying. "I don't need pills when I have you, darling." She slowly pulled away, quickly taking off her shirt.

Adam watched in surprise as Matilda let the shirt fall to the floor, wearing only a pink bra. From his vantage point, he could see her curves—her breasts gently pressing against the table, her bare shoulders, and waist.

She pulled a pack of condoms from her pocket.

Adam looked at the pack with surprise. "You..."

"I took these for a reason," she said, looking at him with intent. "I know you promised me grandkids, but I took these to make sure no one is born by accident into this crazy world—just in case you meet someone. Okay?"

Her breasts are so big and beautiful.



She adjusted the straps of her bra, letting her fingers linger a little longer than necessary as she glanced down at herself, exhaling a soft sigh.

"You didn't have to lie about my breasts being nice," she said. "I'm old... Why are you so quiet?"

Turning to face him, she caught the heat of his gaze, fixed intently on the curve of her bra. Her first instinct was to cover herself, to scold him, but instead, she shifted slightly toward him.

Matilda barely suppressed a laugh. "Maybe... you weren't lying. You're blushing so much, sweetheart." She rested her hand on his chest. "Your heart is racing. Calm down. You didn't even get this worked up when we were in the mall or followed."

"Sorry," he said, placing a hand on her shoulder, feeling the warmth of her skin. "I don't know why Dad filled you with so much self-doubt, but you're still stunning, Mom. You always have been. I know it now and I knew it when I was twelve."

She stroked his hair and gave him a gentle smile. The subtle movement of her hands caused her boobs to shift, drawing attention to her curves in the most captivating way.

"Thank you, sweetheart. I owe



you forever... especially after today," she said, rubbing his chin with her hand before kissing him on the cheek. Adam shifted a little closer, his left hand resting on her shoulder while his right hand settled on her a bit saggy belly.

"Your heart is still racing. You might pass out, stop it, darling," she said.

He brought his lips closer, kissing along Matilda's ear, then moving to her temple, and cheek. "My blood pressure only rises when I'm near you."

And then, with a sudden, electrifying kiss, he claimed her lips. She didn't close her eyes for even a second, watching his loving expression, his closed eyes. Their lips met, and his right hand lifted from her belly to rest on her right breast, gently squeezing it through the pink fabric of her bra.

His mind felt like it exploded. Matilda gently pushed his chest, breaking their kiss. Then she put his hand away from her bra.

Adam was afraid she would get angry and punish him. But Matilda only watched his flushed face with a concern look.

"We're doing something wrong," she said, warning him, "You lied to me, didn't you? You told me you didn't feel anything for me anymore." She didn't raise her voice, but her words were firm, like a soft reprimand.

"I won't scold you, sweetheart, but I don't want you to lie to me," she said, her fingers tracing the line of his neck, sending a shiver through him.

She leaned closer, her breath warm against his skin. "And touching my breasts..." she paused, her lips hovering near his ear. "That's very, very wrong," she whispered, her words for some reason sending a thrill through him. "But these... feelings. It will pass. You should understand this."

She placed her hand gently under his chin, tilting his face upward to meet her eyes, as he had been focused only on the movements of her full plump lips. "Do you hear me? Hello? I don't mind kisses. They show we have a special bond. Most boys think they're too grown up for kisses like that with their mothers. But..." Her fingers lightly traced the line of his jaw as she paused, "... never touch my... 'chest' again."

Adam's ears were ringing. His blood pressure had indeed risen significantly, and he felt a bit off. "Are you serious?"

"Yes, Adam, I'm serious. This is wrong. We have a wonderful connection, but please, don't touch my breasts again."

He didn't hear
*"Don't touch
my breasts."*

He heard *"You
can kiss me
anytime you
want"*

Adam leaned down, ran his fingers through her red locks, and kissed Matilda again.

"Adam!" she gasped.

He kissed her, cupping his Mom's face. Their lips met, but Matilda instinctively placed her hands against his chest, pushing him back. She was



so sweet, so intoxicating. He wanted to push his tongue inside but she wouldn't let him. Finally, she let him in, and their tongues melded for a second.

He was kissing his own mother with a tongue.

The ringing in his ears stopped, and it seemed all sounds faded away...

"Mmm... Mom...I love you so much."

Something dripped from his nose. Something warm. It was blood. His vision went dark.

She was right. His blood pressure had risen too high.

"ADAM!?" He heard his mother's voice and fell from the chair.

Bright is the Future

