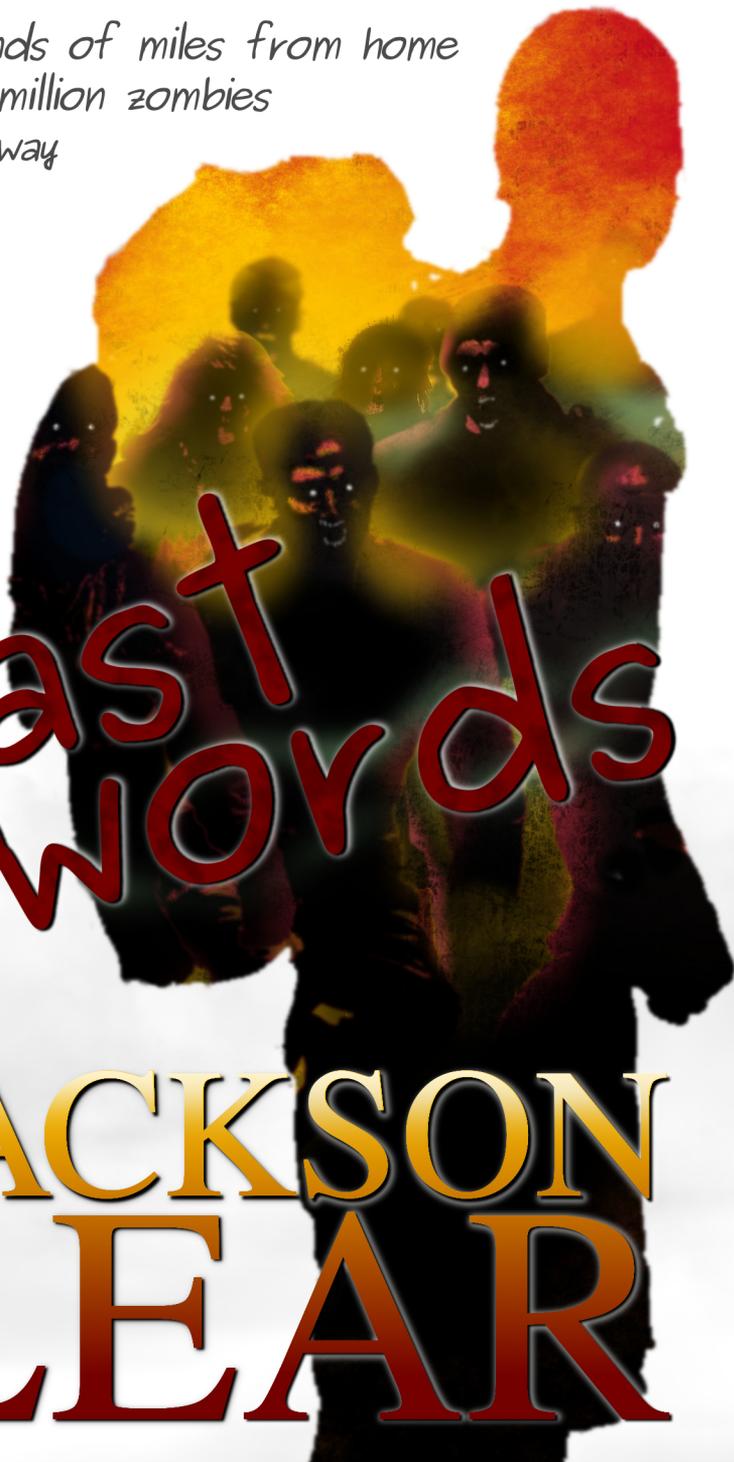


FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE KINGSTON RAINE SERIES

*thousands of miles from home  
with a million zombies  
in the way*

A group of zombies is depicted in a dark, fiery environment. The background is a bright, glowing orange and yellow, suggesting a fire or a sunset. The zombies are in the foreground, appearing as dark, shadowy figures with glowing eyes. They are wearing dark clothing, and some have visible wounds or blood on their faces. The overall atmosphere is one of horror and suspense.

last  
words

JACKSON  
LEAR

# Last Words

Jackson Lear

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By Jackson Lear

Kingston Raine and the Grim Reaper  
Kingston Raine and the Bank of Limbo  
Kingston Raine and the Arena of Chaos  
Kingston Raine and the Starlight Muse  
Last Words



12 July

¡Viva Madrid!

I'd also like to point out: ¡Viva la prostitutes! Seriously, you wouldn't believe how many there are lining the streets in this part of town, even right next to McDonalds. You'd think there would be, what, five at most? Maybe six? Noooooo, there were over a hundred and that was at 3pm. It's like I've fallen arse-backwards into a bizarro world full of chocolate served in mugs with finger shaped doughnuts. Never mind a culturally recommended nap time or a social life when you don't get ready to leave until midnight. Oh, and train timetables only tell you how long the wait is until the next one. The red light district seems to be the entire city. Even the directions are based on where the sun is in the sky and not which of the five streets you're supposed to walk along. There's a deluge of wine and sangria for lunch ... actually, that I might be okay with, especially if I can get three bottles of wine for the price of a sandwich. Suffice to say: Madrid has just climbed to the top of the nuttiest places I've ever been to.

Rachel warned me about her apartment while I was still in Berlin. She reaffirmed her living conditions along the metro ride from Atocha to Callao. Was I adequately braced for what I saw? No, because holy shit is her place crowded. It's like a long term hostel and wreaks of 'scam'. There are ten bedrooms in the one apartment and it sleeps twelve people, though while I'm here it will sleep thirteen. It's a good thing that I'm not staying for long, maybe just a week. Shorter if she wasn't kidding about the lack of an air conditioner. I survived a night in Barcelona but that had the Mediterranean breeze. Here, we are surrounded by two hundred miles of desert.

Many thanks to Rachel for putting me up as well. I told her we can go out for dinner. My shout. Considering what I saw this afternoon we'll probably have dinner at ten minutes to midnight, our food will be served on triangular plates by staff with cocktail umbrellas in their hair, while covers of Adele and Michael Jackson are sung in Spanish with '80s synthesisers as the only accompanying instrument.

Rachel warned me that I might end up looking for a hostel by

tomorrow. It's possible, but either I sleep in a room with seven other sweaty tourists or I sleep on the floor in a room with just her. And the thing with every hostel is that as soon as you have eight people in the one room then one of them, by law, must snore all through the night. Another must stumble in at three in the morning, completely shit-faced, and turn every light on so that they can see what they're doing. Then they'll spend half an hour drunkenly texting someone with their phone on full volume so that they know when they get a new message.

God damn that Russian dick was an asshole. The only thing that cheers me up about that whole ordeal was watching the Aussie walk off with the Russian's shoes. Oh, if only I could've stayed long enough for the Russian to wake up, but no, I had a train to catch.

So aside from the ten bedrooms in this place, there is a small lounge that sits five people right next to the front door. There is one small store room that is locked and no one here has the key. There are two bathrooms without locks of any kind and Rachel says you have a fifty/fifty chance of walking in on something you don't really want to see, since there's a mix of guys and girls currently living here. There's a small kitchen with two fridges which are packed to the rim with food and drinks. Rachel warns me that food often goes missing regardless of how clearly you put your name on it.

There's a tall Italian girl who smokes up a storm. She's quite lively but she has an attitude in the kitchen with what is Italian food and what is not. Apparently spaghetti bolognese is not actually Italian and you will be stabbed in the face if you ask for it in a real restaurant. This all started when I was in the kitchen talking to Rachel about maybe getting a pizza. A faux pas, I admit, since I can get a pizza anywhere and the whole point of travelling is to go for something a little more authentic. But since I know diddly of the cuisine here I figured I'd get the suggestions going regardless of how ludicrous they sounded.

The Italian girl shook her head at me. "Don't bother with the pizza here. It's not real."

That earned her a curious look. I thought maybe there was a Spanish twist, like it's extra spicy or topped with paella, but no. "What's wrong with it?" I asked.

"They do many good things here but pizza is not one of them."

"Isn't bad pizza still good pizza?"

She pulled her nose up at me. "You can't be serious."

“Salami, cheese, tomato sauce, what’s not to love? Fold it all over into a calzone if you’re so inclined. Or, even better, go to Chicago. Their pizzas are as thick as a lemon meringue pie.”

I knew exactly what I was saying and I still couldn’t help myself, because the best part was the look she gave me. It was like she caught me eating nuggets dipped in sweet and sour sauce while sitting on the toilet. For once all of her bracelets stopped jingling about.

“So, this is my friend,” said Rachel, pointing vaguely in my direction.

The Italian Girl still hadn’t shifted her horrified eyes away from me. “Why would you do that to food? It’s the unrecognised religion of the world.”

Now, *that* I understood. “Can’t other cultures be inspired by a foreign dish and make it their own?”

“Of course, but they should change the name of it first. Don’t call it pizza if it’s been changed so much that it no longer resembles pizza.”

“I guess. It’s like chips. Malt vinegar and sea salt all the way, none of this ketchup crap. And no matter where you are, chips always taste better when served in a newspaper.”

Her bracelets stopped jangling about again. “Did you grow up homeless?”

“No. English.”

“And you wrap your food in newspaper?”

“Of course not! The guy I’m paying does that for me.”

She scoffed and mumbled something that I didn’t quite catch.

Rachel came to the rescue. “So Mark’s going to be here for about a week.”

“Then there’s no time to lose. Bay leaves.”

“Bailey’s?”

“Leaves. In the box right behind you.”

Lo and behold I was practically sitting on her tub of herbs and spices. I handed it over.

“Thank you. Do you drink?”

Uh ...

“Good. Grab a glass, pass me the wine. This is one of my favourites, in case you ever find yourself in a shop wondering what to get me as a farewell gift. FYI -”

Yeah, Rachel warned me that it’s really depressing listening to foreigners speak your language exceptionally well when you can

barely string a sentence together in any other language, let alone theirs.

“FYI, there is no such thing as cooking wine. You only cook with the wine you would drink. And not the cheap stuff that comes at the end of the night, no. The nice bottle you begin with. You’re also from London?”

“Yep. West side, near Uxbridge.”

Then came a smile. Turns out, she spent a year on our fine shores at some school I haven’t heard of when she was sixteen. Thus, she has sampled our fine cuisine, which is all French, Indian and faux-Italian, so there wasn’t much I could add to the conversation.

“How did you two meet?” she asked.

Hmm. Does she think we’re dating? Probably not, she was just making chit chat. Still ...

“School,” said Rachel.

“Well, let’s not sell the story short, there,” I said.

“But we did meet in school.”

“I remember.”

“So there’s not much of a story.”

I cleared my throat. “We met in detention when we were fourteen. She forgot to bring her homework one day and I got caught drawing a stickman flipbook.”

“A what?” asked Italian Girl.

“On each page you draw a little figure, like a dinosaur chasing a stickman. You flip the pages and it shows the dinosaur catching up to the guy and biting his head off. I got caught doing that. Detention. The teacher left the room because someone was having an asthma attack outside. I asked Rachel if she wanted to go to the dance together on Friday.”

“That was the first time you met?” asked Italian Girl.

“Yep. I’d seen her around but never spoke to her.”

“He didn’t even know my name,” said Rachel.

“And you asked her out?” asked Italian Girl.

“I asked her to the dance.”

“Isn’t that the same?”

“Not quite. And she said no.”

“Because it wasn’t a couples’ dance, it was just some lame school disco thing,” said Rachel.

“Why her?” asked Italian Girl.

“My friend told me I had to go with a girl.”

“Which wasn’t true, Mark’s just the gullible kind,” said Rachel.

Italian Girl shook her head at me as though I made no sense at all. And in hindsight what fourteen year old actually does make sense? “You asked someone you’d never spoken to before?”

“I’ll be honest, I was in a bit of a panic at the time.”

“It was certainly spontaneous,” said Rachel. “Just a quick blurting out of, ‘Do you want to go to the dance? On Friday?’”

Italian Girl sighed, offered me some more wine, and that seemed to be the end of that conversation. So, we started talking about travelling.

I keep thinking that one day I’d like to do a six week tour of Italy, drive around in a convertible and learn how to cook like an Italian master. The best thing I seem to have done with the diary is kept the back full of recipes from other travellers. Everyone has one killer recipe. All you have to do is chat to them while they’re in the kitchen, shadow them over the frying pan, help out, and write everything down as they’re dictating. You would think that after all this time I would have acquired more than 10 recipes, but no. Sometimes the guy or girl you end up talking to is in the same boat and neither of us can cook for shit. And unfortunately I’ve found that just because I have the recipe doesn’t mean my version ends up being any good. Still not sure why.

Besides Italian Girl, there are three sixteen year old French kids here (two guys and the one girl they’re both trying to sleep with). They’re celebrating the end of their exams by drinking cheap beer and smoking pot. The girl is sleeping in the room next to ours (ours being the first room on the right as you come in through the front door). The two French guys are staying in the room next to her. I heard too many names in such a short amount of time to remember who anyone is, though I know that no one is named Pierre. That’s a shame, since it’s the only French name I know. Those three don’t speak much English.

There is a German guy here who speaks really fast. I asked whereabouts he’s from and hoped he would say Berlin. Nope. Dresden. He saw my eyes go wide when he mentioned his home town and then he said exactly what I feared he would say: “You know only one thing about Dresden, don’t you?” Yep. Nothing like my people carpet bombing his people during the war to build a lasting friendship. But hey, my grandparents lived through the blitz so we both got to blame previous generations of war atrocities. Good times.

There are two girls here sharing the room in the corner. One is from Croatia and the other is from the west side of Ireland, near Sligo she said, at which point I had to say, "I almost went there while riding around the country on my bike." Then I felt like an idiot. Saying you almost went somewhere and didn't is kinda pointless. I almost went to the North Pole that one time, then I realised I was flat broke and could barely afford to go to Sweden. Plus, I made it sound like I thought her town was boring enough to avoid without knowing anything about it. So far I've offended Italian Girl, Dresden Guy, and Irish Girl. I really have to stop saying the first thing that comes to mind.

So the Irish girl and the Croatian girl don't know each other, they just got stuck with a room together. Originally there was the Dutch guy in that room (he said he was sharing with another guy who snored), but when another room became empty he quickly moved.

The Dutch guy is pretty cool. You know what's quite irritating? Everyone speaks English (except for the three French kids). I'm in the middle of Spain, full of internationals and everyone speaks English. I can barely count to ten in another language and they're all geniuses. Rachel called them polyglots or something like that. I have no idea what a glot is but I wrote it down in my sudoku book to remind me.

So there's Rachel, the three Frenchies, the Italian girl, the German Dresden guy, Miss Sligo and Miss Croatia (Miss Croatia really is quite good looking with great legs. She has the long flat face thing working for her), the Dutch guy who has to explain to the Frenchies that he doesn't carry weed with him wherever he goes, and I've been told about the other three who haven't come home yet. There's the Russian girl, the Indian girl, and a Turkish guy. Everyone is supposedly nice and friendly. Most of them are here to study Spanish for a few weeks before going home. The rare few are here on a longer term basis. The only advantage I can see in staying here for months on end is that it is in the heart of the city right in the night club district. Aside from that it's hot, crowded, and way too expensive (well, not for me, because I'm staying on Rachel's floor for free).

Rachel left about twenty minutes ago to do her Spanish class and will be back later. She said I was lucky to get to Madrid when I did, and no kidding. Yesterday all of France seemed to go on strike as though it's a national event. I was stuck in Nice for a few hours trying

to figure out what the hell to do. They were happy enough for me to pay for a full fare ticket from Paris to Barcelona, but did they deliver? No. I got to Nice and listened to a French announcement, and for the first time in my life there was no one around who spoke English. There was a very nice French guy in a beret (I honestly didn't expect to see anyone in a beret except British uni posers), and he managed to communicate a lot with just "Uh ..." and gestures. He waved me out of my seat, which was quite easy when the entire carriage full of people got up and left. I thought I had to change trains and was desperately checking my ticket. Long story short, because my hand is cramping up: France is on strike, I filled out my sudoku book and bought another, found a Columbian guy who had hired a mini van and offered to take a bunch of people to Barcelona if we paid our share of the rental and petrol. Fair enough. I went along and sat with my sixteen kilo backpack on my lap for a couple of hours, pinned up against the window next to a fat and sweaty guy who complained endlessly about the heat. Yeah, it's the Riviera in summer, of course it's going to be hot. At least I had the decency to shower in the morning. I offered him some Tic Tacs.

"I'm okay, thanks," he said.

The transport problems were a little better in Barcelona. It took a while to figure out how to buy a ticket for the train as I had to find out what sort of ticket I needed, where to go and all that. This morning I took the train out to Madrid as per normal and as soon as I was half an hour away from Barcelona I got a text message from Rachel asking if I was on one of the delayed or cancelled trains. It turned out that Barcelona was getting in on the strike action as well and the authorities are having a hell of a time dealing with all of the tourists.

Paris was nice but there was no Internet at the hostel. I had to go to a café and try to order something from the scrawl on the blackboard. The nineteen year old kid had never heard of a cappuccino. Or, more likely, he's never heard me say it in a terrible French accent. So I sat there with some weak brown liquid thing as I endured the slowest Internet connection known to man. Some of the sites took so long to load they ended up timing out before loading even a single frame. I tried my phone and could call and text normally but I couldn't get online, as if there was no signal. Rachel said I could check my emails on her computer but it's password protected, so I'll have to wait until she comes home. In the meantime

I have Clint's ancient tablet to carry around. He's not getting it back until I've beaten his Freecell score.

Overall, yeah, leaving the laptop at home has been good for my sanity. It's forced me to see the world from my own two feet, instead of from the bed of a hostel like I've seen plenty of others do. The tablet has been good for browsing and booking hostels, not for logging into a dozen sites where I can see Alana getting all cosy with Assface. At least when I log in at an Internet Café I'm surrounded by people in the daytime. It's much easier to keep a clear head and realise that I'm having a kickass July. Maybe I can get a photo with my arms around some of the prostitutes, make Alana jealous.

No, that's a fast way of getting robbed. And an easy way of looking pathetic.

So, Rachel plans on staying in Madrid for another six weeks. She says she wants to lose weight and has a target of twenty kilos. She figures the heat will help with that. I've been here for a couple of hours and I'm sure I've lost weight as well, so I believe her. But, honestly? I haven't seen her in four months and she looks the same now as she did back then. She said the final straw came a couple of days before Madrid when she was in a restaurant and her bra broke. I didn't even know that could happen. She said it was so embarrassing because she was almost falling out of her top and her dress was designed in a way that made taking her bra off, even in the bathroom, a little difficult. Yeah, that has me stumped.

I have enough euro with me for a couple of bottles of wine tonight. There will be stories. Oh my god, will there be stories. I'm still curious as to how Rachel even ended up in Spain. It wasn't even a hint of an idea when I last saw her.

I suppose I have four hours to work on the condensed version of why Alana dumped me.

Or I could see if anyone's in the kitchen.

## Part 2.

The Italian Girl has a name: Cristina, from Milan. I grabbed a couple of phrases off my tablet and made her laugh, probably at my incompetent accent, but still a laugh is a laugh. I got her with, 'Che palle' - 'what a pain in the ass.' Then, 'Non vedo l'ora' - 'I can't wait.' I figure I can use those two for the rest of my life. Thankfully I got

her and not the Dutch guy since all of my Dutch flew out of my head a couple of weeks ago. Cristina offered me some wine as a thank you.

She's studying chemistry and wants to complete her degree in the States. She's worried about her level of English. She'll be fine. An hour of talking to her and I made more grammar mistakes than she did. The funny thing about her is that she's spent the entire day in her blue pyjama bottoms with a dark long sleeved t-shirts. It's as hot as balls in here. I guess it's just a comfort thing. Or maybe she just sweats through her nice clothes and wants to keep them as presentable as possible.

We talked a little about Madrid. Apparently there is a huge gay area in town which I'm supposed to explore. She said it's a lot of fun and a hot spot for picking up straight girls. They go to the clubs here so they don't have to worry about guys hitting on them, since the guys are focussing on each other. The girls lower their defences and start to appreciate a straight guy talking to her. Too bad I don't have my own room. Over here I might be considered exotic. I guess some crazy señorita out there has a thing for Arctic-white monoglots. Cristina then said the perfect place to meet everyone is standing in line for the bathroom. The lines take forever and you have about five minutes of talk time before moving along. Even the male bathrooms take a while because dudes are getting blow jobs. What the fuck happened to the 'avoid eye contact at all times' policy?

During our conversation the French girl came in to grab a drink. She doesn't speak much English and barely any Spanish, but she was very stoned and giggly so that helped to understand her. Cristina warned me that the French girl really is sixteen, so leave her to the two French guys who yesterday managed to burn their macaroni and cheese. Cristina said she and the Russian girl helped the kids out and cooked their dinner.

It's weird thinking down to the French kids. I guess it's like at work. I waltzed in with my heart slamming in my chest like it was the first day of school again, hoping that I would make a friend or two and not fuck anything up, only to find myself working with forty and fifty year olds who have smoked half their lives away and are rumoured to be ex-cons. How the fuck do you break the ice like that? So ... anyone watch the Simpsons last night? No? Well then, I better go to the bathroom and read up on football as much as I can.

Cristina helped me make a killer pasta dish, though she balked at

me using dried spaghetti when apparently making fresh pasta is easy. She said the most important thing was to add the cooked pasta to the sauce the moment you take it out of the boiling water. Strain it first, of course, but plonk it into the sauce immediately after. The pasta will still be trying to absorb moisture and if you wait too long it will clump together. That certainly explains some of my past mistakes in life. Really important: add a splash of balsamic vinegar at the end to the sauce, stir, taste. If it's too sweet add more vinegar, if it's too sour add more sugar. I wish I had an Italian grandmother who could teach me these things. Mine were either into crochet or Eastenders.

Rachel will be back soon. Until then I'm waiting for the washing machine to finish its cycle. Then I need figure out where to hang my clothes. There is a line between one side of the building and the other which looks out onto a courtyard four floors below. I've never left my clothes to dry four floors up before. How did they even fix the line in the first place? Anyway, the German guy (Michael, easy enough to remember) must have drawn the short straw with the apartment because his bedroom window is the only one that can access the clothes line, so he has to accept a dozen people coming in and out of his room all day to get their clothes. Most of the time he lies back on his bed with the laptop nearby and with the door wide open. I feel a little sorry for the guy. There would be very little privacy when he wants it.

I'm pretty sure with every window in the building looking into the bathroom there's not going to be much privacy in there either. I'll ask Rachel how she deals with it or if she even cares.

### Part 3.

She cares. She says you get used to it. Just as long as there are no cameras to record the moment then a startled half naked housemate is the worst of your problems.

It's late now, though not late enough for some people. Half of the apartment are going out later but I'm wrecked. After sitting on my ass for almost two full days of travelling you'd think I would be fully rested, but no. Rachel and I went to this Japanese restaurant and we drank a little sake.

Ha! 'A little.'

As we were walking to the next place it occurred to me ... we just ordered fresh seafood even though we're surrounded by two hundred miles of desert. Thankfully I stuck to the Chicken Katsu thing. When in a new country and in doubt, always go with chicken.

It must suck being a backpacking vegan. Although, there was that guy in Amsterdam. We chowed down in some greasy burger place. He said he was vegetarian while travelling, vegan at home, and yet there he was tucking into a meaty burger.

"I have this once a year in memory of my brother."

I guess everyone needs rules to be flexible now and then or else you'll just go insane.

Afterwards Rachel brought me to a churros hotspot. I never had them before. It was like eating a sugarless doughnut which you dip in liquid chocolate. It was quite nice. It's a twenty-four hour place and is supposed to be packed in the early hours of the morning as people wait for the first train of the day after a night of clubbing.

Rachel and I chatted a lot, reminisced, it was all good. I gave her the brief story of Alana and I, how I had tried to surprise her with flowers at the front of the gym, waiting for her to come out and she never did, and I waited until the gym was locked up for the night. Rachel asked how I found out. Believe it or not, it came from her dad. He was hesitating the whole afternoon, which was probably made harder because Alana was always in a bubbly mood. If she had been a bitch it would have been easy to knock her down a peg or two, but no. Her dad leaned over and whispered, "The next time you hear her talk about what she's looking forward to in the future, have a listen and compare it to yours."

Yeah, that confused me for a while. Then it happened. "I can't wait to have a house, renovate the kitchen and push it out into the garden, turn the loft into something useful, have breakfast in bed every Sunday, and wake up to someone who loves me."

Honey, you already wake up to someone who loves you, so why is it still on your list of dreams for the future?

Oh.

Annoyingly, this occurred during a lunch time restaurant date when Lauren and Matt announced that they were pregnant. On the walk back to the Tube Alana asked if I was okay. I went home single. The next day she started dating Assface.

There are statues in this place called Sol and one is a bear eating a strawberry tree (I didn't think strawberries grew on trees ...). Then

we went to Plaza Mayor to see a big statue of a guy on a horse. That was the plan, but when we got there the whole area had been converted to house a free classical concert.

Rachel piqued up and said, "They're playing the Planets." It sounded like the Star Wars theme. "That's what it's based on." Huh.

So we waited and listened. And waited. It was a long piece. The sound wasn't great either because it was live, echoing off the surrounding buildings and hitting us all at the wrong time. Afterwards they played the Valkerie song from Apocalypse Now.

We got back to Rachel's place at eleven thirty and I checked my emails. Still nothing exciting happening in the world. After a few days of limited access, it's disappointing to see that no one has missed me yet. Rachel is checking her emails now. There's giggling coming from the room next door. As far as I can tell the French girl is all alone in there.

Despite being dead on my feet I don't feel like going to bed just yet. Maybe because it's 34 degrees and there's no air-con.

13 July

Weird, weird day. First of all, the funny things:

Between Gran Vía and Sol are lots of walkways weaving around giant department stores. By the looks of things it's just one single company that operates all the stores across several buildings. One building sells clothes, the other building sells electronics. I'm still having to translate euros to pounds. Under the pathways are the metro lines with large air vents that blast air up as the train goes by. Rachel was wearing a full length casual dress and got blasted, à la Marilyn Monroe, and her dress really did shoot up over her face.

"At least I was wearing clean underwear," she said, laughing it off.

That wasn't the only time it happened. Two American girls were caught out while I was walking along a little while later. The locals seem to have figured out not to walk on the vents but there was always cheering and clapping when they saw someone fall for it. I bet it only happens to foreigners.

There were lots of guys selling stuff on the side of the road, like wallets, handbags, watches, and man can they move fast when they see the police coming around the corner.

Rachel and I went out for breakfast to a small sandwich shop.

Along with our order we got a bottle of red wine. That was a surprise. Red wine for breakfast.

For lunch we went out to this other place with Cristina and Derek, the Dutch guy. It was the first time I saw Cristina not in her pyjamas. Black jeans and a dark grey tank top. Her bracelets kept jangling about, so naturally, with her being an Italian, they jangled quite a lot. She also wore thick eyeliner so it looked like a wing on the side of each eye. Derek got a few compliments for wearing a shirt with the sleeves rolled up. I rocked up in a t-shirt and shorts, much like Rachel. It was too hot to bother looking presentable. This turned out to be a mistake as almost immediately the phones came out and now there are pictures of me on the Internet looking like I have just rolled out of bed on minimal sleep.

We went to a place down this small alley that Derek knew of. It was a tiny restaurant on the back of someone's house. I could see right through to the family's kitchen and dining room. The owner was the only one working there and he operated as the waiter, chef, and service extraordinaire. The most customers he would ever have at one time would be sixteen people. He brought out some paella, which is your typical rice and seafood mix. He also did some toasted bread thing which Rachel told me about and I have since forgotten the name of. Since everything is made in bulk the guy doesn't need to hire anyone else. And guess what we also ordered? Two bottles of red wine. They were so nice I took a picture of the label so I can find them when I get back to London.

We did have a couple of weird guys come up to us as we were eating, trying to sell packets of tissues and flowers. The flower guy looked indignant that two strapping men would dine with two feisty ladies and refuse to buy flowers, but none of us are dating. Cristina told us she was bi and didn't realise that was even an option until after she slept with her best friend from school. Derek said he was married when he was nineteen and divorced at twenty one. He is grateful that he got marriage out of his system at an early age. God knows what I said with two lots of half bottles of wine in me but I know it must have been awesomely embarrassing if I got a cheer and a high five from Derek and a weird look from Rachel.

Cristina and Derek were wondering about our situation and thought Rachel and I were a couple. How else could we explain me sleeping on the floor? But no, I'm just cashing in on an old favour. Rachel stayed at my place a couple of times during various troubles.

We told them about her old roommate who got them all evicted. The stupid cow was too afraid to tell anyone what had happened. She knew for three weeks that they were getting evicted before she confessed. She was too embarrassed because the eviction was her fault and she wanted to avoid a confrontation with her friends. Rachel is still bitter about it. She stayed on my sofa until she found a new place, so now she's repaying a favour. I was trying to remember when that happened when Rachel piped up.

"You had just started dating Alana."

Soooooooooooo ... fuck. Did she think I was cheating on her at the start of our relationship?

Cristina and Derek got the condensed version of the story. Met through a friend at uni, both had opposite schedules and near misses, and we only really hooked up over a week-long ditch of classes by flying off to Greece where her cousin had a spare room for a few days.

Cristina spent most of the time peering at me inquisitively. "Did you think you were meant to be?"

"No, I thought she was interesting."

Rachel had to run off to class and almost left her phone at the restaurant. I walked back through Sol for a while with Cristina and Derek, hoping to catch a few more Marilyn Monroe impersonations. No luck. We returned to the apartment and found Rachel there. Her class had been cancelled. The school are hoping to find a replacement teacher for tomorrow as their current one had to fly back home for an emergency. So one of the students who lives a five minute walk from the school took everyone's number and will send them a message tomorrow if the class is still cancelled. As a result, I went to another afternoon lunch, this time with Rachel's class. They are all from different parts of the world. One of the girl's is from Cambodia and she's been living in Madrid for years. She was supposed to be doing a business course here that got cancelled at the last minute so she had to find something to fulfil her student visa requirements as quickly as possible, so she's breezing through the course because she's already pretty fluent. Everyone wants her help to study Spanish but instead she shows them the cool parts of town, which is how we found this bar that does awesome sangria and those toasty things again. I found out why we got a discount on the food: the Cambodian girl is dating the owner and she always brings him more customers. As we were walking back through the twisting roads I noticed a couple of menus. Apparently our discounted bill is the

normal price of the other restaurants. Apparently just saying, "The owner likes you so this is discounted," is enough to earn a bigger tip.

We saw the police in action again, this time actually chasing down some of the street vendors.

There are more prostitutes than I thought possible. There must have been a hundred of them on one of the main roads heading towards Sol. It was still early in the afternoon so I can't wait to see what it's like this evening. We're all going out to a club later on. Rachel warned me that we'll only just be arriving at 1am. If we arrive any later we'll have to pay to get in. Even so, the clubs won't start getting busy until 2am. I need a shirt so I can roll my sleeves up.

Michael, the German guy, said if I spend more than five minutes in the gay area I can get a free blow job, no questions asked (not by Michael, but from one of the locals). I got into trouble when I said, "He better be very charming and look ridiculously good in a dress." Michael said, "That shouldn't be a problem."

Last night was bitchingly hot. I know Madrid is surrounded by a desert and we're in the summer but last night was just fucking awful. I knew Rachel was awake from the heat, as were most of the housemates. It was four in the morning and everyone was dripping with sweat. Those with private rooms could sleep naked and with the window wide open. This morning Rachel came back from the shower and told me if it gets that hot again she's going to strip and not care about it. I don't think she will. I've known her for a long time and she doesn't seem like the type. But sleep deprivation can do the wacky on the unsuspecting mind.

Okay, some of the weirdness from today. And yesterday. The Internet is very slow. Cristina said the government had recently introduced a filter to monitor various websites, including email. Wonderful. No doubt it's to stop kiddie porn and those evil music downloaders. That explains why it has been slow, despite the government's assurances that the speed decrease would be unnoticeable. Yesterday ... there was very little Internet. Very little for today as well.

The news said the Internet company is working on the problem and the heat has affected something or other, and as such we can expect outages in various parts of the country. They explained in detail but I don't speak Spanish. The news channels aren't all that bothered that the entirety of our porn supply has suddenly dried up. No, they're just blaming the heat. Exhibit A points to the blindingly

obvious fact that Spain gets hot in the summer. Exhibit B points to every summer before this one when the heat did NOT melt some cable terminal thing.

If the Internet is back up to full speed by tomorrow then I can book the rest of my trip through Spain. None of the housemates here have been to the south so I can't really ask their opinions on where to go. Still not sure where to go after that. Maybe Portugal, maybe Ibiza. Cristina recommended Sardinia and Corsica. Not sure if I'll have the time or money. I figure I have about three more weeks in continental Europe before I hit up Ireland and Scotland, then train it back to London by the end of August. Depending on how broke I am I might have to skip Ireland altogether.

Do you know what isn't 'down'? The phone lines. Michael called home last night and said the Internet was acting a little weird there as well. Some sites were blocked. The ones in particular were Eastern European and Russian sites. So, the Internet has 'melted' here, is slow in Germany, and is 'down' in Russia and The Ukraine.

The Russian girl (I still can't remember her name, but man alive is she gorgeous. She's tall and slinky, speaks spectacular English, has a double degree, and is the kind of girl I would drop down on one knee for, she also seems to be stuck on super-dork mode and wears several of those coloured wristbands made from twine). Anyway, she said there was a problem in St. Petersburg and the airports were closed due to a 'credible' terrorist threat. She actually said 'credible'.

I keep seeing this fluff ball of a cat walking through the courtyard downstairs. I swear that thing must be melting in this heat. I gave him a little cuddle earlier. Made me think of Basil.

Oh, not surprisingly, Clint's being a dick. He keeps placing Basil in precarious situations around the flat, taking a picture and posting it online. He had a butcher's knife with ketchup along the blade, slid that under Basil while he was asleep, and captioned it with, "They'll never find Mark again. Not after his 'accident.'" Mum doesn't quite get Clint's sense of humour. She called me while I was in Paris asking if I was okay and if I had to go to hospital. I had no idea what she was talking about. You would think that a cat with a knife covered in ketchup in London was not going to cause an accident to someone who was backpacking in Paris. Maybe Mum is on full-blown panic mode now that I'm travelling through Europe alone like a social leper. When I first announced my trip she asked if it was because of Alana. I mean, Jesus, does everyone have to keep bringing her up?

Clint even made a little Mariachi sombrero for Basil. “Dos cervezas por favor.” The last time I went away he managed to set a new high score on *Need For Speed*, only it reads ‘MarksPenis.’ Had to reset the whole fucking game and start again.

Anyway, clubbing tonight! And hopefully not a lot of drinking. Rachel gave me a spare key and wished me luck in finding a guy to go home with, so har fucking har. If I come back any later than 4am I’m not to wake Rachel up under any circumstance.

I was talking to the Turkish guy a few minutes ago. I mentioned I was thinking of buying some weed off the Frenchies but he warned me against it. “They’re teenagers, they don’t know good shit from bad,” he said. He told me what they were smoking was definitely the bad shit. He said it was legal to own three marijuana plants in Spain so getting it isn’t all that difficult. That kinda takes the fun out of it. Unfortunately Rachel is against it. She’s doing me a favour by letting me crash here for a few days so I’ll behave unless a really good opportunity arises.

14 July

This morning the Spanish President addressed the nation and everyone in the apartment missed it. We were all hung over, stoned, asleep or just not watching the TV. It wasn’t until the evening news where we finally got the story. And ... I was right! The St. Petersburg airports and no-Internet is connected!

There’s another bird flu outbreak, like SARS or swine flu. Rachel called her folks and they told her the full story. It was hard to figure out because it was a Russian acronym for the virus that was translated into Spanish by the news, which Rachel then tried to translate into English. There have been six fatalities in St. Petersburg. They closed the airport to stop it from spreading. Unfortunately, a couple of ‘isolated’ cases in the rest of Europe have popped up and are ‘being contained’. Either the Spanish news people are lazy or run by the government because no one reported this over the last few days. The President said the Internet problem was not caused by Spain and he had no knowledge of it. I don’t believe him. Not that I speak the language or was even watching, no. I got the news second hand from other people who thought the limited news from Russia was to stop the spread of panic due of the new flu, because that’s what we

civilians like to do: panic.

But there you go: bird flu and no Internet. And you know what? The Spanish don't seem to give a fuck. Restaurants are still open, bars and clubs are still doing business, and the ladies on the street are still calling me 'Guapo'.

The club last night was pretty good. I got dancing with this girl from somewhere and she was shaking her ass into my crotch. I offered to buy her a drink and she said yes. I came back to the dance floor and couldn't find her. Rachel was there for a bit, left at 2, but she saw my epic fail with little Miss Booty. She took one of the drinks for herself, saying that it must be pretty easy to get a drink out of me if all she has to do is press her butt up against me. I decided not to say anything about her sizeable rear, but it's true, I'm a quick purchaser of drinks.

There was no class for Rachel today. She said she was going out for a bit, which was good because I was still trying to sleep through the heat. I couldn't, so Michael and I were watching some French comedy with subtitles about an assassin chasing another assassin. There were lots of boobs, which is always good for the French to do. Then, get this: the French girl who lives just next to Rachel's bedroom walked in through the front door wearing three things: sandals, a bikini g-string, and a towel around the back of her neck, hanging down over her chest. She went to her room for a moment and came out again with a book and some sunscreen lotion, then she headed back out the front door.

At this point Michael and I realised that none of the girls were home. There was only one place where they could have gone to: the roof. And holy shit balls did I feel like a tosser. All this time I was downstairs when I could have been up here. Let me just say, it wasn't just the girls up there, it was everyone from almost every building, all spread out on the rooftops under giant umbrellas, relaxing in the shade and wearing nothing. The French girl had managed to lose her bikini g-string and had found a deck chair. Rachel, too, was thoroughly European. Some were wearing board shorts. Some should've. I stood on the rooftop looking all along Gran Vía. I've never seen so much bush.

Needless to say I was overdressed. I hurried downstairs and picked up the bottle of white wine sitting in the fridge and went back more appropriately attired, wishing the whole time that I hadn't been drinking heavily the day before. Oh yeah, I also had my

sunglasses. Everyone had sunglasses, which helps to hide your gaze. One of the neighbours was cooking up a giant wok of paella and everyone was welcomed to try it, the only prerequisite was that you had to introduce yourself and say where you were from.

After that some of us from the apartment started playing cards. Rachel won the first game on a fluke and only then did we discover there was a penalty if you lost, so Michael, Derek, Cristina, Sofia (the Russian girl) and I had to introduce ourselves to everyone on the rooftop (there must have been forty people up there). This was all thanks to Rachel coming up with the rules to the game. She's a tricky one. I was expecting just to run a lap of the rooftop, only I soon discovered why that's a bad idea: racing around the rooftop on a hot day with sweaty feet is likely to end up with someone falling four storeys on top of a poor prostitute.

As soon as a camera came out all the clothes went back on. If I ever do a Ph.D. in behavioural science then I have my thesis worked out, thanks to today. The number of selfies required for a girl to be happy with the result is determined by how attractive they believe they are on a scale of 10. Let's say they are a 7. They are in a photo with three other 7s. It's going to require 28 photos before they have a picture they're happy with. Halve that number for the actual photos taken if the camera holder is a guy whose patience can be measured in minutes. Halve it again if his patience expires in seconds. I have about a hundred photos. I was looking as debonair as always.

Anyway. Rachel tells me it requires 2,000 hours of study and practice to reach a basic level of fluency in a language closely related to your own. 2,000 fucking hours?

"Yeah. Depressing as hell, isn't it?" she said.

That made me think. If I did forty minutes of language learning a day in school, five days a week, I would get to about 120 hours a year. Maybe 150 if I did all the homework as well. And here I am, surrounded by people who are fluent in English when it's their second or even third language. How?

## Part 2.

It's Thursday so that means it's a giant housemate cooking day where everyone eats together. I didn't know this but being the new guy I

had to cook something. Ediz, the skinny Turkish guy, and Katy, the Croatian, also helped. I cooked chilli because it's the one dish I never fuck up. Then again, having a dozen people in the apartment all eating food that will make you fart very quickly makes you learn that some foods are better not served in monstrous portions. Everyone left to go to their rooms for thirty seconds before coming back smelling of deodorant.

Ediz brought in the makings of kebabs which is actually kind of genius. All you need is flatbread and chopped up salad, as everyone else filled their kebabs with my chilli. I spent an hour making my feast and all he did was chop up some lettuce, cucumber, and tomatoes, then provide sauce and bread. Lazy arse.

Katy made some dumpling thing that was incredible when mixed with soy sauce.

Oh! The funniest thing today was Louise, the Sligo Irish girl. She missed out on the rooftop party and was out at her class today. She came back home as everyone was having dinner. Most of us still weren't fully dressed. It's weird how if everyone is naked or semi-naked a fully clothed person will feel out of place and rather stupid. So in walked Louise, right through the front door where eleven of us were sitting and standing around wearing as little as possible. Louise went bright red and ran off to her room with as much Catholic dignity as possible. Unfortunately Katy was there, scantily clad, and explained that being half naked was now customary. Louise said thanks but no thanks and spent the night studying.

Derek and a few others took me out to the gay quarter, called Chueca. I walked through the area the other night but that was the lite side. There were lots of people in drag, lots of big muscles and you know what? It was a lot of weird fun. I got a couple of offers but no thanks, I don't ever imagine being that drunk. There was one guy on the street showing off his wang. Let's just say there was a reason why he was showing it off and I might have high fived him if I hadn't suspect where his hand had been.

### Part 3.

We were all watching this thing on TV. It was a documentary in English with Spanish subtitles and it was actually quite interesting. It was about monkeys in captivity, in a large pen being studied by

scientists. It sounds boring, and I admit I walked off after Rachel told me about it, but then I came back and saw the weirdest of things.

There were a dozen monkeys living together, male and female. There was a rope which opened a food chute that allowed food to come out whenever a monkey pulled on the rope. After a while the scientists switched things around. They selected a weak male monkey, not the alpha, and they decided that only he could open the chute with the rope. All of the monkeys tried the rope and none were successful, only the young weak male. The scientists wanted to see if he became the alpha through their interference. It was bizarre and fascinating at the same time. This little monkey was all of a sudden given this great power over his ... people? Tribe? Pack? Who knows?

The others became jealous and started fighting him so he backed away and went hungry. The rest of the pack tried the rope and weren't able to get any food. When desperation kicked in they started attacking the weak one again. Eventually, when he was desperate for food, the weak one tried the chute and was given food for the whole group. This became a pattern. He would give them food, they would fight, he would back off, everyone went hungry, they fought him again, and it turned him into something of a nervous wreck.

And then ... then the females started to pay him some attention. Whenever the males fought him one on one the females came to his defence. They comforted him and the group turned against the aggressive alpha male. The weak one still couldn't beat him in a fight, but he did have a friend. The females allowed the friend to come in and he became something of a bodyguard. He was given a lot of affection by the lady monkeys. Slowly the whole group dynamic shifted and the weak monkey became the centre of attention. He still wouldn't have been the alpha male because he couldn't win a fight, but it was interesting to see what happened when the scientists interfered.

That was the angle I took away from it. Rachel thought the whole thing was cruel. The scientists were cold and manipulative dicks. They just messed around with another specie to see what would happen to satisfy their own curiosity. I'm not a tree hugger by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, I'm a fucking carnivore and I like to joke that my burger tastes better when you know the animal died screaming. I get a laugh. It's a revolted laugh, but it's a laugh nonetheless. But these scientists were actually risking this poor

monkey. If the alpha male got pissed off enough he was going to kill that little thing all because he was hungry.

At the end of the program they did say the chute went back to being opened by everyone and the balance was kinda restored. I bet that was a severe blow to the weak monkey's ego.

Back when I was twelve our school had a disco. The week before, two girls, Becky and Jamie, started to 'like me'. Long story short, my dickhead friend told Becky and Jamie to 'like me' so that I would choose between which one I liked (Becky), then she and Jamie could dump me at the dance.

Which they did.

In front of my friends.

They said it was all a joke. They laughed, they said my 'friend' had put them up to it, and he was there laughing like a jackass. Ten years later he eventually apologised. I had all of this attention. I thought I was doing something right by the ladies, then bam! It was gone, nothing more than a joke because I couldn't fight back.

The lady monkeys went back to mostly ignoring the weak monkey because they could feed themselves and were overpowered by the alpha male. I felt bad for that little monkey. He was dumped with responsibility and then the powers-that-be drop-kicked him back into the gutter when he finally had something going with the women.

Here is where Rachel and I disagree. I said it would have been better to keep the experiment going on forever, or slowly introduce the whole community feeding themselves again over time, not in one go. Rachel wanted it over immediately. She doesn't agree that it was fair, but she said the monkey will get over it.

Maybe.

My dad would say it was supposed to build character. I wonder if he ever did that to some weak kid at school, or if my mum ever pretended to like a guy just to mess with him.

I just asked Rachel that and she gave me one of those sympathetic looks as though I am so naïve. "Did your mum go to a co-ed school?" Rachel asked.

"Yep."

"Then yes, she did that to someone, even if she didn't mean to."

Great. My mum was an emotional whore. I should have known.

Rachel says she had a great time in school. She liked studying, she liked her friends, she was good at what she did. I think that's a

category one warning sign of having a disgruntled future; nothing will compare to her teenage years.

15 July

Sofia was awake early this morning, crying. There's a time difference between here and Russia (plenty of time differences even within Russia, I guess). Her folks called her. The government there is in serious trouble. Yesterday one of the ministers said they were containing the bird flu but everyone should be careful and remain indoors. He said there had been six fatalities. Not quite true. There are now eighty four fatalities and six thousand showing symptoms.

Ho. ly. fuck.

They've closed off the city. No one is working. Everyone is staying home. The army is moving in with masks and suits and handing out food but it won't be enough. All flights in and out of Russia have been cancelled and the borders are closing up as well. We're waiting by the TV for the news but nothing has been mentioned about it yet. I even called home to see what was happening and no one has heard any of this. Mum asked why I didn't tell her that I was in Ibiza. Maybe she should just stop looking at Clint's updates online.

Part 2.

The President just made the announcement, advising people not to travel. He offered his sympathy and support to the Russian people. The Spanish are also bracing themselves and their hospitals. Michael told me the news stations would play this safely. The news are responsible for not spreading any panic. That has got to conflict with a lot of their rating-grabbing sensibilities.

Part 3.

We went out. It's life as usual here and we were in Arguelles (which I've been saying wrong all day), when her Cambodian friend called to say that they've found a replacement teacher for the class. I

wandered around for a couple of hours, keeping close to the buildings and staying in lots of shaded areas.

I ended up chatting to this guy from Seattle when I stopped for a Coke. I heard his accent coming a mile away.

“Where are you from?” he asked.

“Glasgow,” I lied.

So I did the whole thing in Scottish. I even told him my name was Dave and that I was studying sociology in Berlin. I’m in Madrid with my girlfriend who’s catching up with her sister.

It was his first time in Madrid and he asked if I knew how to get to Sol. Why yes. Yes I do. I brought him to the bear eating the strawberry tree when he got a text from his boyfriend saying that he was held up next to a statue of a bull. I knew where that one was as well! They were both nice. Stuart’s boyfriend is from Puerto Rico and they’ve never been to Europe before. I showed them a couple of good spots to eat, like here does good wine in an intimate setting and if you happen to be up late at night then over there is a good spot for churros.

I may have said that my girlfriend was from Milan and that her name was Cristina. And that she’s studying chemistry and wants to do her Ph.D. in the States. I did my impersonation of her rattling her bracelets around as she spoke. They asked how we met, considering that I’m a Scottish guy in Berlin and she’s an Italian with a Spanish brother-in-law.

We had a mutual friend online. We both commented on a bunch of his posts about women’s rights, gun control, and finally authentic Italian cuisine as done by British chefs. That one kicked it off and we got into some heated discussions about what is proper bolognese and pizza, and what is not. She sent me a video of her making pasta the proper way. I liked her accent. So I sent her a video of me eating chips out of a newspaper. She thought it was repulsive but kinda funny. We became email buddies. One morning she wrote that she just had a shit day at uni and all of her friends were busy doing something else. So I bailed on class, flew to Italy, and four hours after getting her email I knocked on her door, saying that a real friend drops everything for someone in need. From then on we were inseparable.

The two guys started getting misty eyed. Unfortunately I was starting to like my fantasy world a little too much and knew it was time to bail. They wished me luck, I did the same, and I sauntered

back to Callao. Somehow I managed to perk myself up and break my own heart all at the same time.

Louise has been trying to book a flight back home, which isn't easy since the Internet is still sluggish. Her Spanish is reasonable but the travel agent didn't care if she couldn't keep up, so after forty minutes she swore like the Pope wasn't listening and came into the kitchen almost in tears. She's about to head out to the airport to try her luck there. Today was her final day of class. Monday is her graduation. She's trying to fly out either tonight (they will mail her certificate) or she will fly out tomorrow (and still they will mail it), but either way she wants to go home. She has assured us it isn't because the entire household was naked yesterday, she just never booked a return ticket from Madrid. She was hoping to travel to Valencia with a couple of friends but they bailed on her. She doesn't want to go alone so she would rather go home sooner than later. Either way she has to be gone by Monday because someone else is supposed to arrive and take her bed, so there will be a new housemate! Katy is hoping it's a girl.

I also have a problem with getting out of here and I may need to ask Rachel for some help. I want to go to the south of Spain and I've been getting some suggestions from Katy, Cristina, and the others. I've been told to go to Seville but only to an air conditioned hostel, because a cool day in the summer is like a sauna whereas a hot day is the equivalent of napalm. They also tell me the entire city really does close down during the siesta time and Sunday's will be 100% closed. There's also Granada and Gibraltar to see. Apparently Gibraltar is the only English colony where they drive on the right hand side of the road. I don't know if that's enough of a novelty to warrant going there, but who knows? The only problem will be finding a place to stay. Without the Internet cooperating that might be an issue. Seriously, how did people backpack before the Internet? Anyway, if I run into problems I wonder how much longer I can stay on Rachel's floor until it really pisses her off? She's warned me that if I snore at all I will spend the rest of my time on the sofa.

I am now the proud owner of a colourful Hawaiian shirt. Everyone is brimming with jealousy because they keep asking how I was even able to find this thing in Spain. The answer to that is fairly simple: walk round until you're lost, see a comic book store with *Witchblade* on the front and prostitutes lurking around nearby, go inside, buy the coolest shirt you can find.

I never thought I'd see the Spanish version of 'the end is nigh', but I did see some graffiti on the side of walls saying exactly that. It was fresh, too. There were a pair of gypsy women standing nearby selling trinkets for the superstitious. I'm pretty sure they were thieves as all the locals rolled their eyes whenever a tourist was lured in.

#### Part 4.

Hahahahahaha! Two of the French kids are totally sunburned! One of the guys and the girl went up to the roof for more 'sunbathing', probably while stoned to hell. They fell asleep under the umbrella. For two hours. By the time they woke up there was no shade covering them. The guy is walking around with his hands out in front and walking on tiptoes. I've never seen someone in so much agony. He has wrapped a towel around his waist but the fabric is so itchy that it's practically burning him. Cristina is helping him out with lotion on his shoulders and the hard to reach places. The French girl is just as bad. I would have volunteered my services, but no, that might land me in jail, so Katy is helping out and not having much fun there.

Brb.

Back. Cristina and I just went to the store to get some more lotion for the burn victims. Cristina was blasting them the whole time, wondering if all kids are really this stupid. She asked me about the dumbest thing I ever did and it's a tough decision. There was the time I was drunk and went to sleep in my parent's bed because mine was too far away, threw up and didn't clean up, but instead was able to get back to my bed and didn't realise that my parents were coming home early and I hadn't cleaned up. Then again, locking myself out of the house three times in a week could be considered pretty dumb. I asked Cristina what she did that was so stupid and she told me she smoked heroin once. Yeah.

The French kids are the colour of beetroot. Even the skin under their fingernails is burned. The girl is in the tub in the main bathroom crying with Katy doing her best to make sure the kid doesn't pass out and drown. The girl has soaked a towel and has draped it across herself for privacy, but she's lying in a tub of cold water while her skin is on fire. I don't know where the boy is but he's probably smoking up just to deal with the pain.

Louise is back from the airport. Lots of flights are cancelled and she wasn't able to get on one. She's booked a ticket and the earliest she can leave is Tuesday. Cristina says Louise can stay in her room for the extra night if necessary. She has a double bed in her room. Either that or Louise can sleep on the couch, unless I'm there snoring through the night.

16 July

It seems as though there is more to Rachel staying here than I first suspected. Two months ago she expressed no interest at all in learning Spanish. Last night we were up until 3am talking. It began in the kitchen at ten when Derek was there. Various people came and went. We heard some stories, told some ourselves, and at last everyone went to bed. Rachel and I just weren't all that tired. Long story short:

Rachel became a compulsive eater thanks to the stress at work. She couldn't find any other job and reached the point where no work was better than the misery of working for arseholes doing so much unpaid overtime that her life had become a blackhole the size of a Chelsea player's ego. One day she realised her third anniversary at the company came and went. Enough was enough, so she quit. She used to work as an assistant sales manager at an advertising company. She'll certainly have options when she goes back to England.

This then gets a little complicated.

To save money Rachel moved in with her mum.

Rachel's mum was living with a boyfriend. They had been together for six years.

A week after Rachel quit her job, her mum proposed to her boyfriend.

He said no.

Apparently she did actually drop down on one knee and asked her boyfriend to marry her.

He moved out, leaving an unemployed Rachel to try and pick up her mum's life. *Woe is me, I'm too old to ever date again, I'll die alone.* That kind of thing.

Living with her mum became unbearable. Rachel hit the doughnuts and chocolate again like nobody's business. She realised she was stuck in another blackhole situation and had to leave as

quickly as possible. It didn't matter where she went, it just had to be somewhere that wasn't in London. She started in Barcelona and found a Spanish school in Madrid that would accept her.

I felt quite bad about all that. Her mum is nice and so was the guy she was seeing. I felt guilty asking if I could stay any longer. She did say it was nice having a friend here and if I wanted I could stay a few more days.

I saw the French kids this morning. The guy and the girl spent the night in the same room in agony, lying as still as possible, because the other guy didn't want to listen to them complaining all night. One of them threw up last night and neither look particularly well. Cristina won't be here for most of the day so if they need to find a doctor they better ask someone else.

It's Saturday so there's no class at all. There's some kind of street party this evening, the kind where people wear those glo sticks and dance to music. I've seen street festivals before so I'm not expecting anything great, although Ediz was here last year and said it kicked ass. We'll see.

17 July

Something serious is going on in the world. Krakow, Helsinki and Budapest have been quarantined and all flights over the Atlantic have been cancelled. It was just like when the Icelandic volcano blew its top and nothing flew for a week. This flu thing has gone global. Even the governments around the world are advising people to stay indoors.

Sofia arrived into Madrid a few days before I did. She's here for a year, studying in the city-sized university just past Arguelles. She's on the phone twice a day with her parents trying to get updates. They're not saying much, only that certain areas of St. Petersburg can use the shops at certain times.

Despite that, we're going out today! There's more of that fiesta tonight (which is AWESOME - seriously, I can't believe how well the Spanish throw a party), plus I'm paranoid about Sundays now when everything closes. It's not supposed to affect central Madrid. Still, I have food and supplies to buy. Rachel has decided that she needs a new bikini (an odd topic of conversation between male and female friends, no?). Apparently the one she bought back in London

was sold to her by a flat-chested bimbo who had never rumbled in the waves. As such, Rachel's top kept falling off when she was in Barcelona (that happens a lot to her, does it? I must pay more attention to what she's wearing). So, Rachel bought a new top in Barcelona and now hates it. So off to shopping we go!

## Part 2.

Part 1 was written just half an hour ago. Apparently there won't be much exploring today. Rachel didn't get much sleep last night so she wants to take it easy today. That's fine. She asked me to go down to the shops and pick up a couple of bottles of wine and some water. She didn't eat much yesterday because of the heat, only fruit and liquid-based food. She feels the same today. There's this herbal tea thing called matay or something. It's from South America and has a weird metal straw. It's supposed to put Rachel to sleep. She's brewing some up now and offered me some. I'll try it when I come back from the shops, which won't take more than ten minutes.

## Part 3.

The heat is a killer. 35 degrees during the day and it hasn't dropped below 30 at night since I arrived. I tried the matay and felt drowsy, as did Rachel, but we didn't fall asleep. So we had some more. And more. We had four brews of it and became more and more drowsy, and still the heat kept us awake. Rachel is next to me right now, sitting on her bed writing in her diary. We swapped diaries and read what the other had been writing, just for the hell of it. At one point she mumbled, "Huh."

I looked up. She shot a quick look my way and went back to my diary without saying anything.

Naturally I read the things she was saying about me. The day before I arrived she wrote she trimmed herself, just in case. Yesterday she woke up early in the morning and had to use the bathroom. She grabbed the first thing she could reach which turned out to be my t-shirt on the back of the chair. She threw it on and has since apologised if she stretched it out at all. I really didn't notice, but she was laughing the whole day because I was wearing something that

had her boobs in it.

When she was done she put my diary down and said that I must have hit it off with Cristina. Well, yeah, she's cool.

And that was the last we spoke of it. I flipped back a few pages to see what I had written ... and I wrote about my Scottish accent while pretending that Cristina was my girlfriend.

#### Part 4.

We're lounging around with a little night time roof-top experience. There's a breeze coming over now that is bliss. We're sitting back in hammocks with a gentle sway talking about shitty ex-boyfriends and shitty ex-girlfriends.

Rachel sat up about half an hour ago and blurted out, "Hang on, you have *nothing* bad to say about Alana? Nothing at all?"

"I'm trying to be a gentleman, here."

"She has to have something about her that pissed you off while you were together."

"Of course."

"... Well?"

"I found it kinda troubling that she hadn't been single since she was thirteen."

"There you go. That's a warning sign," said Rachel. "And if you're still thinking about getting back together with her then that's one of yours."

Trust me, I don't want to get back together with her, but I have been daydreaming about seeing her again. We'll be at Kim's wedding, somewhere down the line. I'll be going stag and I'll bump into Alana. For the first time in her life she's single. We'll have that smile knowing that five or so years have gone by and there's no longer any resentment. We'll start chatting and, naturally, we're sitting at the same table during the dinner. We'll flirt, we'll dance, then I'll take her home, screw her brains out, and won't call her again.

The downside to that is if she doesn't try to contact me either.

Ediz's highly offensive joke of the day: "What's the difference between a terrorist training camp and a school? Who gets the credit for blowing it up."

18 July

No TV, no radio, no Internet. There has been a complete media blackout. The only thing convincing me that a coup hasn't taken place already is that life seems to still be pretty normal here. No tanks, no rebels, just a typical summer in Spain. There was a Spanish guy on the steps in front of the building saying "If I die, I die," then he went to watch a movie. The metro isn't working, the buses aren't working, the trains aren't working. People are still driving around but mostly everyone is holed up at home. Some are on the roof getting a tan, but the majority are keeping to themselves and drinking themselves stupid.

We've been playing cards all day. There's this game called Pato which is supposed to mean 'duck'. There's also one called Carioca. The phrase 'wiped the floor' isn't nearly enough to describe how I obliterated Rachel, Cristina, Ediz, Katy, and Derek. I've never played Pato or Carioca before in my life but by the third game I had to scale back my abilities just to give these people a chance, and even then I crushed their souls like a bug.

"Can anyone play poker?" asked Derek.

"A little," I said.

"Do *not* play poker with Mark," said Rachel, with a definite point of a finger in my direction.

"So, you're good?"

Well, no. On a purely amateur level, then yes, I am pretty fucking great. You can thank my grandparents for sneakily teaching me whenever they had to watch over me. I've played online a couple of times and have probably earned £500 over the last five years, but that's the height of it. That was actually one of the things that made Alana nervous. I'd be playing online while watching TV. I'm risking £5, honey, not my pension.

We ended up playing a couple of rounds with imaginary money (whee, what fun) as I tried to coach them into improving their skills. First rule: don't look at your cards until it's your turn. Second rule: remember what cards you have. There's only two of them, it's not that hard. Third rule: never look at how much money you have while you're trying to make a decision.

Sounds easy, right? Nope! After four rounds everyone was still checking their cards the moment they were dealt, they couldn't remember what they had, and they all checked the list of imaginary

money. I won £8 million.

The French kids are doing better, though their skin is peeling. Cristina is telling them to drink lots of water. Katy is meeting up with some classmates later on and they might swing on over here. One of them is from London. Holly Crombe. I went to school with a Holly Crombe. I wonder if it's the same girl. I asked if Katy's Holly is blonde, but people can dye their hair. I asked if she was thin or not, and then I remembered that people can gain or lose weight. I'll just have to wait and see.

One of the toilets started overflowing today. It was clogged with a grey tank top, of all things. Why? And how? No one knew who it belonged to. Derek said that toilet wasn't working properly when he got here so maybe it's been there for weeks. The landlady insists that we should be able to fix it but the plunger is in the locked room. Who the fuck locks a plunger away?

## Part 2.

Derek found me in the kitchen. "So, uh ... you kinda missed the cue back there when we were playing poker. There were three guys, three girls, a little bit of wine, and Texas Hold 'Em was not the type of poker we should have been playing. And with a little wine maybe we could have got something going, you know, help you out a little."

Really? Help me out? A little?

"With Rachel."

Oooooo, swing and a miss there, buddy. "Rachel's not the one I have my eye on."

"Then who?"

"Catherine."

That certainly confused him. "Who's Catherine?"

"A girl I met in Barcelona. I'm trying to see if we can hook up in Málaga. But, if Rachel's the one you're after then good luck, because you're not the first to mention it to me."

That certainly made him backpedal. After a bit of confusion he walked away, which is good because Catherine's backstory would've had something to do with her being Canadian and me looking into a working holiday visa to see her.

19 July

Dear all paranoid Internet conspiracy bullshit websites: explain to me what the fuck is going on in this world. Yesterday I went to bed and everything was fine. Sort of. This morning I woke up and the whole world has gone and clusterfucked itself. The conspiracy bullshit websites promised me this would NEVER happen: Zombies.

Fucking zombies. They said a zombie apocalypse won't ever be possible. Why?

1) Because zombies move slowly and are easy targets for people with guns.

2) Lots of people have lots of guns and generally have no problem killing anyone even when they're alive.

3) Everyone around the world has seen at least one zombie movie and they all know what to avoid and how to survive, i.e. shoot the fucking zombies before they become a problem.

The Internet is back, the phone lines are open, and the world has gone to shit. This better be an elaborate hoax because Sofia is as white as a ghost. "That's my city," she said, over and over, watching images of the downtown area that have been streamed from phones and street level security cameras.

We were all sitting in the lounge with the TV on and everyone had their laptops out checking the news from all over the world.

St. Petersburg: fucked.

Krakow: fucked.

Helsinki: fucked.

Vienna: fucked.

Budapest: fucked.

Istanbul: fucked.

Edinburgh: fucked.

Firstly, I have no idea how the hell anyone managed to fuck up Edinburgh. It's on an island in a no-fly zone and somehow there are dozens of zombies running rampant. At this point I'm thinking there are only a few safe places left in the world, Malta being one of them and Antarctica being the other.

Michael was telling me it won't really be that bad, there will always be pockets of survivors no matter how bad everything gets. He also reminded me that we are in a city surrounded by hundreds of kilometres of desert, so good luck to the zombies getting through. There's just one slight problem there: the Edinburgh conundrum.

First there were no zombies in St. Petersburg. Then there *were* zombies in St. Petersburg. Then the UK sealed itself off to stop the spread of clusterfuckedness. Then, days after St. Petersburg was flooded with zombies, zombies appeared in Scotland. How? If they can go from Russia to Scotland without conquering everything in between then they can go anywhere.

It also means the spread of infection takes a while, obviously long enough to become infected, board a flight, take off, land in another country, then fall victim to the lunacy of science fiction. I mean, what the shit is going on here?

There are hundreds of zombies causing havoc in each of those cities. There's only a few hundred of them and yet everyone around the world is crippled with fear. It's like if there was one fake sighting of a zombie in Mexico City then the entire population would cross the border into Texas just to get away from it. Why? Because we've all seen the movies, which, frankly, might soon be regarded as documentaries.

There was a video from Estonia of a zombie with a shotgun. That doesn't bode well. He looked like a regular guy stumbling down the street like he was blind drunk. He was able to keep a central line while walking, though. So the only difference between him and an actual drunk person? His coordination was much better. He was dressed in a cheap blue tracksuit that was covered in blood. Maybe he had been out hunting zombies when one of them got him. People were shooting at him with pistols. The zombie shot back, slowly and stupidly. Then he ran out of shells and kept trying to shoot. Maybe it thinks it's still human. I've never seen someone ... actually, no, I have seen someone being shot before, online. Some guy took a shotgun blast to the face. His body fell limp. Worst thing I've ever seen.

Wait, no. The worst thing I've ever seen was the Japanese girl going up in flames in a restaurant.

I have enough bread and pasta to last four days before my situation becomes desperate. Rachel is the same.

Katy just went upstairs to the roof. Please don't let her jump. Please. Even though she said she was just going to wait it out and let the authorities clean up the mess in cities that don't affect her, please don't let her jump.

Part 2.

I called the embassy. They have my address here, they have my address back home. They have my phone number, email, and the usual details. I've been set up with a text alert about what to do or where to go. I asked if there was any chance of flying back home. Nope. We're staying put.

Part 3.

There are zombie sales in the street. Anywhere that sells booze is open for business. There are trivia games going all around the city. It's all because the various presidents and prime ministers of the world have announced that the spread of the disease is 'contained'. My arse it's contained. They've really shot themselves in the foot with that statement. If the situation is contained then everyone else can go on with their lives normally. If they say it's contained when it isn't they're risking *every human alive*. If they say it isn't contained then there will be widespread panic.

I got the ball rolling with a couple of songs earlier, just to relieve some tension. It began with replacing words in typical songs with 'zombie' and seeing which ones are the funniest. 'I got 99 problems but a zombie ain't one' was my highest claim to fame. 'Hold me closer tiny zombie' was Rachel's best. 'Zombie in the deep' was Cristina's. It certainly brought new light to the lyrics and it bummed us out.

Then we were inventing all sorts of songs, love songs to zombies, anything from Elvis to Eminem where the focus is now on the undead. That branched off into general trivia and scenarios, like what would you do if a zombie lumbered down the street? I imagine I would casually out walk it.

One quirk of the Internet is that the zombie uprising has put a stop to a lot of pointless pictures showing off how incredibly mundane everyone's lives are. I just made dinner! Better take a picture and post it online. I'm reading a book with a glass of wine! Better take a picture and post it online. Look at my cat! Better take a picture and post it online.

St. Petersburg is evacuating the city. That doesn't sound like 'contained', does it? And get this: no one is looting. They're walking

around with backpacks and those are probably full of food and anything valuable. I wonder how long the no looting thing lasts for. Right now there are a dozen cities affected and there's bound to be some nutter taking shit that isn't his.

Not everything is running perfectly smooth over here. The lines for the ATM are huge. I had to wait twenty minutes in the sun just to withdraw a stack of cash. It's probably the most I've ever carried at one time.

I figured another couple of reasons this 'apocalypse' will never happen.

1) Dead flesh doesn't stay around for that long. Eventually the body will rot away to just bones.

2) Dead flesh in the winter or summer is going to freeze or cook quite easily.

3) There are millions of people in well contained pockets of mankind, not just Malta. There's everyone who can stay on a boat or submarine for a long time. Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Ireland, and lots of islands in the Caribbean are closed off to the world now. I imagine somewhere like Cuba would be easy to contain until there are boats loaded with zombies. And there are lots of people in middle America who are well armed and won't find much contact with zombies either. That said, what qualifies as an apocalypse? One million people dead? One hundred million people dead? Right now we have an outbreak, so at what point would it shift into an apocalypse? If 10% of the population fell dead? 20%?

The nauseating thing is knowing that one hundred million dead people is just a blip in our population. It's only 1.4% of us. How many dead people do you need to reach the tipping point where fear takes over? One hundred million people might die from a zombie infection, but how many more will die because someone shot them because they weren't going to take the chance of trusting them as a decent human being?

'Fuck everyone else because I will do whatever it takes so that I survive.'

So, what happens in Madrid when zombies are walking around a thousand miles away? Drinking. The fiestas around the country have been shut down as a mark of respect and caution. There are free check ups at the hospital for a quick zombie test but no one is really buying that. Hospitals are busy and packed even when there isn't a mass outbreak of the undead. A quick test should be quite simple:

“Hey! You! Are you alive?”

“Uhhhhhhh ...”

“Put your arms up in the air!”

“Uhhhhhhh ...”

“I’m warning you!”

“Uhhhhhhh ...”

(Warning shot)

(More shuffling)

(Kill shot)

“Either he/she/it was a zombie or he/she/it is so friggin’ stupid the world doesn’t need ‘em.”

Simple.

I’ve been drinking so I’m kinda drunk. Hang on, zombie drinking game, brb.

#### Part 4.

Back. Three hours later and the drinking game was pretty epic! It was engineered by Sofia, the Russian, in celebration of her family being safely evacuated and her loving the Russian military for saving them. She got a call and her folks are in a small town where Sofia’s grandmother lives, so they’re staying with her. Sofia is beyond relieved and spent the first hour laughing, kissing everyone in sight (no complaints here), and crying in joy while giving us a run down on the best vodka available. Her energy lifted the whole mood, so Derek got us all drinking. We were all partnered up, guys and girls. I was not missing any cues this time so I kept my mouth shut. It was surprising how quickly people gravitate towards each other because there were two options: find your own partner or everyone’s name would be drawn out of a mug. Yep, a mug. We’re classy. Everyone found a partner.

Sunburned French girl and sunburned French guy.

French guy and Nadia, the Indian girl.

Derek and Cristina.

Katy and Michael.

Sofia and Ediz.

Rachel and myself.

Louise sat out and went to her room to call her folks.

We each had turns in our teams to answer zombie trivia

questions, zombie movie questions, and so on. Whoever was correct got to nominate another team to take a drink. Then we watched the news (in English). If there was a sign (like a protest sign) saying the apocalypse is coming, the end is nigh, or that bible quote John 14 something ... essentially any sign that was written by a Debby-downer ... the guys had to take a shot (of beer or wine, since we would have died if it was spirits). Any time there was someone trying to call for calm and peace the girls had to take a shot.

It didn't take long before we were all sloshed enough for titty shots! The girls poured a shot glass and put it in their cleavage (poor French girl doesn't have much of a cleavage) and their partner had to pluck it out with their mouth and down it hands-free. Since it was largely one-sided we needed to change the rules. For every titty shot the guy had to wear something of their girl's (she got to choose what, and it wasn't anything she was wearing, rather something from her closet or suitcase), so Michael ended up wearing five girly tank tops. Guess how many g-strings came out? Zero. And bras? None. Spoil-sports.

Things went well until Nadia ran to the bathroom and threw up. That stopped most of the festivities for a while and everyone was wrecked. Seriously, only half an hour of 'Breaking News' was all it took for us to get clobbered on beer and wine. By the end we were just sipping instead of shooting.

Some bad news: Louise won't be flying out tomorrow. The airports will be closed for at least three more days and she's stressing out. It isn't just Barajas that has closed down, it's everything in Europe, so even if she could fly out of here she wouldn't be able to land anywhere. I think Shannon is the closest airport to Sligo but I don't know for sure.

You know what we need now? A robot army uprising. Robots versus zombies! They would have to be psychotic zombies and outnumber the robots to make it a fair fight. Make it a game show and everyone wins.

Clint removed his latest picture series of Basil In Peril. He had one of an urn with the caption, 'Poor Basil. RIP.' Yeah, that was pushing it, dick. The next was, 'Back from the pet store. Hope Mark doesn't notice that Basil is now a female.' I'm expecting a call from Mum any moment now.

Part 5.

The US now has drones flying over their major cities. Drones with guns. The bastards stole my idea! Robots versus zombies. I'm sure that's not doing much to quell the fears of the masses (I can't believe I could even use 'quell' while heavily intoxicated, hehe). Imagine if there are no walking undead in your area but there are flying death machines overhead ready to take on anyone who's walking too slow. The government is questioning everyone who has flown in from overseas. They're all calling for calm.

Cristina apparently hates zombie movies. They creep her out. A lot of that is because it forces the survivors to become murderers. Take vampires, for example. There's only ever a couple of them at most so only a handful of us will be required to kill them. If we're fighting zombies then everyone on the planet will be forced to pick up arms and kill their former family, friends, and neighbours. And while they look human they can no longer act like it. Vampires have all the memories. They can taunt, they can talk, they can seduce. Zombies have none of that, it's like the worse-case scenario of someone with dementia or Alzheimer's. Your mind is taken away from you.

We're also desensitised to shooting people. I wouldn't think twice about shooting a zombie but there's no way I could take a baseball bat to one of their heads. I'd have to get in close, put my life in danger, and then the only way to win is when I hear a crack along the top of their skull as I beat my former friends and family to death.

20 July

Some of the Russian soldiers are quarantined. A couple of them are dead because of injuries and counter attacks. There is an American CDC team flying in to come up with a vaccine or a cure but they're still preparing themselves in the States. Every infected city says they are making progress. The Germans are researching various animals to see if it can spread that way. Zombie dogs, zombie rats, zombie birds ... we'll see. I don't know how long it would take before the effects become noticeable. They're still trying to figure out how all of this started and are asking everyone around the world to help identify Patient Zero. So far they don't even know where he/she/it

would be. They might be dead in the middle of Siberia or floating down the Ganges by now.

I helped Cristina in the kitchen today and for the first time in my life I've made fresh pasta. 1 cup of fine semolina flour, 1 and a quarter cups of plain flour, 4 eggs. Mix everything together and wipe the goo off your fingers. Add a little more flour until the pasta ball no longer sticks to the bowl. She said it was easy, but good god it was time consuming. Leave the pasta ball for half an hour, then cut it up, roll it out, cut it into strips, hang it out to dry for another half an hour, then cook, but not for ten or twelve minutes like regular pasta, no. Two minutes, tops. And don't put oil in the boiling water, only salt. Just as well Cristina handled that part because I would've fucked it up.

## Part 2.

Rio de Janeiro has been hit. That's a little unnerving. I have no idea how it managed to cross the ocean but obviously someone flew across while sick. They weren't expecting it in Rio and it's actually worse there than in Russia. Russia has four cities that are affected and being dealt with.

One story from St. Petersburg chilled me. The police responded to suspicious noises and found a grandma in her apartment with her dead husband banging on the bedroom door. She had managed to barricade him inside but she didn't dare leave the apartment until he got better. She kept passing food to him under the door. When the police finally arrived they had to drag her away. All the food she had been giving to her husband was mouldy and rotten, stinking up the whole bedroom and turning into a sort of furry puss. He had been treading all over it for thirteen days, moving back and forth along the wall as he tried to find another way out. Thirteen fucking days of him banging on the bedroom door, trying to get out and kill his wife. And she stayed in the living room the whole time, passing food to him! She even barricaded the front door to stop the police from coming in!

As I was saying: Rio. Four thousand people were admitted to hospitals with symptoms and six hundred have been killed in the street already.

They are introducing three levels of symptoms: light, medium,

and heavy. Light symptoms are mostly psychosomatic, animal bites, rashes, etc, and are of no real concern. Medium means that you are definitely infected and need to be closely observed. Your eyes will be bloodshot, open wounds will have stopped bleeding but won't close, your bowels will loosen and your organs will be in pain. Heavy means that your body can no longer keep itself running without medical aid. Your organs are shutting down, you're pissing and shitting blood.

I'm assuming a zombie would be level four.

Wall Street is closed. They're predicting another financial collapse around the world as people fall into a panic. Travel is largely suspended, medical industries have had their stock soar, and oil is dropping.

The government is being paranoid now and recalling all meat products except for fish, so bye bye lamb, beef, and chicken. Everything meaty is being destroyed so the restaurants are closing down or serving vegetarian. That made Rachel somewhat happy but I wish I had some advanced warning on that so I could have stocked up.

There are now five Zombie Locator apps available to download. Didn't take long, did it? One of them is connected to your phone's GPS, so you type in how many zombies are in your area, click 'update', and presto! I guess some server filters out the hundreds of updates and tells you the exact location of all the zombies roaming around. There are ads on the app as well. So far it's kind of buggy.

There's also a Help Me app. There are two functions. You can log in as a helper or as a helpee. So, I'd be typing in that I'm male, where I'm from, where I'm trying to get to, how many people are in my group looking for refuge, etc. Then it tells me where the nearest helper is. I'm weary of this app, mostly because you have to specify if you're male or female. It sounds like a group of women would be easy prey for a helper who isn't as honest as he makes himself out to be.

### Part 3.

I just got a call from Dad. He and Mum are heading into the country. The motorways are jammed as everyone is leaving London. Dad said they haven't moved in two hours, they're just sitting in the

car with the engine off and the windows down. No one else is moving, probably because of a couple of accidents farther down the road. Everyone is being really nice but almost all of London had the same knee-jerk reaction at the same time. And who wouldn't, there are now zombies in the world! He saw a news helicopter hover over head so he considers that a good sign, especially since there aren't any screams and no one is running.

It did hit home just then. I was okay thinking it was happening all around the world, but with my folks freaking out about this it's time to shut up and do what the government wants.

In Edinburgh the police and military are going building to building to create a green zone. Snipers are keeping an eye out, helicopters are everywhere. They're asking for complete cooperation and telling everyone via the TV what needs to be done during the medical test, which is simple enough: they check your temperature, your pupils, prick your finger for blood and have a small paper test which is supposed to change colour. I don't know if any of that is going to help but maybe it's just to give everyone some peace of mind. Simply the act of doing something, even if it's useless, can do wonders for morale. It could also be a world wide attempt at DNA printing everyone so that they can identify a hundred million corpses later on.

If there's ever a time to fake your own deaths and start over, now's it. That might give me the chance to come back as someone a little more exotic. Even change my name. Andy, maybe. Perhaps I was a chef, travelling around Europe in preparation of creating a cookbook and a TV show. My co-host was Camille, my French girlfriend with an adorable accent, a biting wit, and an ex-boyfriend who had been blackmailing her. Thankfully he had something of an extensive gun collection. After Nice fell we broke into his garage, looted everything he had, she said a few words of compassion over his fallen corpse, then we torched the place and made a run for it. We bulldozed our way through a dozen zombies, picking up stranded victims while Camille blasted everything in sight with a 12-gauge shotgun. By the time we got to Calais we lost half our team. The hardest thing I ever had to do was bury Camille. I was going to spend the rest of my life with her as I had finally found my match. But now she's gone. The rest of us broke through the Chunnel and walked from France to England through the darkness, expecting zombies and barricades with every step. The darkness was a perpetual neighbour, the type

that never lets you get a peaceful night's rest. We blasted our way through the barricades until the lights from the guns blinded us.

"Halt!" they cried.

We threw our hands into the air. "I'm English!" I shouted.

"Stay right there!" they shouted. They weren't going to let us through. They were going to leave us to die in that tunnel, in the darkness, with nothing to eat.

Then a lone voice called out from beside me. "Dad?"

And at last the sergeant in charge faltered. "Mary?"

That's how we got out. Not through general human compassion but through a direct connection. Someone had to put their balls on the line because they knew someone.

#### Part 4.

Everyone around here is more or less miserable, except for Sofia, since her parents are 'safe'. Louise doesn't like being here any more. There isn't much to do. Everyone is worried about getting food. We're all concerned about parents, friends, and family who are either in trouble from zombies or in trouble from trigger happy nutjobs who have been waiting their whole lives for a moment to wreak havoc and get away with it. There's already been mass shootings in the States. Someone went through a mall and killed eighteen people. Someone else shot up their campus in Iowa. Maybe the shootings are unrelated to the zombie outbreak. Or, maybe that was the trigger – they have to kill everyone who was an asshole to them before they get turned into a zombie.

Everyone here is awake at all hours, watching the TV for updates, being online for emails and more updates, relaying all of this information to everyone else in various languages. On top of that, the heat is trying to kill us. There are thirteen people here in an apocalyptic situation (potentially apocalyptic, at the very least) and no one has resorted to the B-Grade schtick of 'We seem to be safe for a while, can you help me take my bra off?' So let Hollywood stand up and pay attention. Sex during a zombie outbreak? Doesn't happen.

This is day three of almost no sleep, working through hangovers, and over doing it with a lot of coffee. It's getting boring. Rachel snapped at me a little earlier and then apoloigised, saying it was a

mixture of the sleep, stress, and heat. I'm impressed she made it this far while still keeping her temper in check. God knows I've sworn my arse off since getting here.

I'm grateful to still be here. It's better having a friend to lean on than being holed up in an actual hostel with sweet fuck all to do and no one to talk to. Jesus, what would I be doing now if I had actually made it down to Seville or Granada?

I bought a solar charger today that might keep my tablet running for a while longer. If in doubt I still have my thick ol' notebook to write in. That's the one I've mostly been writing in because it's nice to sit on a train with a notebook instead of staring into a computer screen. It also means that I'm a lot more focussed and not playing games or surfing the Internet.

There's no printer here. There is at the local Internet café and at the university. My mission tomorrow is to print out a tonne of survival cheat sheets, maps, how to cook food, how to find food, how to learn Morse code, how to say basic phrases in other languages. I'm going to keep those on me in a plastic sleeve at all times. And I'll see if I can pick up an SAS Survival Handbook. We used to have one in the bathroom back home. It was great taking a dump while reading up on how to make a bow and arrow. Kinda wished I had paid more attention to that.

I've asked Rachel to torrent every zombie film known to man. What would normally have 20 seeds now has it in the thousands. It seems like I'm not the only one who's getting in on this. The problem is there are hundreds of zombie films listed. Fuck it, let's try and get them all. It'll be a lottery of what finishes first. I don't do many things well, but I can cram like no one else.

## Part 5.

Mum called. She and Dad are still fine but it's now dark. Everyone has moved forward a few hundred metres but they've stopped again. Mum was asleep in the car and Dad was dozing at the wheel with the engine was off. He kept waking up to see if the cars in front had moved forward. It's going to be a long and awful night for them. I wish they stayed home but Mum was afraid. She kept telling me she loved me as though she's never going to see me again. They had to turn off the radio because it became too depressing. Even the

announcers were aware of it so they decided to only do updates on the hour.

You would think that some of the American networks would ease back on the fear mongering, but no. Just about every video has a, *'Is This The Apocalypse?'* written in bold yellow. Apparently there are experts to weigh in. I wonder if their credentials are any better than mine.

It doesn't take long before the discussion turns to: 'How will this affect the election?' Well, Jim, if the military didn't have a blank cheque written for them every year then this will certainly guarantee it. It's good thing I'm twenty three and not sixty three because why would they pay my pension when the money could go to better things like a new anti-personnel vehicle?

I suppose this kind of crass news presentation does actually have a comforting appeal to it. If they're playing their usual brainless strategy of getting as many ratings as possible then everything is running as normal. It's when they start to go with *'Everything Is Okay'* ... that's when we need to worry.

I asked Ediz about the zombie situation. He patted his wallet and said, "Way ahead of you, buddy." I didn't quite follow. "I wrote a note in case I get bitten. It has the address of who to take me to."

"Your parents?"

"Nah, the guy who used to beat me up in high school."

I need to steal every joke he has.

21 July

I'm over staying my welcome. We're all crammed in this one apartment with no real privacy and no idea of when any of us can leave the city. I arrived nine days ago and hoped to stay for a week at most. Realistically I was going to stay for five days. Even though it's the start of a zombie outbreak and Rachel is being really cool about me staying here, everyone is in a mood with each other. We're boxed in here like it's a perpetual traffic jam, sitting around, waiting for the news that our homes have been overrun with the dead. No one in the apartment works. Most are students who study Spanish for a couple of hours a day then they come home, so usually there are nine people in the one apartment at any given time. There's always someone in the bathroom or kitchen. There's three people always

trying to use the stove so you have to become a master of a one-pot meal or you cook in bulk at weird hours of the day and store everything in a fridge that can't possibly hold any more food.

Speaking of which! Katy found a weird smell coming from the fridge so she roped Derek into clearing it out with her and ditching anything that had expired. They lined everything up on the small table as a showcase of their cleaning efforts. There were containers of mayonnaise and cheese that had expired two years ago. Food with names on it from people no one here have heard of. Some kind of pasta and pesto combination that made us gag. Raw chicken that had gone grey. And despite packing the table with crap that has to be thrown out, there's still no space in the fridge.

You can hear every conversation through the walls. Some nutjobs here are morning people, most are night owls, so there's only about a three hour gap in the day when everyone is asleep. The moment the first person is up they're banging something or running a shower and leaving doors open that slam shut in the breeze.

Right outside our window there's a big crane jackhammer thing that's knocking down a building across the road from us. That starts at seven in the morning with a *ka-kunk, ka-kunk, ka-buuuuuuuh, ku-ku-ku, ka-kunk*, and on it goes. It never fucking stops! If the window is open you get a dust storm slapping you in the face. If it's closed you start melting from the heat.

Rush hour traffic seems to last all day. They love honking here. It's like they beep their horns instead of using indicators. <Beep> "Everyone get out of my way, I'm about to change lanes!" <Beep> "I gave you plenty of warning, buddy!" <Beep> "Get off the road, I have places to be!"

Cristina finally snapped at the French kids. So far they've demonstrated zero life skills. They burn the most basic of foods, they don't clean up after themselves, they don't know how much they've drunk. I don't know if Cristina is bracing herself for what's about to come – that we're all going to have to run for it one day and survive on our own – but already we've had whispered conversations about what we would actually do. If Cristina has to mother three French kids who can't take care of themselves then there's a chance that she's mentally divorcing herself from them. How the hell those three are going to survive on their own is a mystery. I can barely remember what I was capable of when I was sixteen. I couldn't drive, I wouldn't ask for help if I was lost, and I was stuck pining over some girl who

knew I existed but didn't actually care if she ever saw me again.

Michael has twisted his ankle. He was out for a run (which is a terrible idea if people are all on edge about seeing sprinting zombies) and came back hobbling. Apparently he didn't see a step and took a tumble. He says he's been trying to get back into shape. I bet he's going to regret that run if the zombies come today.

There are only two topics of conversation here. The first is how fucking tired we all are, how little we slept, and that we're blaming it on the heat. The second topic is the obvious. Shops are closing early, the police are everywhere, the CDC have arrived in St. Petersburg, and the news for some reason hasn't been reporting on the infected and quarantined Russian soldiers which is suspicious.

There is petrol rationing now. Trucks need special permits to travel and need to be checked before entering the city.

We're all on a constant rotation of water bottles in the freezer. Finish one, fill it up, put it in the freezer. Take one from the freezer, put it against your neck, scull it, fill it up, put it in the freezer.

I finished *28 Days Later*. Lessons learned: avoid going through tunnels. Mountain bikes are a good mode of transport. Entire cities might burn out of control if no one is there to put out the fire.

Rachel just came in in tears. She's been trying to call her mum in London with no luck. She's refreshing the news page every thirty seconds waiting for an update. The last update was four hours ago. She's convinced that something has happened since then. She's packed her bag and has her shoelaces loosened and open by her door in case she has to leave in a hurry.

I've been sitting here with nothing to do. The only thing on a constant loop in my mind is: what happens, if by the end of the day, the entire city has turned into the undead and you're left here, locked behind a door, being as quiet as possible like in a submarine movie, hoping that none of them can hear or smell you? I'd have to creep to the bathroom and kitchen in my socks, but I wouldn't be able to use the bathroom because they might hear me, so I'd have to find some way of getting rid of urine and shit without drawing any attention to me. And then the day will come when I open the fridge and it is completely empty. I will have to make a break for it. I'll try busting into the other apartments, but how will I know if they're occupied by others like me? They'll be moving around as quietly as possible as well, maybe carrying a knife with them at all times in case someone like me comes along.

I won't ever know how many zombies are lining the streets. I won't know where they are if they're just slumping around. They might be one street over, wandering about with no purpose, just waiting for that one tell tale sound that screams: HUMAN! It might be something as simple as me crunching over broken glass, having to climb over two cars that have crashed into each other, or something out of my control like plastic cup rattling over the pavement as the wind sends it my way.

The military will have blockades on every road heading out of the city. They'll have snipers and machine guns ready to mow down the wandering undead. I'll have to put my faith in some sniper to not shoot me. *And* I'll have to put my faith in some colonel issuing orders based on info that are for his eyes only. From what I've heard, snipers aren't exactly the most compassionate of people, they're just in a competition with each other to see who can get the most kill shots. So, do I stay in the city and outwit a million zombies or do I take my chances with a high-school dropout that's picked me up in his scope from a mile away?

"Huh, the zombies are learning to walk around with their hands in the air."

BANG!

"Damn dude, nice shot!"

"Cheers."

I have a headache that won't seem to leave me alone.

## Part 2.

I tried calling my folks but there was no answer. I sent them a message and I won't call until they respond. The problem with thirteen people here is that everyone has their phone on loud and there are multiple calls every day so everyone jumps at their phone as soon as they hear the same annoying ringtone. I just wish they would change it to something different.

## Part 3.

I was sitting in the kitchen having a late night snack with Ediz when the French girl came in. She was wearing one of the guy's t-shirts and

it came down past her hips, but she wasn't wearing anything else. Literally, nothing else. She started rummaging through the fridge and the cupboards, looking for a snack. Ediz and I were gawking at her the whole time. We invited her down to join us at the table. Her t-shirt was loose enough for us to see down her top and after a while she forgot to keep her legs crossed. I know it's weird because we've seen her in all her glory up on the roof, but there seems to be something different about sneaking in a glance when a girl is dressed and seeing something awesome, compared to seeing a girl sunbathing while nude. Or maybe guys are just weird. Thankfully, none of the other people in the apartment came to interrupt us or else we would have looked like dirty old pervs.

22 July

It's the French girl's birthday today. She's seventeen. Yep, I feel dirty and old for having stared at her for so long. Her skin has improved and she's celebrating with a couple of drinks. She's weary about going up to the roof and I don't blame her.

None of us are getting much sleep still. There are twenty phone calls a day so at best we might get an hour of uninterrupted sleep. The coffee is on a constant rotation.

The heat, though. What the Jesus titty fucking Christ is up with the heat? How did anyone even think to settle in the middle of the desert? Was it to escape invaders? Perhaps the Moors conquered the south of Spain and decided that going farther into the desert was just too much hassle. So obviously the locals set up camp right here hundreds of years ago and stuck their tongues out at the aggressors and built a city here because no one in their right mind would come along and tell them to move! I'm English! I'm not built for this! My people have not left our fields and drizzle for thousands of years! It's where I belong, not sitting in ball soup every hour of the day. I should've come here in the spring before this misery kicked in.

The situation, shall we say, is reported to be getting better. They still don't have a cure (they're dead and they came back to life. They're not going to magically be cured of the deadness no matter how much money people throw at funding research) and there's no vaccine (though they are 'looking into it'), but they have isolated and quarantined certain areas around the world. So far everything is

working out. The confirmed death toll: 3,450 (world wide). The confirmed number of resurrected: 4,200.

There's a problem with getting accurate numbers. Firstly, there might not actually be any zombies in the rising-from-the-dead sense. Everyone on TV is still being far too cautious about labelling them as 'undead'. If we give them the benefit of the doubt then there are zombie-like people who might be suffering from a brain-eating virus while still retaining enough motor skills to roam around looking for a cuddle.

Secondly, the death is limited to people or former people who have died and aren't getting up again. That includes zombies who have been put down with a shotgun blast to the face. In that case they are definitely dead and go into the death toll category, but they're in there with people who were never resurrected and died in hospital.

3,450 confirmed dead in a week.

They have captured a lot of the zombies and have put them in prison (now there's a weird concept). They are keeping them alive to see if there is actually a cure. Also there were some outcries that these people aren't actually dead. And who's to say they're wrong? I'm in the middle of Madrid saying "That's a zombie and it's dead," while pointing at a grainy image of some guy in St. Petersburg. I don't have a medical license so my opinion isn't all that special. They're trying to reverse the condition. Besides, they've only been shooting and killing the aggressive attackers, anyone who poses a threat to anyone else. The docile ones were rounded up. They're treating it like small pox or TB and protective suits are a must.

I downloaded Wikipedia and have stored it on a flash drive. You never know when you might need to learn how to make a battery or find out who was the longest reigning monarch in the thirteen century. I wonder if I will actually ever open Wikipedia on that flash drive.

Just finished *Dawn of the Dead*. Lessons learned: if you're going to build an anti-zombie truck tricked out with anti-zombie weapons so that you can leave your fortress, start building it as soon as you can. Also, when one of the guys keeps his girlfriend locked away, saying that she isn't feeling well, that shit is suspicious! Go check it out.

23 July

Shops and restaurants are opening up again! Public transport will be up and running on the 27th. I've already forgotten what day of the week it is since I've been backpacking for two months now and it doesn't really matter what day it is. God that's awesome. I just need to get back to London by the 1st of September. I wonder if this whole outbreak has given anyone from work pause for thought. Maybe some have decided that they really aren't going to spend the last of their days working for some asswipe. I got a quick update from Steph about that. She said Gary is about to go on annual leave. There is talk of everyone quitting the day before he goes, just to fuck up his vacation time. I still can't believe he dangled the chance of a promotion in front of me two weeks before I was due to take time off. Then he had the gall to say that he was disappointed in me for not taking his offer. Well Gaz, that would have cancelled my trip around Europe which was already largely paid for.

"You should be working towards a down payment for a house," he said. Gaz, shut the fuck up.

Oh, they've found the culprit behind the disease: fleas. Yeah, just like the great plague that wiped out a quarter of Europe a few hundred years ago. Fleas are infecting people. Cats and dogs are now being disinfected and rats are being exterminated. There's rat poison on every corner in every city around the world. If it wasn't already our apocalypse, it's certainly now theirs.

On a side note, there is a virus that can only live in rats that only reproduce in the intestines of a cat, so first of all: what the shit? It means that a rat must run to a hungry cat and then be eaten so the virus can reproduce, and then the cat needs to die and be fed on by even more rats. That's like the weird reproduction cycle in *Aliens*.

Either way: stay clear of rats, cats, fleas, and people who want to bite you.

I'm still wondering how a bra breaks during dinner.

Part 2.

After restocking our overflowing kitchen and celebrating our survival, it seems as though our joyful moment was a little premature. Cases are being reported in China, Thailand, and India.

Rachel finally got through to her mum and everything is okay. Rachel just crashed on her bed and didn't even say a word, so I'm writing this on the staircase outside the apartment. It's the only spot in the building that's quiet. I've been trying to call Mum and Dad but I haven't got through.

I've spent the past couple of nights trying to get away from all this death and morbid conversation. Last night Derek, Michael, and I were in the kitchen chatting away for a couple of hours. Obviously one of the most important things in life is football and beating Germany, but the Germans have managed to take our superiority in beating them and done the unthinkable: they don't care. At all. How any German is supposed to hold their head high when they lose a game to England is madness. They don't even go crazy in celebrations when they beat us. For a while I was convinced it was because they've mastered some kind of German Zen. Maybe it's the thinking of "You get us wrong, Englishman. Vee build cars. Very good cars. Denn vee drink beer. There just isn't enough time left over to care about football." That's what I wondered, but noooo. Who do they go nuts over beating? The Dutch.

Seriously? The Dutch of all people? What has The Netherlands ever done to Germany to become arch rivals?

So it was me, a German guy, and a Dutch guy going over twenty year's worth of football. I can't say I really contributed much to the conversation but I'm really good at nodding my head. We were eventually interrupted by Cristina and Katy and there was ... another drinking game. We invited Sofia along and the only rule was: no French kids. Why? Because we started playing "I have never ever."

"I have never ever had sex on a roof." Because I had, I had to take a drink.

"I have never ever had sex in a swimming pool." Already I was at a disadvantage and I realised why this game gets more liver-killy when you hit 23: you've had more time to do crazy shit. So whenever we did something we had to take a drink and no matter how clean we started it shot straight to sex and stayed on sex for two hours. Rachel came in to join us. So did Ediz, who admitted that he was a bad Muslim for drinking but that he wasn't exactly orthodox to begin with.

We saw a little of Louise. She sat and listened but didn't participate. I guess not everyone is a bundle of joy around strangers. She said the apartment wasn't what she expected. She thought it

would be a four bedroom at most and finding a dozen people living here wasn't what she wanted. She also wanted a non-smoking apartment and feels ripped off. She's on edge because today's the last day she's supposed to stay here. Tomorrow someone else is due to come and take her place in the apartment and she might not have anywhere to sleep.

What I got from *World War Z*: Keep your phone on silent if you're about to sneak past zombies. Also avoid Brad Pitt. Bad luck seems to follow him wherever he goes.

### Part 3.

Uh, Nadia hasn't been home in a couple of days. Everyone was asking around and no one saw her last night or today. No one has her phone number. Her stuff is still in her bedroom and there's nothing obvious saying where she would have gone to. No laptop, though. If she went somewhere then she planned on staying the night. That's the thing that's kept us relatively calm. She probably spent a couple of nights with someone from her class. Cristina said she would call the school and find out who Nadia sat with and if there are any phone numbers available, but the school is still closed and no one was answering the phone.

We have her parents' phone number in India, but we're hesitant about calling. The last thing we need to do is stir up panic for someone else's parents, especially if they can't do anything from over there except call their daughter over and over again. No one picks up the phone these days anyway, you just send a text message and wait for an answer. We'll have to wait until she comes back.

24 July

We've tracked down Nadia. She met a couple of people from her home town and they've been huddled around the TV in some guy's apartment.

A dozen cities around the world are starting to look like Tiananmen Square with tanks rolling in and blocking off everything in sight. The infected are running around like crazy, violently attacking everything they can. Some are climbing up the side of

buildings, breaking through windows and crawling inside.

Now for the bad news: the Spanish army has rolled into Madrid as a pre-emptive measure against the disease. I suppose if you use enough bullets that will kill the disease. There is now a curfew in place from 10pm to 6am. No clubbing for anyone. Chuecca's economy will collapse because of that.

Loudspeakers are broadcasting the news in a dozen languages. Tonight they're bringing in special trucks to hose down the entire city and spray the area with a special sort of chemical, a mass disinfectant and pesticide. They're trying to kill all the fleas, stray cats, and rats. As a result of this spray, which will be kinda noxious, we have to close all of our windows and keep them closed throughout the day. Our apartment doesn't have air conditioning. The curfew extends to different suburbs during the day as well when they're spraying around the clock. At night they'll be dumping all of this crap over the entire city via airplanes and helicopters.

Now for the even more bad news: there isn't enough of this chemical for the whole city. There's definitely not enough to cleanse the whole country. There will be a lot of towns and villages without any of this miracle cure and they will be susceptible to the spread. For now, though, Spain is trying to get the trucks out to every port and every border crossing and disinfect it all at the point of entry.

I'm wondering what will happen to the homeless people, because there are quite a few of them. You can't dump noxious chemicals on them, nor can you risk having hundreds or even thousands of people sleeping in the streets when the first zombie strolls in. Where are they going to put them all?

The world economy has already hit the worst scare since The Great Depression. No one is travelling, no one is willing to take on a mortgage now that the dead are roaming the Earth. People are calling in sick and then realising what a bad idea that is. What happens when they turn up in a few days and their boss wonders if they've been bitten by a flea? If they're not crammed around a TV then they are lining up for miles at hospitals to get a jab of something or other.

America has led the way in damage control. Banks are forbidden from foreclosing on properties due to delays in pay or loss of income. They were all bailed out a couple of years ago and most of the banks still haven't repaid their ... what, gift? It's hardly a loan if they don't pay it back. Let's call it a gift. When the US President goes on TV,

asking for everyone to pull together in this time of crisis, you kind of tune out. I mean, that's what he's supposed to say. When the Prime Minister asks for industry leaders to pull together, you also kind of tune out. When the Queen says the same thing you end up taking home a different message; *'Dear CEOs who are thinking of hiding until this crisis is over. I have an air force. You don't.'*

One industry that's thriving is bullshit miracle cures for pets. No one wants Chance or Rusty to go on a murderous rampage after they're turned into a zombie, so a few people (those who are most deserving to rot in Hell) have stockpiled all the bottled multi-vitamins and herbal health pills they can find. They've changed the label and are now selling it as a cure for your pooch. You can buy it all for a low, low mark up of 1,000%.

Mum and Dad made it out of London and are staying with Bill and Grace in Eastbourne. It took them three days to clear the motorway. Three days to travel seventy five miles. It would have been quicker to walk.

Yesterday I learned that if petrol has been sitting in your car for more than a month then it will deteriorate to the point of being undriveable. If you've stored it in a jerrycan then it will last for a year. That's good to know in case I have to live in a post-apocalyptic world.

I say 'live'. What the fuck kind of survival skills do I have? I've shot a gun thanks to clay pigeon shooting. I can change a tire. I have no idea how to rebuild an engine. I can cook food but I have no idea how to hunt an animal. Even if I caught a rabbit I wouldn't know which parts of it were edible and which were not. I've been cramming like crazy through Youtube survival videos but it's not enough.

There was this woman on a desert island game show a few years ago. She was trying to micromanage her teammate who was starting a fire by hand. She kept hassling him for not using the right technique. She read how to do it in a book. Then: boom, the guy she was managing made fire! He dusted off his hands and said, "While you were reading, I was practicing. You can make the next fire."

I'm four floors up in the middle of a city in the middle of summer. I don't really have access to firewood. I don't know to clear a gun jam, which car is best for hotwiring, or even how to have a cool night's rest in the middle of summer!

The news is saying this thing got to Iran as well, only no one

reported it until now. It hit Iran in the south east of the country, which is supposed to be a problem area and as such no one really contacted the government asking for help. They have plenty of guns, though. The only thing is the zombies aren't staying down. As long as they still have some of their brains intact then they're up and about causing mayhem.

There are reporters all over the world broadcasting from their hotel rooms on their phones. There's a lot of bogus information going around on how to protect yourself from these fleas. Some are all right, like laying a towel under the bottom of the door and keeping your pets inside. But let's think about that for a minute. If you have a dog and it needs to relieve itself then it's going to be forced to do it in the house, so walking around with dog shit over the floor and disposing of it is going to be awful. Then there's the garbage that will pile up. Someone will eventually have to open a window and dump the trash outside and that's when the killer fleas will jump in and party like it was Ibiza. No one will bring their bins to the side of the road, they'll just hurl it towards the street.

The CDC has found out how long it takes to infect someone. Via a flea bite it takes 3 - 4 days before the signs become noticeable and then another 3 - 4 days before you start to feel really miserable. Death takes place 2 - 3 days later and the good news is that not everyone returns as a zombie. I say 'good news' there. The resurrection rate is 80%. They don't have firm data yet on how long it takes via a zombie bite but they're saying it's faster.

They've tried communicating with the zombies in the prisons. They are talking to them, playing music, getting them to interact with each other. No luck. Whatever semblance of personality they started with when they were fresh as a zombie deteriorated quickly. Some of the zombies in prison haven't had food or water in six days and are still alive, though they are shuffling around like the Romero zombies. The fresh ones are faster and more aggressive.

Ultimately, the virus is the only thing keeping the body 'alive'. It completely takes it over, spreading and mutating so that it controls basic motor skills. There are still enough neurons firing in the brain for the person to be basically aware of what's going on, that they're sick and they need help, but the virus isn't making the body weaker. It's designed to keep the body from dying. Of course, the heart has stopped beating, but by then the virus has spread so quickly and so effectively that it's able to keep the skin, veins, and organs working

to some degree. I guess everyone who has it will end up like the Karloff Frankenstein monster, instead of the intelligent and tuneful classic version from the book.

And ... it's getting closer to Spain. The strike in France has helped somewhat by shutting down most of the public transport, but the ports, trucks, and highways were still active. Nice has fallen prey. That's a sobering thought, really. I was there just last week and now they have one confirmed patient who hasn't travelled in months.

The latest tally is: 19 countries are reporting an outbreak. It's so wide spread that it's too difficult to get an accurate count of the infected or the number of fatalities. It's hit the Chinese countryside and from there things are only going to get worse. Food is going to be in short supply and if it's contaminated with fleas and blood then what the hell are we supposed to do?

I'm guessing that if these things do start to take over we'll only be able to determine what is a human and what is not through the use of dogs. If a dog trusts you enough to come near you, then you're human. If it tries to kill you, then you're not human. Thank God I'm good with animals.

I miss Basil. I miss rubbing his little belly while he sleeps.

Everyone here is sick of talking about just one thing. Most of us are hiding in our rooms, reading books that everyone has passed around. I'm reading a Nora Roberts book that Katy gave me. I can't believe I'm saying this since it's something that I would never read voluntarily, but it's actually quite good.

The Internet is slow and I imagine every government has put a filter in place to stop the spread of misinformation. Unfortunately, none of us trust the government and their version of the truth.

Huh. I hear some moaning coming from next door. The French girl is getting some. Rock on.

Everyone in the apartment is downloading movies and TV shows. We're all terrified of what happens when the Internet finally freezes. After all, if people aren't going to work to fix anything that breaks down then it's only a matter of time before the TV, radio, and Internet goes kaput.

I can smell the disinfectant through the city, even though we aren't in the suburb that's being cleaned up. Let's hope it works.

Louise's replacement hasn't turned up. Probably won't, either.

Part 2.

Rachel just came in with news. She's lost eight kilos since arriving in Spain. She's back to wearing some of her old clothes from this time last year.

I, too, have lost some weight, as a result of walking around Europe for two months.

I really hope the government doesn't consider me as a high risk traveller, given all the countries I've visited in the last two months. (Yes, dumbass, that's exactly what they think you are. Stop being an idiot.)

It's still sweltering here. I'm sticky from sweat all day and all night. I wake up at dawn and fall asleep several times during the day until the heat gets the better of me and I wake up again. God damn no air conditioning. The day time isn't too bad. It gets to a high of 35, but the night ... fucking hell. It doesn't go below 25. I can't sleep at anything above 22. 20 would be ideal. I've been stuffing t-shirts into the freezer for an hour before I try to go to bed, then I put that on and shiver for a few minutes. Just as I'm about to drift off I become too hot again and have to take off my t-shirt.

*Shaun of the Dead*. I've seen this one three times already. Don't intentionally crash a car so that you have to use someone else's Jaguar. You might need that car after all. Don't stand next to windows. Never give up.

Part 3.

Rachel's good mood didn't last long. She's asked me to keep this to myself: Katy found a lump in her breast. Rachel was asked to check it out. Rachel couldn't find it but Katy said she could feel it whenever Rachel pressed her fingers in. There are no marks or spots but Katy is freaking out. Rachel is torn between believing Katy or thinking that it might be psychosomatic. I wouldn't know which to believe either. Katy has been known to be a drama queen but even this seems cruel, so I'm going to believe her until something is confirmed. It's just safer that way.

We're running out of booze and food again. Someone is watching old episodes of South Park on the computer in the lounge.

I don't know how many more zombie films I can watch. I guess

the overall lesson is: be overly prepared, overly cautious, find somewhere inaccessible by walkers.

I also don't know how many more of Ediz's jokes I can write down before I really have to start apologising to everyone I've ever met. "My brother was in a bad accident when he was a kid. To cheer him up we got him a dog. The pet shelter warned us that the one we picked out was particularly retarded, so my brother called him Names."

25 July

Oh, for fuck's sake! Eastbourne has been quarantined. Mum called and now wishes that she and Dad had stayed in London. It wasn't worth the three day drive just to be quarantined. There are reported cases in Eastbourne and there have been shots fired, presumably by the police or the army, but who knows?

This thing is certainly helping my geography. The Brazilian infection has spread to Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, and Suriname. Andorra, on the border of Spain and France, has reported twelve fatalities. This thing is right on our doorstep. The east side of India has close to a thousand resurrected. Greece and Turkey have more than a hundred fatalities each. Egypt has reported an infection as well.

So, 23 countries are in trouble. We're going to have a 24th if this thing travels a few kilometres south from Andorra and reaches Barcelona.

The last estimate (and still wildly inaccurate) is 20,000 fatalities. It seems as though the news are just guessing these numbers right now.

The pesticide thing they're spraying throughout the city is awful. None of the windows are open and still we can smell and taste it. It reaks of bile. I caught a whiff and it actually sealed up my throat so that I couldn't breathe any more of it in. Worse still, they haven't got to our area yet. They're focussing on the more likely areas first and slowly making their way down.

There's no real conversation here. I asked Rachel what she really would do if Madrid was hit. She said she would stuff her face with food and not care about her looks any more. I was hoping for more of an actual strategy, since I'm her guest and I might need her help

to get me out of the country. Derek said he would try to sleep with every girl in the apartment. Cristina was open to that only if Madrid was closed off, but she told Derek that he better promise to be spectacular before she even considered it.

So far they're saying that animals aren't infected (not even the rats), but they can carry it. So a dog bite can pass on the virus even if the dog isn't a zombie.

The National Guard in the States have lined up along the border of Mexico. There are helicopters, gun ships, and drones flying around shooting anyone who crosses the border illegally. Note how I said 'shooting anyone' and not 'ready to shoot anyone'.

Rachel, Louise, and I have to go to the British embassy today (Louise, despite being Irish, is here on a British passport). We've all called them and they have our details already, but they need to see our passports and find out how we're doing. They'll probably also make us do a health check. I wish we could just stay indoors and not leave the apartment. If there is someone infected then making everyone go together in a giant mob isn't going to be real helpful. We have to be there at 12:45.

No one has slept properly in a week.

## Part 2.

We're back from the embassy. It was two hours of waiting and three hours of being questioned. They made us do a health check and they wanted to verify all of our details. Sure enough, they weren't remotely happy when I told them that I've been backpacking through Europe for two months. They brought me into a special room where they checked my shoes and the dirt on them (these were my spare shoes, my travelling shoes were still at Rachel's). They asked for dates and specific locations for where I was, what hostel I stayed at, who my roommates were, what time did I arrive and all that. I couldn't remember most of it. The longest I stayed in a single hostel was four nights. I suspect that if I brought my diary along (as it actually has the dates and locations within) then it would have been taken and read by someone who doesn't need to read it. I should have also brought my old sudoku book. I was writing notes to myself just after finishing each puzzle, like: 'On the train to Amsterdam now, there's a girl here who looks like Donna Noble, only she's 20.'

Stupid stuff like that. I finished that book in Nice and wouldn't have brought it to the embassy either. So I was bored. Rachel and Louise were done first and went back home. For a while I wondered what would happen if they detained me until after the curfew kicked in. Would they give me a comfy bed in an air conditioned room? Or would I be in a hospital bed being jabbed and prodded?

The landlady came while we were gone. Apparently she is not happy at all. She expects everyone to pay extra because some of us have overstayed our visit. She wanted the money upfront, right then, in cash. It's a good thing I wasn't there because I'm staying there ... illegally? There's hardly anything legal about this place. It's an apartment with twelve people (supposedly) crammed inside.

Cristina wasn't having any of it. She and the landlady were battling it out for an hour. Everyone has already paid (except for myself and Louise). Cristina said that price gouging was illegal and we have all paid at least until the end of the month. She also demanded to see a return of the deposit that the newbie had paid for Louise's bed. That stumped the landlady for a while and she didn't understand why Cristina wanted to see it. It turns out that the landlady stumbled a bit and asked why she would have to pay it back. It looks like the landlady wanted to charge double use of Louise's bed at an increased price. Cristina jumped on the phone to register her complaint against the landlady, who is also in violation of numerous laws and terms of service, things like ensuring the maintenance of the apartment (hey, remember the clogged toilet that the landlady said was not her problem and that we had to fix it? Cristina asked how expensive it would be for the landlady to fix overflowing sewage once everyone left). She also demanded to know where the air conditioners are as it is specified in the rental agreement that there are three in the apartment. Turns out there are zero. Cristina kept saying, "Shut the fuck up and show me where the air conditioners are." Only she did it in Spanish. The landlady feigned a language barrier so Cristina grabbed her contract and highlighted the section in question.

"You understood me perfectly well the other day over the phone when you told me to contact a plumber. You didn't even ask me to repeat myself. How about you write down exactly what your demands are, date it, sign it, and we'll make a few copies so that everyone here can compare their rental agreement to your new one."

I need to marry an Italian, plain and simple.

The landlady left, presumably to get her husband. Cristina instigated a new policy with the door. She left her key in the lock, thereby preventing anyone from unlocking the door from the outside. People had to knock to be let in and only housemates (and me) are allowed inside. After hearing that, I offered the last of my wine and vodka to the household as a thank you for not kicking me out. Cristina said I was like family so of course she wouldn't kick me out.

Nadia came back to start packing her things. She's going to stay here tonight and then head back to her friends tomorrow.

The French girl is having sex again next door. No one else is really in the mood. I have a headache from the pesticide, plus over drinking and under sleeping has put a strain on my libido. I mumbled something to Rachel. She said, "Well I just got my period today, so no." I swear I wasn't even talking about sex. I can't remember what I was talking about but I know she misheard me. Either way, Rachel and I will not be getting it on any time soon. I'm okay with that. As much as I would like to sleep with every girl in here (except for Louise, she seems like a bad lay), I don't expect any of them to start putting out. Plus, I have to live in such close proximity to Rachel that I don't want to risk getting in her bad books. I'm also hiding my diary in my bag in case someone starts reading it.

Oh, I did walk in on the French girl and her guy in the bathroom today. It wasn't anything terrific. She had a towel around her waist and he was hugging her from behind. I saw them for all of one second and jumped back while apologising.

Which reminds me, I was sitting on the toilet yesterday and Ediz walked in on me. I've adopted the attitude of not caring.

We have problems here with laundry. There are no clothes racks to dry our clothes indoors and there's no way we can leave them out all day with the pesticide in the air. It's awkward and everything is drying on what few hangers we have. Michael put up a length of cord between some of the rooms so now everyone's underwear and t-shirts are on display for the world to see. I mean, we've all walked in on each other in the bathroom, we've all seen pretty much everything up on the rooftop, so what's the big deal with a little underwear action?

I've been downloading a lot of Youtube videos covering basic survival skills. How to light a fire, how to perform CPR, how to treat burns, bites, cuts.

*Undead:* watch your naughty language, don't be pregnant. Half-headless zombies can still be a threat so if you're going to blow someone's head off you have to blow it all off. Don't leave the brain stem in tact.

26 July

It's barely 1am and I can't imagine anyone in the city is asleep. There's gunfire in the street and lots of it. A constant *pop pop pop* and the sound of trucks and cars driving through. We don't have a great view of Gran Via from our apartment but we can hear it loud and clear. Every building we can see has a light on and people are staring out the window. It's not coming from one direction either. The gunfire has covered the city and there's nothing on the TV or Internet about it. We were all standing in Katy and Louise's bedroom trying to get the best view.

*Pop pop pop.* Ten minutes go by, then another quick burst. We have no idea what's going on. Everyone in the house is dressed with shoes on, ready to run. It's the middle of the night and we wouldn't stand a chance at surviving until dawn if the zombies pounced now.

We're surrounded by the desert and still we're not safe here. It doesn't take a single zombie to crawl through the desert to mess us up, it takes a single flea that travelled here two weeks ago to do that job. I have no idea what the police are shooting at but hopefully it's just looters.

Let's also hope that the shops will be open in the morning so that we don't become looters ourselves.

Part 2.

It's 3am. The gun battle is over but now there is a more pressing issue: the Internet is down. None of us can get online. The phone lines are down as well. The TV is playing static as if Spain has flipped the switch to 'off'. What the hell are they trying to do, stop us from panicking? I thought the Internet was designed to be non-offable during a time of crisis. That's what it was built for!

Part 3.

I managed to sleep from about 4:30 until 8. Now I'm wrecked. Rachel is still asleep so I'm out in the lounge. No one else is here. I guess they're all asleep, although I do hear someone in the shower. No idea who. Still no TV. Still no Internet.

Part 4.

Holy crap, did I pass out or what? With no open windows, no fans, no AC, a Spanish summer ... we're all dying in here.

It's almost 10pm now and I must have slept for twelve hours straight. I didn't even realise it. Rachel said she got up at twelve, had something to eat, a cold shower, even got changed in here, and I never even stirred. She said I was either a gentleman or completely zonked out. At 3 o'clock Rachel went back to bed. It seems to be the same with everyone else. Now we can't leave the house again and we have no idea what was happening with the gun battle. Cristina was trying to find out from the neighbours across the stairs but they don't know either. Still no threatening landlady, so that's good.

I've been here now for two weeks and was only expecting to stay for five days or so. I really owe Rachel a big favour for putting up with me. She's dying for some chocolate but there's nothing in the house. She wants an emergency care package flown in.

I've done a quick stocktake of my supplies. 7 boxers, 7 pairs of socks, 7 t-shirts, 1 good shirt, 2 hoodies, 4 pairs of shorts, 2 pairs of jeans, 1 pair of black cargo pants, 1 bum bag, 1 belt wallet, 2 pairs of shoes, shaving kit, after-sun skin-care kit, moisturiser, basic walking around first-aid kit (mostly band-aids, vaseline, blister needle, aspirin), 1 bottle of water, toilet paper, 3 packs of tissues, 5 plastic bags, 1 hat, wallet, watch, sunglasses, phone, phone charger, tablet, mp3 player, a deck of cards, 3 pens, sudoku book, diary.

Things I need to get: a can opener, matches and fire lighters, a proper first-aid kit.

There's a quiet game of cards going on in the lounge. People are smoking pot. Rachel is watching and getting passively stoned. She's a giggler, it seems.

Sofia was a little glass-half-full a while ago. She wrote up thirteen sheets of paper with her contact details and emergency numbers.

We've all filled them out, which took forever, so now we each have everyone's name and a couple of phone numbers and addresses. We've all accepted friend requests but this gives us another way to stay in contact with no Internet.

Finally, after two weeks, I have the names of the three French kids: Camille, Luke, and Robert. I can figure out who Camille is but I have no idea which of the guys is which.

Tomorrow it's vital we get to the shops.

28 July

Well shit. This is extremely very not good. Yesterday I didn't write anything for one simple reason: I was too depressed. We went to the shops and they were closed. So we went to the other shops and they were closed. We walked around for three hours trying to find somewhere that was open and we managed to find a small fruit and vegetable place that was selling the last of their food. The guy assured us it would all be gone by the evening. Rachel and I were able to get two single kilo packs of pasta shells and a five kilo pack of rice (plus fruit and vegetables). The rice was a bitch to carry.

On our way back to the apartment we saw something disconcerting: a mob of people, all walking down the street with suitcases, all directed by the military. People are being evacuated. I couldn't see the front of the crowd nor the rear, but I did see a lot of wheeled tanks. Rachel and I kept out of sight and remained quiet but the feeling was loud and clear: don't let the guys with guns take us away. We didn't have our backpacks so we'd be fucked if we had to survive without them. Of course, at that point all of our shopping became incredibly heavy and the bags were cutting into our fingers. It took an hour of detours just to get back home.

We saw a couple of dead rats on the street. That didn't fill us with much joy either. We've each checked ourselves over for any red spots. We're covered in them. I'm hoping it's just a heat rash and not actual flea bites.

Everyone in the apartment sat around and got stoned. There wasn't much else to do with no TV or Internet. It's the end of the world and we're getting stoned. Wheee. I soon fell asleep.

There were more gun battles in the evening, starting at 9pm. There was a helicopter flying nearby with a loud speaker and a

spotlight repeatedly telling the person to stop moving and lie on the ground. After five minutes there were a number of gun shots.

So: zombies appear to have arrived in Madrid. I can't confirm anything with my own two eyes but that seems to be what's happened.

What good are these stupid apps if there is no Internet?

Last night we came up with a list of rules and good ideas for surviving a zombie apocalypse. It's a shame we were still stoned because a lot of them were quite funny.

1) Always travel with someone else, even to the bathroom. (We haven't started doing that one yet.)

2) If you're forced to travel on foot (we're assuming that cars and motorbikes can't be used during the apocalypse), use a mountain bike as you can probably out-pedal something that's on foot.

3) If someone gives you a machete to use on a zombie, give the machete back and tell them you're not getting anywhere near that thing.

We ended up with a list of twenty things, but the other seventeen were misspelled ramblings in different languages.

Today we saw more herds of people being evacuated.

Rachel and I have enough rice and pasta to last us for about a month. It'll be boring as all hell but hopefully it will be enough to keep us alive.

I can't stop thinking about Alana. God knows I've tried but for the last two months she's largely been the only thing on my mind. Europe has been a nice distraction but whenever I see a couple walking hand in hand I think of her. When I see a waif with long brown hair, a heart-melting smile and clumsy glasses, I think of her. I'm been flipping between a giant FUCK YOU to feeling directionless since we had the talk. I thought I knew what I was in for. The conversation went well, I felt good afterwards, I was back on the market. Clint offered me a beer and Basil fell asleep on my lap, though I'm sure he would have done that anyway. Then the next day there was an absence of text messages and it started to sink in. Then the next day, still no messages, like she had pushed me off into the discard pile. Then came a hell of a lot of second guessing, looking back over our time together, and wondering what everyone picked up on about us that I was oblivious to. I hate her for having me wrapped around her little finger like that and yet I love that someone was able to get that close to me and make me feel so alive.

I still never want to see her again. I just can't help but think that it took me a year and a half to get over Vicky and then another year and a half before anyone showed me even the slightest bit of interest. I don't think I can spend another three years going through that again.

29 July

It's not everyday I get to use the word 'plume', but there's a plume of smoke rising in the next suburb. There are two police helicopters hovering over the area, keeping a safe distance from whatever is happening down below. The police lights are bouncing off all of the buildings. We went to the roof to see what was happening. We couldn't see much, but there was a lot of shouting, breaking glass and scraping metal, like a car was rolled onto its side and then pushed around. It's coming from the area where people were being evacuated, so I'm guessing there's a riot going on just one or two hundred metres away from us. Even the prostitutes on our doorstep are in hiding. We may have to barricade ourselves inside the apartment in case the riot spreads.

Part 2.

Yep, there's a riot going on. It's utter chaos in the suburb north of us. There's a lot of cars and buses on fire. People are looting and grabbing what they can. How the fuck are we supposed to buy food if people are looting the shops we're going to? Shop owners will be too afraid to open their stores if the people next to them were robbed. It's just not worth it for them to take the risk. So those asshole thieves are going to turn the rest of us into thieves because no one is going to open their shop and risk being killed as no one has the money to buy anything. Just a handful of assholes are going to force a lot of misery and suffering onto hundreds, maybe even thousands, of people. But of course they would because they can only think of themselves and are incapable of expressing their anger in anything that isn't a violent outburst.

30 July

We've been evacuated. I didn't think our situation was all that serious until now, but ... fuck, we're in trouble. I'm at the Atocha train station with all of the housemates. There are soldiers everywhere, all wearing gas masks like they're expecting to blast us with an anti-zombie chemical attack. I've been through Heathrow and wandered past Downing Street enough times to feel comfortable enough seeing a dozen steely eyed officers sporting assault rifles, but this blows everything out of the water. I would see four policemen at any one time in Heathrow. Here there are forty soldiers in sight and many more on the platforms. There's a row of small white tents just behind the ticket turnstiles. You walk through and get sprayed with disinfectant. Then you're given a tissue to wipe your face clean. Then you can move to one of the platforms.

I've packed my sixteen kilos. Add to that my five kilos of rice (and a few liberated items from the apartment) and my backpack feels like it's trying to murder me. Everyone from the apartment is here, sitting together. There are people crying nearby. No one is telling us what's happening except that we're getting out of Madrid. But where to? No idea. Nor do they care. Us non-Spanish-citizens are obvious threats to the Spanish way of life so all that matters is that we are kicked out of their capital city as quickly as possible. There are four million people in Madrid, there's no way everyone can be evacuated all at once. Where are we supposed to go? At least if they quarantined us in the apartment we could at least feed ourselves and live in something similar to comfort. But nooooo. We had to leave a relatively relaxed environment and be forced into a human pressure cooker.

There aren't even any newspapers. I guess when the TV, phones, and Internet go down the reporters really have no way to find out what's happening in the world.

I was here two weeks ago when I met Rachel. She took me to see the turtles in the station. The turtles have now been relocated, as the whole area has been sprayed with disinfectant and everything smells like vomit.

I guess the fight Cristina had with the landlady was for nothing. I also guess that infected people managed to cross the border before everything was sealed up. It might've taken them a week of being sick before they all died. We still don't know who was being shot at

the other night. They're not telling us anything.

Rachel is bored stupid and is reading some weird sci-fi book. Louise is on the other side of me. I gave her my sudoku book to help her pass the time but she's done six of the puzzles now and I want it back. Michael is listening to a few mp3s and Derek is hoping his phone doesn't run out of battery.

It was weird how we were evacuated this morning. We heard a couple of authoritative bangs on the doors at ten. There was a soldier at ours and he realised that most of us didn't speak fluent Spanish. He said: "You all must go. One hour. Downstairs. Everyone must leave."

Cristina went out to the neighbours and got a lengthier answer. Yep, we're all leaving, the whole building is leaving, the whole street is leaving, we're all going to Atocha. Pack what you can carry and let's go. I grabbed a small pot with a lid from the kitchen. It belonged to the landlady. I consulted with Rachel first. She said to take whatever I wanted. I also took a wooden spoon, some steak knives, and plastic tubs.

So we walked. Everyone trundled along with 15+ kilos on their backs or carrying 20+ in wheelie suitcases. It took an hour under the blistering sun but here we are. Michael was hobbling the whole way. My thighs are killing me. I've been lethargic for two weeks. Hell, for the last week I've barely left the apartment. I can feel the burn around my neck from the sun. Louise is already in trouble from the sun. Rachel had the sense to walk with a big hat but her arms having taken damage already.

They guided us in wheeled tanks and trucks. Perhaps the soldiers were concerned that several thousand angry evictees could easily overpower a few guys on foot with rifles. We saw plenty of soldiers on rooftops. What we didn't see were the snipers. I've been assured that they were there.

It was a pain in the ass of a walk. The crowd felt like Times Square at New Year's. Now that we're in Atocha, everyone is sitting around, waiting to get doused by the chemicals. Some have been leaving by bus, some by train. I hope we get to go by train. The buses suck. There's nowhere to rest your elbow if you have a window seat and your knees bang into the seat in front. There's more room on a train.

Someone needs to tell us what the fuck is going on.

One of the soldiers just walked by as his radio went off. There was a gun shot in the distance. High calibre with some punch to it.

Cristina heard the message but didn't quite catch what was said. Judging by the change in attitude in the soldiers, who now look like they're on high alert, it doesn't take much to figure out what's happening outside.

How the hell did a zombie get this close?

Rachel just leaned over. She's done with the book. She's about two thirds into it and is giving up. She did say something interesting, though. So far we don't know why we're leaving Madrid. We all think it's zombies or a great undead uprising but none of us know for sure. This could be just a mass deportation of unfavourables. Maybe there's been a coup. It's certainly not out of the realm of possibility. The lack of Internet and phones would also say that a coup is likely - it stops any kind of resistance from mounting.

After that bout of thinking, Rachel's now listening to some music with her headphones in.

I don't even dare use my tablet in case they confiscate it. There's a camera built in. Much safer to write long hand in a notebook.

People in uniforms are moving past us with these large scanners, checking our body temperature. No one's resisting. Nor would you want to, not when someone (dead or alive) was just shot nearby with what must have been a sniper rifle.

## Part 2.

We've been sitting around for six hours now with nothing to do and no where to go. We're just here, on the tiled floor, huddled in the middle of the Atocha walkway, protecting our bags. The station is packed to the point where we're overflowing. There's a gentle din of news going around. The soldiers have moved away. They were getting asked all sorts of questions and they were either saying, "I don't know," or, "I'm not allowed to say anything."

One thing that did catch their attention was finding a zombie walking along the train tracks. It's amazing how one little dead guy has now immobilised not just an entire station, but hundreds of soldiers and thousands of travellers. And there he was, one zombie wandering along the train tracks. Now the trains aren't going anywhere. They shot him four hours ago and still there are no trains moving. So they're either keeping us here overnight (please no) or no one is willing to get close enough to the zombie to move him out

of the way. Why can't they just drive over him?

It took Rachel two hours to get to the bathroom and back again. The line is huge and people are in there crying and keeping to themselves, instead of doing their business and leaving so that others can relieve themselves. Rachel just muscled into the men's bathroom and went in there. It was either that or she would have pissed herself.

We're all hungry. No one has eaten in twelve hours. I have a small pack of rice and pasta but I'm not going to eat it raw.

A number of soldiers are going around asking people for their passports. They seem to be targeting anyone that doesn't look Spanish. The passport people have passed our group a few times and Ediz has been asked twice. I haven't been asked at all, nor Rachel or Louise.

I can smell the disinfectant everywhere. Everyone has their hand over their nose and mouth trying not to breathe it in. Of course, the station is open to the elements down one section so of course we're going to smell the entire city. It's already made a few people sick, so we have to smell that as well. Every couple of minutes something pulls their nose and tries to find whoever just farted. Clearly someone's been living off a diet of raw eggs and cabbage. And then there's BO. My gym bag smells better than this place.

One of the people nearby just asked the soldier if we're leaving to another city or if we're going back to our homes. The soldier said he didn't know.

Cristina was talking to another group earlier who had some information. They haven't been running the trains because people on the platform jumped onto the tracks and ran off, presumably back home or to a friend. They think a hundred people have escaped. All were processed by the authorities in the tents and now they're missing. They've been trying to find them all afternoon and until they do they can't release the trains.

There's shouting down one end now. I imagine a lot of people are sick of no one telling us what's going on. It's not just one person shouting, it seems to be everyone.

Cristina just leaned over and is translating. It's a lot of, "You will have to shoot me because I'm going home."

Some people are being carried away and screaming in protest. We're looking at the faces surrounding us, trying to gauge their reactions. People are starting to stand up and watch. Some are voicing their support and shouting from across the station. Others

are standing up just in case they get trampled

The soldiers are shouting, “Everyone sit down.” Everyone else is saying, “I’ve been sitting down for twelve hours, I’m going to stand up when I feel like it.”

More shouting. More screaming. More people being dragged away. Rachel has zipped up her bag and has her hand around the handle. We’re in the middle of the concourse so we’re in prime trampling territory.

About a quarter of the station are on their feet now. Where’s the nearest soldier? No idea. He’s probably carrying someone away. In fact, the more people they carry the away, the fewer soldiers remain in the station.

We outnumber them a hundred to one.

“Everyone sit down!” they’re shouting, now over the station’s loudspeaker. God knows how many tanks there are outside. If anyone runs they might as well be racing into a barrage of tear gas and bullets.

Ediz just stood up.

### Part 3.

I was in a car crash when I was seventeen. Heard the tyres squeal and the felt the crunch of metal as we slammed into the car in front of us. The sound was the worst part. I’d seen the aftermath of car crashes before so I became inured to them. But hearing it ... it’s like having your teeth removed. When I had my molars yanked out I could hear the pliers squeezing around my tooth as it dragged the decayed tooth out of my jaw. It’s been two years and I can still hear it. The sound stays with you, and that was just for a tooth.

I saw people die today. I heard them die as well. When you remember seeing something you can alter it, put some kind of spin into your memory and keep yourself from going insane, but there’s no altering the sound.

There was a panic and people were trampled. There were screams and cries for help. There were hands going up in the air and people falling over each other. There were shots fired from several directions. The soldiers were over-run as soon as one of them opened fire. There may have been thirty bullets in that guy’s rifle but at least a hundred people ran at him, all trying to get out.

Immediately afterwards there were riots, screaming, and looting. I guess the survivors of Atocha were in such a scared frenzy that they broke into shops to grab what they've always wanted as a giant 'fuck you' to the soldiers who kept them captive. We all ran as quickly as we could, hearing the riots around us. The helicopters came in closer and followed us with their spotlights running along the ground.

Madrid has just lost control. I've never been in a riot before. It's something new to tell people, I guess. We escaped one zombie and a couple of thousand people in a panic. I'm not sure which of the two is worse.

It's midnight. We're hiding in a tunnel. Rachel, Cristina, and Ediz are here. I don't know where the others are. There are some other people with us, I don't know them but one was staying with people in south Madrid. I thought about heading back into the middle of the city, to the embassy or to our old apartment. Ediz told me that would be stupid.

From Atocha everyone just scattered in every direction. They all knew where to go except for me. Ediz grabbed onto my arm and pulled me after Cristina and Rachel. We stopped at the bus station next door. We called out to one of the French guys but he kept running. We heard frantic calls on the radio. The soldiers were calling for back up so we started following people who knew their way around. One of the guys in the tunnel said he used to live down this area and would walk along here drunk to get back home. The only problem is we're heading south, near the train tracks where one of those things was seen walking around. If there's one then there has to be more, right?

The adrenaline is not doing us any favours right now. Every time we hear something nearby we freeze and get ready to run. We don't know if it's the army, the police, more civilians (foreign or Spanish), the homeless or the undead.

I have no idea where we are or what we're going to do. We're just resting to catch our breath. We're not talking to each other. No one is arguing. We're just waiting.

I lost Rachel in Atocha for a few seconds and neither of us could see each other. What the hell would I do if I couldn't understand what the soldiers were shouting? If I lose Ediz, Cristina, and Rachel I am royally fucked. I don't have a hope in hell unless someone is willing to help me.

Hang on.

A helicopter with a search light just flew over head. I don't think they saw us. If they had they would've kept us in sight until the military came to round us up.

Yeah, Rachel is starting to freak out. She's asking Cristina how to say, "Please don't shoot us," and, "I can't find my friend." Great. What the hell does Rachel mean by, "I can't find my friend"? She better not mean me. I don't want to be lost out here in the middle of Spain with no idea where I'm going. I don't even know if the rivers are safe to drink from. I should have stayed in Amsterdam. I may be a liability there as well but at least in The Netherlands everyone speaks English. I'd also be able to grab a boat or even swim home if I was desperate enough.

Okay, maybe I couldn't swim home, not unless my life depended on it and the option was to drown at sea or be eaten by a marauding cannibal.

Rachel just slapped her book down, frustrated and needing to vent. "I can't get those screams out of my head." Neither can I. The sound of people screaming as they're being crushed, not even just crushed on the ground while trampled, but people crushed against walls and seeing their eyes almost pop out ... that look of sheer terror that they can't breathe and that they are actually about to die while watching a stampede and no one is there to help them ...

One of the guys just went off to find water. He said he'll come back. They always say they'll come back. What he really means is that he will come back if it suits him and if he can, because we all know these are unusual circumstances. Maybe he can break open a vending machine, if he finds one.

I packed way too much crap to travel around Europe. Now I'm stuck with all of this. I should have just picked either a jeans and t-shirt climate only, or a wear-as-little-as-possible climate. I should have gone to Mallorca or Ibiza, nice islands in the Mediterranean with lots of girls and less chance of an undead invasion. Then again, if there was an invasion it would probably be difficult getting off a tiny island when everyone's resources would be focussed on the mainland. Yeah, next time I'll choose somewhere based on its survivability when facing an apocalypse. Kenya, for example. Zombies can be eaten by lions, assuming that the lions don't become zombies, otherwise we would all be -

31 July

We're next to a motorway now. We had to move in a hurry. The guy who went for the water was attacked. I didn't see it, but we all heard it. I don't know how a slow moving creature could even ambush a full grown man, but it was dark so who the hell knows. It's about 4am now and I got to hear a guy scream for his life as he was attacked and eaten alive.

I thought the screams from Atocha were bad. They at least were blurred by the screams of people running and calling out to each other.

I don't know if I will ever sleep again.

Something ripped into him. He called for help and we didn't go to him. We just grabbed our things and ran.

Rachel is crying. An emotional outburst, probably. Honestly, I feel like crying as well, but it's too hot.

Why the fuck did he just walk off like that? Why would anyone venture out on their own? Fuck him, he deserves it if he's going to be that stupid!

We're just lumbering around and everyone is covered in sweat. It's all waiting, sitting, walking, waiting ... We go from being wired and unable to sleep to being so exhausted we can't move and then back to being wired. Either way, it's too hot to sleep.

He didn't deserve it. People being mugged don't deserve it, people being raped don't deserve it, so people going out to check their bearings and see what's around don't deserve to be attacked either. He was just trying to get help. Maybe it was just for himself, maybe it was for the rest of us. I've heard too many people scream tonight and I've done nothing to help any of them. I should have at least gone to see what was attacking him, but no. Ediz simply started running. Cristina grabbed Rachel and pulled her along. I followed.

There's no traffic on the motorway. I'm sure there are road blocks keeping this thing contained, but a zombie is not going to walk along a motorway. It's going to walk where it can find people to bite.

I thought the only way to ensure a zombie stays where it is would be thanks to a sniper. So, that led me to imagining a Spanish sniper staring at the lot of us as we're walking along the underside of a motorway. There are nine of us, giving me reasonable odds that I wouldn't be the first shot. The idea of being followed by a sniper does not ease my paranoia at all.

Zombies and snipers. What a great combination. Me in the middle. Bad combination.

One of the guys here seems to know where to go. I think he's Moroccan. He's with a group of friends like me. There's myself, Rachel, Cristina, Ediz, the Moroccan, his two friends and two more tag-alongs.

You know what? I'm really done with this shit. Tomorrow I'm going to find the police or the army and just surrender. I don't want to be hiding next to a motorway at 4am, hiding from people with guns and the legal authority to kill me. I don't want to be here in the middle of summer without a drink in fourteen hours. I'll just surrender and they can take me to some camp or to the British embassy and I'll be treated correctly.

Part 2.

Rachel didn't appreciate my surrendering idea. She said, "You can do what you like but I'm not going to fucking surrender."

Rachel, it's not surrendering. If we stay out here any longer we'll die from heat exhaustion and dehydration.

Cristina and Ediz were at least giving me the benefit of the doubt.

Something's coming.

Part 3.

Fuck this! Seriously, fuck this! Fuck running around, fuck these Spanish motorways, fuck the lack of water, fuck these undead assholes! I'm tired of all of this. The sky is getting brighter, I haven't slept, I haven't had a drink, I need to take a dump and I'm backed up worse than a heroin whore in a tag-team gangbang. Fuck all this running!

Part 4.

The sun is halfway up the horizon now and my temper-tantrum is over, I guess. Walking off like that was the dumbest thing I could

have done. I left a group of people just moments after seeing a zombie attack.

I wasn't thinking. The heat and lack of sleep got to me and I cracked. I could have been killed. Something could have grabbed my wrist and yanked me into the dark and no one would have come to help me, because no one can help during a zombie crisis. One bite and you're gone. I almost died and it was entirely my fault. You know those morons in horror movies who decide to split up and check the haunted house alone? It turns out that I'm one of those morons and, this time, I got lucky.

The Moroccan had seen something in the darkness. The rest of us got up as well. After a few minutes someone pointed. There was a pair of eyes in the distance looking our way. They were spaced-out, dead eyes, and they were watching us.

It was the Moroccan's friend, the one who went to find a vending machine. He was covered in blood while staggering forward. He had followed us all this way.

We ran. We ran until we collapsed. That's when I had my tantrum. It was so bad that I actually left the group. I somehow decided that I was going to walk along the highway and flag down the first car I saw so that I could surrender. I didn't care. I was beyond exhausted and in a rage. But because I had been running for an hour with this backpack I barely got fifty metres before collapsing. My legs shook uncontrollably and my heart thumped so violently that I nearly passed out. After cooling off for a few minutes I realised what a colossal idiot I was and I had to jog back to the group and apologise.

No one's talking to me. At least they didn't kick me out of the group. I introduced myself to the others.

I broke down before everyone else did. They've all gone through exactly the same shit as me and I was the first to crack. I thought I was better than this. I thought I would have to go chasing after someone to convince them to stay, reminding them that wandering off is an epically bad idea.

And you know what? No one came after me. That was one hell of a sobering reality.

I have now seen my first zombie. Dead-eyed and covered in blood. How the hell did he even rise that quickly? It took days for the previous lot to stagger around. This guy was down for a few minutes before getting up again.

Maybe he was able to get away with some open wounds and a

concussion. He could have just followed us looking for help. If that's true then we just ran away from a guy who was dying. I hope I never learn his name. I won't be able to get it out of my mind.

Things got worse when we saw him. We heard a helicopter approaching. The spotlight stayed on the injured/dead guy while the rest of us got the hell out of there. For a while I thought I was following Ediz and it turned out that I was following someone else. Ediz, Rachel, and Cristina had run off the other way. Azeem, the Moroccan, was able to pull us all back together. The helicopter found us. We couldn't just hide, we had to keep moving. After a few seconds the pilot changed his mind from following the injured/dead guy and started following us. We kept running and the spotlight kept following. We ran for what felt like an hour until we were in this remote area near a train line heading into a tunnel. We hurried over the hill, bypassing the fence for the train, and ran into the tunnel to stop the helicopter from following us.

You know what I remember from *28 Days Later*? Don't ever go into a tunnel. What did we do? Hide in a tunnel.

We waited to see what the helicopter would do. The tunnel was only a hundred metres long but there was no light on either end to show us what lay beyond. When we got out Azeem had to take us in a different direction. He wanted us to keep going south. He kept saying the name of some place, 'tah-fay', or something like that.

We had to duck, keep our heads down and follow a different train line as far south as we could. Soon after I had my tantrum and left the group.

Azeem now says that we are only an hour away from getting to his friends. None of us know where we're going or if these friends will even be there. If they are there, will they be happy to see eight complete strangers and Azeem arrive on their doorstep, all looking for food and a place to sleep?

I figured out another reason why I have a splitting headache. Caffeine. I'm used to tea, coffee, coke, chocolate. Anything with a caffeine fix and I'm all over it. That might explain why I sleep erratic hours and never get enough shut-eye. I've been without it for at least a day now. The withdrawal symptoms are killing me. I can now add a headache to my list of grievances. Sleep deprivation, dehydration, starvation, and now running-for-your-life-ation.

Cristina says we're heading to Getafe. It's just a suburb, nothing special. There's a university nearby but that's all she knows about it.

Azeem says his friends live ten or fifteen minutes from the train line. With any luck they're used to having lots of people crash at their place, but it's a stretch to imagine that they will welcome us with open arms.

Let's hope we get there before whatever is following us catches up.

## Part 5.

We made it. I don't want to get these people into trouble so I will be as vague as possible. I mean, they are housing potential fugitives, refugees, or whatever the hell we are. They asked us to keep quiet and not to tell anyone that they helped us. I will agree to that. I won't even be fully honest here because I'm sure if I'm caught someone will go through my diary and if they are so inclined they may want to crack down on the Spanish citizens who helped the foreigners. I've been told that old memories run deep, beyond the generations, and that Franco seriously fucked up the psyche of his country when it was a fascist dictatorship not too long ago.

I will say this, though; these three students are welcome at my place in London any time, for any reason. They saved my life today.

There is M, not from the south.

There is J, not from the north east.

There is A, not from the south either.

They're all Spanish guys from different cities speaking with the Spanish lisp. They know Azeem from a few parties that happened to be packed with Italians. Cristina perked up when she heard this and, small world, Cristina knows some of those Italians. They come from Milan and went to the same university as Cristina. She is now desperate to know if they are lost in Madrid, hunted by zombies and soldiers.

M, J, and A offered us water and sandwiches. They don't have a lot of food available. There are some small shops nearby that have been ignoring the bans and curfews and have been selling their perishables. M, J, and A stocked up as much as they could, but we run the risk of eating all their food. One thing they have is a tonne of oranges, and I really do mean ... well, not a metric tonne, but they have four crates of oranges. They grow them on the roof. At least we

won't die of vitamin-C deficiency.

There are five bedrooms here. The house is weirdly designed. It's three storeys. On the ground floor is nothing but the staircase and the garage, which is supposed to be very large and is only accessed by the landlords, not by these guys. On the next floor is the lounge with large windows, a bedroom for a fourth student, a girl, M, not from above Portugal (she's gone back home). There's also the main bathroom and the kitchen which is four times bigger than the one in Rachel's place which was used to feed twelve people. This place is supposed to feed four or five. Upstairs again are four bedrooms and a small bathroom.

I am currently upstairs in bedroom two. It's only as big as a double bed. Literally. Not a double bed with space to walk around the edges, but a double bed pressed up against three of the walls. God knows how you would change the linen, your knuckles would scrape against three of the walls.

Rachel is in here with me. We pulled the single mattress off the bed and she's sleeping on that, on the floor, while I'm sitting here on the hard surface of the bed base wishing I could fall asleep.

Cristina and another girl who came with us are in Girl M's bedroom downstairs. Ediz, Azeem, and the others are asleep in the lounge.

Holy shit was it a long walk. Azeem assured us he wasn't lost, but when you're stumbling through a heavy industrial area for two hours with nothing but aircraft-hanger warehouses in every direction you kinda wonder if your guide actually knows where he's going. Ediz said we reached the end of one train line and were about to start another that had no connecting track to Madrid at all.

Then we hit upon the outskirts of Getafe. At that point Azeem really was lost and admitted as much. With all of the twisting streets and not a single straight road it took him ten minutes for him to confess and us another hour to stumble upon a metro station. The train wasn't running but at least from there we had a point of reference. Before that we had nothing, we were just aimlessly walking around looking for one unremarkable house in front of a tiny park in a town devoid of all street signs and maps.

I wonder if that's how the zombies' vision would be like. Clouded over, dulled, where it could be the brightest of days and yet everything looks dark and overcast through your zombie eyes. You can't recognise any of the street signs anymore like they're writing

might as well be in some hieroglyphic that your brain can't process. You can't hear anyone until they scream when they see you. All you have keeping you company is the tiniest of voices urging you forward, to find food, to find someone who can keep you alive for just a little longer.

The last half hour of walking was murder. We had to follow the main road from one metro stop to another until we reached the Alonso-something station. At that point Azeem assured us we were ten minutes away. You can tell from the look on everyone's faces that 'just ten more minutes' better be exactly ten minutes and no more, because if it ends up being an hour and you don't actually know where you're going then we'll ... glare at you until you apologise. But he was right. Ten minutes.

It was strange meeting the housemates. Azeem did all of the talking and asked if we could come in for a minute. We all put on our best presentation faces for a good first impression. All of the students here are very nice, very warm and friendly, and understand that we are in a shitty situation. However bad they had it, we've had it worse. It's good to see that kind of perspective. It's good for me as well to know that not everyone is as miserable as I've been.

We came in, told them our situation and asked if we could spend a few hours here to sleep, then we'll go. I think it was Guy M who spoke to Azeem. He initially said yes, but he had to check with J and A. A was indifferent. He is clearly the sort of guy who isn't surprised to find nine people crashing at his place because of a zombie uprising. J didn't care either. He was supposed to head back home the other day but of course the transport has shut down and he's stuck here. It's his last semester so he won't be coming back to the house. He just hopes the landlady won't come along to collect an extra month's rent. He says he'll tell her to piss off if she tries it. He was very eager to talk to myself and Rachel. He was an exchange student and had spent some time in London. He wanted to practice his English (which is pretty good) and wanted to know if we were from the same area that he lived in. Not quite. He lived in the centre of the city and took advantage of the night life. He's probably seen more of Downing Street and Big Ben than I have. Isn't it weird how that works? The tourists often know more about your home town than you do. At least, they know the tour book version of your town better than you. I, on the other hand, know the best chicken and chips place is within walking distance of my flat.

We asked if there was any news. There's some on the local radio but it isn't good. No flights, no boats, no one is leaving Spain.

Azeem told the housemates about what we saw yesterday in Atocha. It was weird hearing the events in another language and still following where he was up to in the story. It's also weird hearing it from someone who was just twenty metres away from us when it was happening. I must have looked over to Azeem a hundred times in Atocha and I don't remember him being there. There were just too many faces. Or, more likely, he had his back to me the whole time. Someone that close to me would later save my life. He could have just as easily trampled me if I had been in his way.

The three students heard bits of the story before we even arrived. They knew some people had died in Atocha while trying to push their way onto the trains. When we told them about the zombie on the train tracks they lost all faith in the government reporting. Someone shot someone or something and then no one was willing to go near it.

They couldn't believe we walked from Atocha to Getafe. It's fucking far. And they're right! It took five hours of solid walking. But what else were we going to do? We had just escaped a human stampede, were being followed by at least one zombie, had to hide from the helicopters, and we were always on the verge of sprinting for our lives. All the while we were weighed down by big ass backpacks.

There's still no electricity so we can't use the washing machine. We've all bundled our clothes into a big plastic tub on the balcony. While one person was manning that the rest of us jumped in the shower (one at a time, of course). Nine people waiting in line for the shower is not easy, but we made it. I was last. Rachel was already asleep on the mattress when I got here. It's almost 9am. I'm using my backpack as an oversized pillow. The base of the bed is like lying on a wooden board. Still, we're safe here, and feeling safe after the last couple of days is one hell of an improvement.

I'm pretty sure Rachel had been crying up here while I was downstairs. I see myself getting angry over the slightest of things, pissed off when one of my shoe laces comes undone when I'm walking, pissed off whenever I have to bend over with my backpack, pissed off thinking about all the blisters that are building up. I couldn't even relax in the shower. A one minute shower is not ideal. Add to that all of my clothes are being washed and mixed up with

Cristina's, Rachel's, and Ediz's and we had to sort through all of them. Cristina snapped at me when I picked up her underwear. It wasn't my fault. She grabbed the bundle of clothes out of the washing tub and something fell. It turned out to be a pair of her knickers and I picked them up off the ground. She grabbed them out of my hand and said something in Italian which couldn't have been pleasant. I remember her saying 'cazzo'. My Italian is nearly non-existent but I know when someone is swearing at me. Maybe she's still pissed off that I walked off and then had the nerve to come grovelling back.

I should apologise when I see her next. I hope I can sleep. Second-wind wakefulness has kicked in and I'm still afraid that we'll have to grab our stuff and run like hell in a moment's notice. I have no idea where we could even run to. We'd have to out run the police, military, and the zombies with no real idea of where we are or where we're going. I have the entirety of wikipedia on a flash drive and yet I don't have a single map printed for any city that isn't Madrid.

Please just let me sleep.

That didn't last long. Rachel gasped and sat up. Much to our surprise Cristina was asleep next to her. I had no idea she even came in. When Rachel woke up it woke me up. She said, "Was that you?"

I thought I had farted or snored or something, but no. She just had a creepy dream and the stress got to her. I reminded her that there are twelve people in the house so she's going to hear something. Cristina started to stir. She was supposed to be in Girl M's room with the pint-sized Moroccan girl, but the Moroccan spent the whole time crying and Cristina had enough and left.

I tried to get back to sleep but I couldn't. Once awake, always awake. It was just after 2pm.

I paid Guy A two euro for an espresso. He said it wasn't a problem but I insisted. They have a percolator and a gas stove top. I need one of those to calm me down if I ever have to run from a zombie horde.

After leaving Cristina I went to find someone to talk to. Maybe the phones or the Internet worked in Getafe. Nope. Azeem was awake, Rachel was awake, the three Spaniards were awake. No one else. Azeem doesn't speak much English. He can say, 'Arsenal', and 'It's a long way to Tipperary,' for some reason. J was pretty good with his English, having spent a semester in London.

Everyone has been told to stay indoors. The police have been going door to door to talk to people, letting everyone know what to do in an emergency. M told them they needed food. The police officer the other day said he had heard that a few times. I guess they will try to find a way to get food runs going. I mean you can't seal off a city of four million people and let them starve.

A, not from the south of Spain, went out this morning for a secret food trip. Apparently there are quite a few roof-top farms. These guys grow oranges (useful for sangria, I guess). The neighbours grow carrots and potatoes, so they were trading a bucket of oranges for a bucket of potatoes and wishing each other well, that sort of thing.

Oh! One thing I forgot to mention. This house has run out of toilet paper. Now, most guys won't see that as a terrible inconvenience until, well, it becomes absolutely necessary. The girls see it as the worst possible thing in the history of impossibly bad things. The Spaniards weren't expecting to have to stay this long in Getafe, they were supposed to be home now, where the land runs full of toilet paper and the need for roof top farms is less urgent. As I stepped into the shower I noticed an odour ... it wasn't until I spoke to J where he warned me about the TP situation and I put two and two together – whoever had a shower before me had taken a dump (in the toilet) and then, without TP to clean themselves up with, had taken a shower to clean themselves. So there are little bits of shit floating across the bottom of the shower and I didn't figure this out until after my shower was over. I thought it was just bits of dirt. Fucking awesome.

I won't dare tell any of the girls.

After an hour and a half Cristina emerged, groggy, her hair looking as though she had just been shagged by a sex-crazed mad scientist. She asked if there was any coffee and wondered who she had to kill to get a decent brew in this country. A went off to his room and unpacked some more espresso. Cristina looked up in delight. Then out came some Italian wine. These Mediterranean people are not like us Channel people. They work to live and we live for disappointment.

I told A and the other Spaniards here that they are all welcome at any time in my long, long, very long life, that they can come and stay at my place. And if they prefer something better then I will find them somewhere to stay. Rachel said the same thing.

We were all talking about recent natural disasters around the

world; tornadoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, trying to figure out how long it took to restore power. We've been without it now for four days and it's as boring as hell. People need to eat and get online. Thankfully, this house is equipped with gas tanks, but the fridge is now room temperature, and room temperature in the Spanish summer isn't at all pleasant.

Some of the guys went up to the roof. There are a couple of hammocks up there. Rachel just came down to say it was really nice and we may have to spend the night here. The Spaniards don't seem to mind but I know it is a terrible imposition. Tomorrow we will definitely leave. We'll have to find an official who can help us, not just rat us out and cram us into another massive station where people get crushed to death.

31 July, daytime, part 3, I guess.

These hammocks are actually very good. Rachel is in the other one. Ediz and Azeem are talking near the edge while M is getting a roof-top update from one of the neighbours. Her husband works in the power plant and was told to go back to work today so maybe we'll have power this evening?

We've been trying to figure out what to do. It's clear we need to get out of Madrid. There was talk about hiring a car and all of us driving somewhere.

Problem one: we don't have the cash to hire a car.

Two: the rental place won't have electricity for us to use cards, unless we wait until the power comes back on.

Three: we're several petrol refills away from any kind of destination and we might not be able to refill. It is much better being stranded in a city of four million people surrounded by the desert than being stranded in a car with four or five -

Holy shit, there's a zombie!

It's wandering up the road. Calle Toledo. He's just walking in the middle of the street, lumbering forward. Just about everyone in the surrounding houses is looking at him. 4:43pm. No one is on the street. Everyone is at their windows, on the balconies, on the roofs, coming out to see what everyone else is looking at. That guy is definitely dead. His shirt is covered in blood. He looks like he's missing some fingers on his left hand. He's looking up with his head

tilted to the side. His jaw is hanging open like he's forgotten how to close it. He's not groaning or saying anything, just stumbling forward. I'm sure he knows we're all here. He must be able to see us, hear us, or at least smell us.

He's getting closer.

The rest of the house is up on the roof now, watching quietly. The Moroccan girl is crying.

How did something like this manage to attack Azeem's friend? It must be building up its energy, storing it all for a single explosive attack.

There's a trail of blood behind him. His right arm is covered in welts and sores. They might be bites where something took the skin off. There's some yellow puss bubbling around one of the wounds, which is now dribbling down his arm. He looks like a walking disease.

One of the guys from another building is whistling, calling out to him. The zombie's just walking forward like he doesn't know where he is. Rachel's gone to grab a camera. Unless this thing takes off in a hurry she will have plenty of time. Other people are whistling now, shouting.

And he's still getting closer.

She's back. Taking photos.

Where the hell is he going?

M says there isn't much up the street, just a few quiet streets and the metro which is supposed to be closed. Then again, this dead guy has probably been walking for a while. I guess no one will be leaving the house until it's gone and by then it will be dark. Far too dangerous. I wouldn't let anyone out of my house if there was a zombie this close and on the loose.

We're about to lose sight of him. I'm having to lock in on the spectators across the street as they can still see where he's going. As long as they don't suddenly freak out then the zombie will just keep wandering away.

No one will be sleeping tonight, certainly not with that thing out there, possibly climbing walls. Everything is brick around here with bars, cars, and industrial bins. It would be easy to climb the three or four storey buildings. Very easy. He could then walk across the roofs and break in if he wanted to.

People are pointing at it as it's moving up the street. "That thing was talking before."

“What did it say?”

“I don’t know, it was just talking.”

“To itself?”

“I think so. That’s what the last guy said.”

“What do you think it said?”

“Beats me. Probably asking God to let it still go to Heaven.”

That’s the gist of it. The dead are walking the Earth. There are a few atheists up here. No one is recanting yet. We still don’t know if it’s a virus and a brain-eating parasite. There is that fish aroma disease. People end up smelling like rotten fish. The zombie could have that. He could be dehydrated and have parasites in his brain, stinking everything up, regressing to a sluggish primal thing, trying to get help while being unable to speak. Maybe he’s partially paralysed.

Hell, he could be anything. Right now we’re going with ‘dead’. His appearance is dead, his smell is dead, his communication is dead, he’s acting like a zombie, so until further notice we’re calling him a zombie.

Everyone is still off the streets, looking around to see if there’s another one. We’re getting some updates about where he’s going, passed down again like Chinese whispers. It sounds as though he was heard mumbling again. Or groaning. Maybe that was the original whisper and is now on the return. Mumbling or groaning.

#### Part 4.

What a day. I’ve seen the dead walk the Earth, I’m a fugitive, I stormed off from the people who were trying to save me out of the kindness of their hearts only for me to come grovelling back, I found refuge with students, ate a dozen oranges and then got hiiiiiiiiigh.

Yes sir, after that kind of day the Spaniards looked at each and decided, ‘Fuck it, let’s smoke.’ Everything after that became hilarious. Ángel, not from the south, has a friend who was going to take care of the plants while the guys were back home for the summer. Heh. The guy, also called Ángel ... I mean ‘A’. Not Ángel. Aaaaaaaa. Crap. Still stoned.

Heh.

So. Right.

Rachel is giving me a weird look. It’s probably because I was

talking out loud, you know, “Not Ángel ...” and he, A, kept saying, “Si, Ángel.” I shook my head. “No. A. Not Ángel.” “Si, si, Ángel. Meh yamo Ángel ee oosted ...” I can’t remember the rest.

Rachel and Cristina are laughing at me. No idea why.

A2, also known as Ángel 2, came over. He was going to take care of the plants over the summer, bring them back to his place, probably smoke them all. He came over so now we have two Ángels and we’re up to thirteen people now. Or fourteen? Can’t remember.

A2 said he heard the zombie talking, or murmuring. He couldn’t quite hear. I didn’t think zombies could talk. But considering zombies can’t be real, it is reasonable to hypothesize the perchance of possibility that Mr Zombie, sir, is not in fact a zombie, but a real human being of severely lowered levels of motor and cognitive functionaroonies, so speaking is as natural to a humano as is walking around. Yep. See?

I see.

Good shit.

They didn’t want us smoking in the house or on the roof. Kind of a problem then. They spent all last week clearing out the smoky smell from their rooms since the landlord lady will be looking over the house to make sure everything is still where it should be. They say they don’t smoke all that often. They say that Lady M from the south (why is everyone from the south in this country? No one is ever from ‘here’, except for A2, but he doesn’t count because he’s not from this house he’s from the other one over there, so he’s not really from ‘here’, but from ‘over there’) -

Okay, Cristina just asked why I write the way I do, on the wrong side of the paper. It’s because I’m left handed. I write on every page but not on every side of the page. I can’t write with the spiral metal binder thing bumping against my hand whenever I start a new line, and I seem to start a lot of new lines. So I write on the back of the paper, which for me is the front.

Lady M ... south girl ... she likes to smoke the stuff. Not quite a wake and baker but more of a casual joint at the end of the day. Or two joints. I don’t know, I never met the girl. I can tell you she isn’t studying medicine. You can’t smoke and study medicine, it doesn’t work. You never get any studying done. Maybe she’s doing law.

The guys had to de-smell the house so we took turns on the private balcony with its shutters up so no one can see us. Real paranoid feeling, you know? Then we came up to the roof and

looked out for more zombies or sub-humans or infected-humans as they might later be known as. Then we came down to smoke some more and went back up. I'm not a big smoker. But ... zombies! How could you not want to get high when there are zombies walking around on the same fucking street as you are hiding out on!

One thing we kinda neglected to think about. Hunger. Yeah. We're holding back on the munchies but we're going to town on the oranges.

Cristina says she used to work in a rehabilitation centre as a receptionist. There were people who had to learn how to walk and talk again after strokes and accidents. It's kinda creepy to think that if that guy down there really is a zombie then he has more motor control and better speech than some stroke victims.

You can't exactly get the army out here and shoot everyone that is sick like that. You have to capture them, take them in, study them, then try to cure them. I mean, we don't go around and shoot people with the flu, do we? Or cancer? Fuck, if you shot everyone with cancer then there goes half the population.

It's sexy how they greet each other here with a kiss. One kiss on each cheek. I was embarrassing myself when I first got here. I gave them the English kiss, which is about a foot away from their cheek. They laughed at me. They need actual cheek on cheek contact for it to count as a kiss or else you're being rude or being a dumb foreigner. Not with the guys, though, that's still a handshake. But if you're a girl then you get to kiss everyone. Sexy.

The only one who looks like she's not having any fun here is the Moroccan girl. She's talking to Azeem. He's high and nodding a lot, barely paying attention, but she's balling her eyes out. Maybe she lost her friends or family in Atocha.

It's really hard to do anything here. The power is still off and it's getting dark. I won't be able to add anything until it gets brighter, or until the moon comes out, otherwise it will be random writing without any lines to guide me and I'll be writing over previous writing because I can't see it. I had a look at what I wrote last night and it's all over the place. My writing gets smaller at the end of the sentence and it goes up at an angle, so a lot of my sentences have criss-crossed each other.

We've been talking about how to prove if that guy was a zombie or not. I know there are several tests to see if someone is dead. You check their breath, see if their eyes dilate or contract when you shine

a light into them, you tickle them, you cause them pain like by pushing a pen against their fingernails, you check their pulse, and if none of that works then they are probably dead. Now, this zombie might fail all of those tests, except that he's still walking around with some kind of brain function.

Perhaps we could introduce a basic human test. We enjoy self preservation. We like cute things and little luxuries. We don't like annoyances. So, we try this: leave a kitten meowing in front of the zombie. If the zombie eats the kitten then it's obviously not human. If it ignores the kitten then it's not a cat person, so we try it with a puppy. That's the cute part of the test. The self preservation part comes with a guy and a shotgun. There isn't a human alive who doesn't know what a shotgun looks like. We point it at the zombie. If the zombie makes no effort to protect itself, no effort to surrender, it just keeps advancing, then it has no regard for its own 'life' and would not be a human, unless it has lost so much brain function that it can't recognise the danger and is just approaching a comforting human (who is probably shouting at said zombie). Then we add the electric fence element. We surround the zombie on most sides with an electric fence and allow one exit. If the zombie can find the exit then it has enough brain activity to be worthy of a human.

Finally, we stick the zombie on an airplane for sixteen hours behind a screaming baby. If the blood pressure of the zombie doesn't increase by the end of the trip then it's not human.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is the basic human test.

I just asked Ediz, Cristina, and Rachel. They all agree. Cristina says she's allergic to cats, but that's fine. Do zombies have allergies? We should find out. We can surround ourselves with cats and blind the zombies with fits of sneezing.

It's getting too dark to write.

## Part 5.

We have power! We have electricity! Oh, the joy of having lights again! The whole neighbourhood cheered all at once. Jeez, it's been four days since we've actually had electricity, now what do we do?

We're all charging our phones, laptops, tablets, cameras, everything that's portable. Marcos, Ángel, and Jorge are all trying to get online. The connection is slow, probably because four million

people all tried to get online at the same time. We're all waiting as the servers get back up to speed. There's nothing much to do but sit and talk.

I need to check the British embassy site. I need to see a message saying, 'Flights will resume in the morning at our expense.' I could be back in London by this time tomorrow.

Marcos just brought his laptop down to the kitchen. The main news page won't load. Maybe they don't have power either. Marcos just tried calling his folks in the south and the phone rang off the hook. No one answered. We've tried a few other news sites and nothing's loading.

The Moroccan girl, I still don't know her name, keeps bugging Marcos to use his laptop to check her emails and to make sure her family knows that she's alive. Marcos keeps telling her to wait, he wants to check his stuff first. She actually said, "But it's important!" (in Spanish, but I understood 'es muy importante' clear enough) and then I saw Marcos's reaction. He rapid-fired her with Spanish but the point was crystal clear, even to me: you're a guest, a stranger, shut up and wait your turn. She thankfully left us in peace. We can still hear her crying, though.

Rachel is trying to call her folks but she's not getting through. Maybe they don't have power either and their phones have died.

You know what's weird? No one has a radio here. It seems to be out of style and out of fashion. We need a classic AM/FM radio. There are thirteen people in this house and no one has one. I guess most of us don't actually live here, and students may not need a radio when they have all of their music on the computer.

Hang on, Marcos has found a phone number giving everyone updates. He's calling and listening. It's automated and on a loop. We're all writing down the number in case we need it later.

It gives the date. 31 July. That's today, I think. Stay indoors. Curfew. Shops may be opened from 9am until 3pm. There may be rolling blackouts. If anyone sees anything strange or unusual (we know what that means), call this number.

Marcos is calling the number. I like that. Most people would leave it to someone else to deal with but he's on the ball. Too bad I need a translator to know what he's saying. He seems like a good guy. Maybe a little overwhelmed, but having ten extra people in your house can do that to you. I wonder if A2 is going to be stuck here for the night.

Nope, he's leaving, now that there's power. He's saying goodbye and about to hurry home. It's dark but there's enough light in the street to see where he's going. Apparently he's just a two minute walk away.

Marcos is thorough, registering the details of the single zombie, what we saw, where we saw it. I gave him the time and the street. Lucky I had the diary with me. Rachel is looking through her camera to see if there is anything useful in there to show Marcos.

Jorge is back. He has his laptop. Emails from friends all over Europe, even some from London. Curfew's and quarantines in London, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Prague ... just about everywhere. All military personnel have been summoned, all police are on duty, all emergency services are active.

Ángel is back. He has a friend who's a nurse in Madrid. She said that four 'unusuals' have been brought in since this all started. Four in one hospital. It's not exactly an epidemic, is it? I mean, it depends on the number of hospitals, really. If there are twenty in the city then there could be eighty zombies brought in. If there are a hundred hospitals then ... all right, we start to get to some big numbers there, but four million people were miserable for days because of an average of four zombies per hospital.

Then again, that's just one country. There could be five thousand people infected across Europe.

The Moroccan girl came back. She was shouting something. Marcos asked Azeem to take her away and keep her quiet. He's checking the embassies. Bajas airport is still down. They don't know when flights will resume.

The Atocha tragedy has been reported. Seven people died. The authorities have already put a spin on it. Apparently we rioted and tore the place apart. Police are looking for us. Lovely. Did they quell our panic? No. Did they provide us with food, water, and decent bathrooms? No. Did they keep us informed about what was going on? No. They just pushed us all together like grains of rice in a pressure cooker and then wondered why people decided to leave. That still pisses me off. Treating us all like criminals. This is Europe, not a Third World dictatorship carting undesirables off to camps. It's the -

All right, so I almost wrote 'It's the zombies who should be carted off to camps.' And maybe they should be. They're a disease and we don't know anything about them -

Look, I know I'm tired, exhausted and suffering from a rare case of racism. But they're not even human -

Just earlier we were talking about if these things are human or not. The little-kitty test, the kind of thing that would melt the heart of a hardened war criminal.

But anyway, if these things can be picked up and the quarantine is lifted then the rest of us can go back to our normal lives. I'll go back to London, go back to work, see Basil again and give him a big squeeze. It's not like he's known what's going on. He's probably just pissed off that Clint won't let him leave the house.

Clint better not have let him leave the house, not when there's a pet curfew in place.

Should we let the zombies die? What if the doctors say that the zombies were already dead when they arrived at the hospital? They failed the existing test, after all. But what if some doctor in Japan is able to bring one of the zombies back to life and cure it? Then through negligence the doctors allowed thousands of people to die. Would they be tried for malpractice for wilfully ignoring the hippocratic oath? There would be hearings and investigations. Did the doctors do enough? Obviously they didn't because this virus epidemic thing is spreading and the doctors haven't contained it yet. It might now be too big to control.

So, if these things don't die under hospital care and go on to live for another ten or twenty years, what should we do with them? Is there anyone who will want to live or work near a zombie? Will we re-classify them as another specie? Something like what we did to the AIDS people in the '80s where they are ostracised and given a social death sentence? *Oh my God you're a zombie, I won't have anything to do with you.* That kind of thing. We're humans, of course we'll do that. We're not as compassionate as we think we are. We might be compassionate about what directly affects us, but no one gives a fuck about someone we don't know.

A drunk driver kills a family. Kill the asshole! The drunk driver is your best friend? Go easy on him, he made a mistake. Send him to prison, yes, but he's a really good guy.

The world is too full of double standards. And fuck no I don't want a zombie anywhere near me. This is the time when we need the gung-ho American shoot-first approach, just as long as they don't do to me what they did at the end of *Night of the Living Dead*. That was one depressing movie.

And, from what I remember of the *Resident Evil* films: you may need to stretch and warm up before you kung-fu your way through a zombie horde. Only good looking people will survive. They will also be ridiculously athletic. Don't drive a Humvee if there is a gas shortage. Best to get a hybrid.

There's a message from Katy. She says she's okay and is staying with Nadia. She doesn't want to say where she is, though. I responded and told her the four of us are okay as well. I wonder how private our private messages actually are. All someone high up has to do is type in 'Atocha', see everyone who was there, and follow them to their current location after escaping. Katy sent back a big thumbs up. No word yet on the others.

This has to be the most recorded event in history. Everyone has a camera on them, everyone will post it online, and every government will immediately try to bring it down to quell fears of an apocalypse.

## 1 August

I crashed before. It's something like 2:30am now. None of the clocks have been re-set since the power came back on. I went to bedroom number 2 alone, thought I would just rest my eyes, and woke up when I heard a murmur from next to me. Cristina. She and Rachel are asleep on the mattress. I guess Cristina couldn't handle any more of the Moroccan girl's bullshit. I went to sleep with the light on and it was off when I woke up, which is a little disorientating. I got out of bed quietly, grabbed my tablet, and came down to the kitchen to see if anyone was awake.

Ángel and Marcos are here with Ediz. There are websites dedicated to confirmed sightings. I guess the apps were a good idea. Too bad the apps were hacked by very smart people to render them ineffective.

These sites are a little different. You have to type in your postcode and it will show you only the surrounding area, and not, you know, the entire world. I came down to find the government here have now established a Spanish firewall. Only Spain-related news and sites can be accessed. Ángel and Marcos said that Spain isn't the only country to do this. Greece apparently never lost their electricity but the firewall went up almost immediately. They didn't want the spread of

fake news, they only wanted the truth to get out to the people, and for that it had to be confirmed by an official. By then the news was so old that it was no longer valid.

There has been just one sighting in Getafe. One! And we saw it. All of this craziness for one stupid little zombie. Ángel and Marcos have been calling people all night, trying to get updates from them and going through the websites getting as much info as possible. Before the great firewall was erected they recorded the list of sightings. This is how it looked:

Spain - 37  
Austria - 12  
Belgium - 3  
Croatia - 2  
Czech - 8  
Denmark - 5  
Finland - 1  
France - 24  
Germany - 41  
Greece - 16  
Ireland - 2  
Italy - 19  
Lithuania - 1  
Malta – none reported.  
Netherlands - 11  
Norway - 4  
Poland - 3  
Portugal - 12  
Russia - 28  
Sweden - 5  
Switzerland - 8  
Turkey - 23  
UK - 58

I haven't added it up, but holy shit, UK is doing worse than all of the other countries? How? Spain has the second highest reported, yet it was one of the last to be hit by the invasion.

So what happened to all of the reported cases from last week? Weren't there supposed to be 20,000 zombies roaming the earth? At what point will the media admit to making shit up? So far, no one has apologised for coming up with the 20,000 number, they just keep editing their information as they go along. All they needed was

something more explosive than CNN or the BBC so they could live in the ratings wonderland.

You know what's missing? Every country outside of Europe. Not all European countries were reported. Some I guess were too small, some may not have had any sightings of zombies. I don't know the details, I'm just writing them down. I'm curious to see how many there would be in the US. I don't think we will get any details out of China for a long, long time.

Marcos has been working on a list based on emails and phone calls. Everyone is trying to find out when and where Zombie Zero started. The problem is, no one knew what they were dealing with when it first became apparent.

I was in a lot of those countries when it exploded. It feels like I brought this curse or disease with me. I didn't, and I'm not telling these two where I was or what I was doing. I was in Czech and that's now diseased. I was in Germany and that too is diseased. The Netherlands, France, and Spain, all diseased.

One thing that keeps popping up is a 19 year old Austrian girl. She was backpacking with friends in Egypt when she fell sick. She didn't trust the medical facilities there and waited until she could go back to Austria. Well, she boarded the plane and instantly became worse. They made an emergency landing. She was taken off in a stretcher suffering heart problems and was close to death. That happened on the 3rd July. The Austrian government has been trying to track down the other passengers.

It might be that she had the flu, it might be that the virus started in Egypt. There's no way to find out from the kitchen in Getafe.

## Part 2.

Ediz is on the roof with me, in the other hammock. He knows I had a tantrum the other day and hasn't treated me any less, not like some of the others who are still wary of me. He told me he should have gone back home already. His Spanish course is over now. I guess Rachel's should be ending soon as well, but that has been cancelled. I told him there were twenty three zombie sightings in Turkey and he nodded, saying that his town is on the other side of the country so there isn't much need to worry. Apparently his mum will scare the zombies twice to death and they won't go anywhere near her.

There are still a few people at windows, on balconies and roofs, talking and looking around, too tired to sleep. I wish I could sleep. This heat is nuts. At least up here there's a breeze, not like down in the stuffy bedroom next to two girls and one tiny window. I just hope the zombie hasn't figured out how to climb walls.

### Part 3.

There's another zombie in Getafe. A woman. She's of African descent. Not internal Africa where everyone is black, and not outer Africa where everyone is brown, but a shade or two lighter. She's completely naked. Barefoot, slashes marks all over her body, oozing puss, cuts, bites, slumping around ... she looks like she was gang raped by zombies and left for dead.

She's standing in the playground in front of our building, about five metres away from me, staring at the swings, unmoving. I can't tell if there's a demon raging in her or if she's absent of all self awareness.

One of the Spanish guys is shouting at her from his balcony. She's doing nothing but staring at the swings. She looks like she's waiting in line for Confession. The guy is still shouting at her. I bet he starts throwing... yeah, he threw something, a pebble from a pot plant or the like. It clanged on the metal struts of the swing frame. The zombie didn't even flinch. That's pissing the guy off even more, being ignored like that when he's trying to be intimidating. Other people are shouting at him, probably telling him to be quiet.

Ediz just went downstairs to get Marcos, Ángel, and anyone else who is awake.

They're up now. Marcos is on the phone. "Si, esta aqui," he says, over and over. The guy on the balcony is throwing more stuff and still shouting. Everyone is shouting at him to shut up. He's now shouting at the other people. I have no idea what everyone is actually saying but if there wasn't a dead lady five metres away from my building I would probably find this quite amusing, except that there is a naked dead lady who's staring at the swings and it's making my skin crawl.

Fucking hell, someone went onto the street! Not the shouting throwing guy, someone else. He's just standing against his front door looking at the zombie, passively provoking it. He's looking around

to see if anyone has seen him. Yeah, I see you, dumbass. People sound like they're telling him to go inside. He's walking towards the zombie. What kind of idiot does that? I bet he has a, 'no one tells me what to do' attitude. Maybe all he wants to do is shout, "The power of Christ compels you!" That might earn him a laugh from the neighbours, then he can go inside and leave the thing that's about to kill him alone.

There's a small fence surrounding the playground. The guy has stopped just a metre away from it. His front door is still open. I think someone is there holding it open for him. He'll need it as well, because if that door swings shut he'll have to fumble with his keys while fighting off a zombie.

He's trying to talk to it. People are shouting at him, pointing and being unusually expressive with their gestures. You don't see gestures like this in England. He's waving to the zombie, trying to get her attention.

She's still just staring at the swing.

He's walking around the fence, keeping his attention on her, trying to get her to look at him.

Marcos is shouting on the phone now, talking about the policía.

People are on the street now, holding onto their front doors, waving to the man to get him to go back inside.

The walking man just snorted and spat on the zombie! She could be contagious with an actual airborne virus and he's being nothing but a fucktard! She's still not moving. The guy just kicked the fence with a resounding *boom*.

Rachel and Cristina are upstairs now. The whole house is awake, listening to the shouts. The guy is kicking the fence again. The zombie hasn't moved. Stupid douchebag behaviour, trying to be braver than the others by doing something obviously suicidal.

"You were so brave when you faced that naked woman who wasn't moving."

"Yes, yes I was. Want to hear my story again?"

Ha! The guy just froze. The zombie lifted her head and looked at him. He stopped moving completely. People are laughing at him now. He looks like he's now telling the zombie to clear off. I'm sure that will work. I mean, she's been listening and obeying everyone else for the last five minutes.

Someone else has come out now, tugging on the guy's arm to get him to come inside. The zombie is looking at the pair of them. The

second guy is walking back home now. He's tried to get his neighbour to behave. He's checking over his shoulder. The idiot is kicking the fence again.

Marcos is still on the phone asking for the policía.

Uh ... the zombie just said something.

That brought silence to the whole street. Even the guy provoking her is silent, just standing there, dumb struck.

It spoke again. "Ven," it said. I had to get Rachel to spell it out for me. It means, 'Come,' as in, 'Come here.' The zombie is looking up at the guy with her hand stretched out to him.

"Ven."

I think the whole neighbourhood shivered at once. The guy is backing away, no longer so brave.

"Ven."

Marcos is still on the phone asking them to hurry. The guy on the balcony threw another pebble at the zombie. She paid no attention to it.

"Ven."

That ... can't be her voice. It's too deep. She's too little to have such a deep voice. There's an accent there. The Spaniards are looking around at each other, trying to identify it.

"Ven." She's walking forward, still with her hand out for the guy, locking eyes with him.

"Caribbean," Jorge said.

The zombie sounds as though she has either a very low female voice (and she's petite, so that doesn't sit right), or a male voice. She obviously can't have a male voice, she's female, but it certainly sounds like a man, speaking through a dead woman's throat. She has lady bits from what I can tell. Even the man in front of her, by the fence, is referring to her as a 'she' and he has a better perspective than we do.

"Sounds Cuban," Jorge said. Marcos and Ángel are nodding. Maybe she's Cuban. It explains her faded brown skin. I have no idea what a Cuban accent sounds like and I don't know how they can pick it up from a single word over and over again.

The zombie has shifted her attention. She's turning around, looking at everyone watching her. I didn't catch that last word. Neither did Rachel. Cristina did. "She said 'Surrender.'"

She's looking back at the man by the fence. "Ven."

The man ran back to his house and slammed the door.

She just looked at me.

Everyone is on the phone now, calling it in, calling their friends and families, saying the zombie just talked to them.

The zombie has gone back to staring at the swings now. It's like she was just possessed by someone and his attention drifted away. She's just standing there, staring.

If these zombies are intelligent then we're in a lot of trouble. If they are calling for us to surrender then that's only going to inspire more fear and a lot of people are going to die in a panic.

No one seems to be willing to move until the zombie is gone.

Someone just shouted out ... okay I can't spell it all in Spanish. In English it would be: "Are you human? Or zombie?"

The zombie hasn't moved.

"Putal!" a woman shouted. I know that one. 'Whore.'

"What's your name?" someone else shouted, a woman. Huh. It's taken fifteen minutes before someone actually asked that. Why did no one else think of that earlier? "What's your name?" she shouted again.

I guess none of us are leaving the roof top until the zombie goes away. She's just standing there, looking at the empty swing. Maybe she's remembering something, maybe she's stuck and unable to move, maybe she's just there to draw our attention.

Marcos has finally hung up the phone. Now he's calling his brother in the south, repeating the "Ven," "Surrender," "Putal," and "What's your name?"

Jorge has brought up his computer and is checking the website. There is still only one confirmed sighting in Getafe. It will take them some time to upload a second one. Hopefully the police will come along and behave. Hopefully they won't come into this house and arrest us for being the Atocha fugitives.

Ángel is saying we should all go downstairs and hide. We (the refugees) aren't supposed to be here. The neighbours have seen us.

#### Part 4.

So the four of us just had a secret meeting. Me, Rachel, Cristina, and Ediz. We needed a plan. We couldn't come up with one. The only thing we could agree on was that we were going to stick together.

Have you ever tried to agree on anything by forming a

committee? We need a leader. I vote for Cristina. Despite that I said, “In certain situations trying to agree on something will cost us too much time and we might die. If we’re on a plane that’s being hijacked we need to fight back. If we’re pinned down by a shooter we can’t wait to be found, we need to fight back. If we’ve seen a zombie and three of us say to stay where we are while the fourth says to run, we all need to run. It’s better to take a chance than wait for death to become inevitable. We can’t argue. We can’t veto a command to run. We need to trust each other’s instincts.”

I was two sentences away from saying, “We shall never give in. We shall never surrender.”

Somehow they agreed with me. We shook hands.

I still think Cristina should be our leader.

## Part 5.

Now that I’ve thought about it, Churchill’s speech is more appropriate to the zombie horde than to mankind. I had to Google it. I shouldn’t have.

*“We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air (maybe not that bit), we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.”*

That’s the famous bit. Then it gets really depressing. He talks about the New World, with all its power and might, stepping forth to rescue and liberate the old. The New World of Zombies will have their power and might. They will rescue us from our mortal selves. They will fight in the fields and streets. We will run until we are forced to sue for peace. They will never surrender.

## Part 6.

We’re in the kitchen. We’ve been here for twenty minutes. It’s impossible to talk about anything else.

“Do you think she’s a zombie?”

“Zombies aren’t real.”

“She’s real.”

“Then she’s not a zombie.”

It’s conversation like that. We’ve seen shit in the last couple of days that is not conducive to a worthwhile intellectual conversation. We’ve all survived the terror of Atocha, running from police helicopters, being attacked by a zombie and then followed by another. Now we have all of this crap happening outside.

The Moroccan girl, Lalla by the sound of things, has locked herself in the main bathroom. She’s crying and shouting for people to leave her alone. There’s a small bathroom upstairs she could have locked herself in, which would have been more convenient. Azeem is trying to talk to her, to calm her down and get her to come out. Marcos is rummaging in one of the kitchen drawers for a screwdriver. I guess he’s about to try and remove the handle from the bathroom door. What is it about dipshits who must hide in the most needed room in the house?

We’ve drugged Lalla. Marcos removed the door handle to the bathroom and Azeem, Marcos, Ediz, and myself went in to get her out. She was screaming at us like we were about to rape her. She fought us every moment and we had to carry her out into the kitchen. I had one of her legs. We then dumped her on one of the stools and gave her some tea to drink and told her to shut up. The tea is more of the Spanish herbal thing called ‘mah-teh’. Ángel made it for her and dropped a lot of marijuana into it. She drank it slowly, through a straw. She’s quiet now, just staring off into space.

Marcos said that if she does something like that again in his house, she’s leaving. Azeem nodded but stayed silent. We’re not sure what to do with her.

It was scary, going in towards a screaming girl and dragging her away. My heart was thumping so much that every step felt like a full shudder. She kicked back and knocked me into the shower screen. Try as she might, my grip around her leg was stronger than her kick. That was the closest to a fight I’ve ever been.

She said she felt bad for the girl outside, the zombie, and wanted people to stop throwing stones at her and stop calling her a whore. There is obviously something wrong with the zombie woman but Lalla wanted to go and make sure she was okay. She was swearing at us for being assholes.

Cristina and Rachel are eyeing me up carefully, not saying much. Was it because I just barged into a bathroom with three other guys and dragged a screaming girl outside?

The police are outside. We have to be quiet. I don't know what's going on, we're not allowed near the windows. I can see several flashing lights though. It's taken them forty minutes to arrive. By the sound of things the zombie lady hasn't moved from the playground. The police don't want to go near her.

She's staring at them, according to Jorge, who's looking through the hallway window. She's lifting her hand to them. Ángel is filming. He wants to send it to his brother.

She just got pepper-sprayed and didn't react. They're going at her again and she's not moving, just standing there with her hand out.

We're going in for a closer look, the police will be too busy to notice.

Yep, she got pepper-sprayed. Now here comes the taser. The police are shouting at her. She's too quiet to hear but her mouth moves once in a while, enough to say one word. She just got tasered. She's on the ground. The police aren't going anywhere near her. There's a police arrest-van with its door open. They want her to go inside on her own.

She's back on her feet. Marcos is on the phone to his family, relaying the news.

She got tasered again. She's on the ground, moving sluggishly. The police still won't go near her.

Shit! The police just shone a spotlight through our window, trying to stop us from looking. Marcos, annoyed, told us to go and hide and not go anywhere near the windows. We've lined up in the hallway, listening to the commotion outside.

There are now shouts and calls from the neighbours, lots of them. They're pointing behind our building. The police have repositioned themselves. Another zombie is on its way.

The power just went out.

We just went onto the balcony which runs along the side of the house. We can see the zombie stumbling along. It's a man, different from the first guy we saw. Three zombies in Getafe. The police are trying to move in against him with pepper spray. They keep jumping away like they're working up the courage to squash a giant spider.

That was close. Some of the spray just hit the side of our balcony. I can smell and taste it in the air. Makes me gasp. Pleh.

After who knows how many days, they still haven't found a way to take people into custody without touching them. They need a noose on a pole like the ones they use on deranged dogs.

They're backing up one of the arrest-vehicles towards the male zombie. They're trying to get him to climb into the arrest chamber.

He just walked by. The police car is rolling forward, keeping it next to him.

Huh, one of the police officers out the front actually has a rope with him. He's swinging it around, trying to get the woman.

Fuck, the police spot light just got me. I'm sure when this is all done they're going to come upstairs and start taking us away as well.

Marcos just told us to get our bags and get ready to leave, possibly up to the roof and along the neighbours'. There's no way off the roof. We're three storeys off the ground up there and there's nowhere to hide.

I'm on the roof now, looking down on the mess. The two zombies are talking at the same time. "Ven," and "Surrender." It's the same voice. Not just the same accent, but the exact same voice, as though one guy from Cuba (or wherever he's from) is talking through the mouths of that woman and that man at the same time.

Talking zombies saying the same thing the same way.

Marcos is talking to one of the neighbours up here. She's an older lady and she's waving us over. We can hide in her house for a while. Marcos is saying we should leave when the police are gone. We don't know where to go. He's kicking us out.

## Part 7.

The older lady was nice. She allowed us to stay until 9 o'clock. That's when the shops in Getafe started opening up. The lines were huge. It's obvious we're not Spanish and they're treating us with suspicion, especially since most of us have backpacks with us and we stick out like you wouldn't believe. We're in a line now, waiting for food. The electricity came back on an hour ago.

The police lassoed the zombies and forced them into the back of the arrest-van. The other officers then came and looked around the neighbouring houses, including Marcos'. Marcos said that one of the neighbours had called the police on us, saying that we weren't Spanish and that we were in Atocha. I don't know how they knew we were in Atocha, maybe they just lied and got a lucky guess.

There's six of us now. Myself, Rachel, Cristina, Ediz, Azeem, and Lalla. None of us are happy about Lalla but Azeem is trying to comfort her in Arabic. People have been walking by us saying we shouldn't be here. Dickheads.

## Part 8.

We were just rejected from the shops. It's for Spanish people only, they say. Cristina tried her best but her accent is still Italian. She then started swearing at the manager and staff telling them that they were low-life racist scumbags. I swore as well, in English. The only reason I'm not more pissed off is because there was a couple behind us in the line who heard what happened and bought us the food we wanted with our money. They were decent, good people. We thanked them and they apologised for the assholes working here.

We waited in line for an hour and a half and it was only when we got through the door that we were told to piss off. They could have saved us some time and told us straight away, but no. I hope they fucking die and beg for help and no one comes to help them.

We went to another shop for another top up. We have food, mostly granola bars, carrots, and bottles of water. I bought a large box of cereal because it's one of the only things still there. It's going to be as dry as hell but I hope it will be filling and not too sugary. Most of the shops didn't even open. We saw a delivery truck an hour ago but it's the only one working. It'll take a few more days before everything picks itself up again.

So now what? We're sitting around, eating, with no idea what to do. Azeem says he has another friend who might still be here somewhere else in Getafe. Azeem has been our life-line and it sucks that I'm the only one who can't speak to him. Great little tag-along I am.

Jesus, Part 9 already?

Anyway. We're in a van! Azeem to the rescue! He bumped into his friend on the street, Carlos. Carlos is from Seville, south of Madrid. Carlos' dad drove all night to come and get his son since Carlos was trapped up here with no transport getting in or out of Getafe, so his dad drove up to bring him home. He was stopped at three checkpoints and had to wait two hours at one of them just to verify his story. We followed Carlos back to his place and met his dad, who is a little wary of driving another six people back, but really he brought the van so Carlos' roommates could leave as well. The roommates all left a couple of days ago so there's enough space for us and we are on the road! Carlos junior convinced Carlos senior to offer the six of us a spare room in his house. How long for? No idea. We'll have to figure out what to do when we get there.

We passed the first check point without getting stopped. We are now well and truly out of Madrid! Heading for Seville! Carlos senior says that things are a little more sane in Seville and no one has seen a single 'zombie'. He doesn't believe the story. The rest of us seem to flip from being 100% convinced to undecided. Either way there is definitely something creepy about the way those two people / creatures spoke with the same voice. Carlos didn't see any of the action from last night. Azeem has filled him in on the details.

Carlos senior has told us that the French/Spanish border is blocked, completely blocked, no one allowed to go in or out unless they are medical staff or recognised officials. That's made Ediz and Cristina a little uncomfortable. There's now no direct road back to Turkey or Italy. I wouldn't even consider going to Turkey by road, it's too far. The train from Paris to Nice was bad enough, taking four hours. Paris to Barcelona was supposed to take eight hours but we were caught out with a train strike and had to take a rental car from Nice to Barcelona. Ediz would have to go from one extreme end of the continent to the other.

Cristina and Rachel have fallen asleep in the back of the van.

We're coming up to our second traffic jam now. The first one lasted half an hour. Carlos senior has the radio on but there's nothing about the traffic. senior keeps saying, "Vamos, vamos," while staring at the radio. We're creeping along at a snail's pace. There's no where for me to rest my arms.

At best this would be a five hour drive.

Now we know why the traffic is so slow. There is an accident up ahead. I don't think it's serious, just a few cars shunted into each other, but it's knocked out one of the lanes. Stupid drivers. You would think that if you're trying to get to safety you might actually value your life enough not to drive like an idiot.

Rachel woke up, looked around, and went back to sleep again. Sounds like a good idea.

Okay, this is getting stupid. We've moved maybe a mile in the last half hour. I see a few motorbikes zipping past (which wakes us up) and the drivers here seem to have a hard-on for honking their horns. What the hell is up with that? If you're stuck behind a mile of traffic that isn't moving, honking your horn isn't going to do anything. Nothing at all. Nada. And yet they still do it, and it's not just one driver, it seems to be at least half of them. Yes, I understand you drivers are frustrated and want to spread the misery by irritating everyone around you, but this is a violence begets violence thing. The more you do to other people the more they do to you. With all of this noise it's impossible to sleep.

A dog just ran along in between all of the cars. It earned a smile from a couple of us, but not from Lalla.

I bet that dog ends up showing more compassion and camaraderie than most of the people blazing their horns and shouting at everyone else stuck in traffic. I bet most people would prefer to be kept company by an unknown dog than an unknown person. At least with a dog you know it won't try to cheat you out of money or food.

Cristina is saying she misses her dog.

I want Basil to be okay. I've missed him more than I've missed some of my friends. At least with them I know I'll see them again regardless of how bad this gets. Even if they're in some camp on the outskirts of London trying to rebuild civilisation, I'll see them again. But Basil is an escape artist extraordinaire. If Clint is forced to leave the flat and can't find him in time then Basil will be on his own. He might be locked inside or left out to fend for himself. If Clint is smart

about it he'll leave a window open so Basil can still climb in and out. But how much foresight will Clint have with my fucking cat? Even after a year he still has to ask me when bin day is.

Lalla just said she's allergic to dogs. Bravo, Lalla. Way to go. Maybe if Cristina has to choose between saving a dog's life and saving yours, we'll see who wins out.

I had a dream the other night about Alana. She told me she loved me, like she was telling me for the first time. It brought along a surge of 'I love you too' that I haven't been able to shake. Maybe staring out of this window will help me forget about her.

Fuck! A guy got flattened on the road just in front of us. I wasn't even looking at anything in particular. I heard a motorbike drive past my window. A guy got out of the driver's seat to see what was going on up ahead and the bike hit him. The nearby drivers and passengers are all out of their cars, looking over the two guys. Some of the passengers have their hands over their mouths in shock. Others are looking away.

Ediz is telling us not to look.

Carlos senior just turned off the engine. We won't be moving for a while.

There's no way to get an ambulance in through all of this. They'll have to come along the other side of the motorway and walk through the traffic.

According to the radio, the Atocha riots have spread to the rest of Madrid. Forty people are now dead, having been trampled or shot. People are burning cars and attacking the police, raiding shops and supermarkets.

It's no longer a traffic jam, it's a road block. We're twenty kilometres to Cordoba, which is about eighty kilometres from Seville. The army is checking every car. We're all feeling pretty edgy here. Rachel just asked if we should leave the van and go on foot, over the motorway and away from the cars. No one knows. Are they looking for foreigners or for zombies? I hope their priorities are now looking for zombies.

Rachel and I have been talking about getting our asses to Gibraltar. It's still a British colony and since we're both British citizens they should let us in. Azeem and Lalla want to head in that direction as well. They're hoping to get a boat to Morocco. Cristina and Ediz have been rather quiet about what they should try and do.

It's as hot as an oven in the van and we're all dripping sweat onto each other. The radio is the only thing keeping us company and everyone is fidgeting in the heat, fighting a losing battle against sweat rash, and trying to get away from the sun as it creeps in through the windows. No one wants to risk getting sunburned.

Lalla just told us she needs a wee. We don't know how long we're going to be here for. We've seen lots of people getting out of their cars and pissing on the motorway, but Lalla sounds terrified even thinking about doing that in public.

Cristina sighed and just agreed to help Lalla and keep her company. We checked all around the van to make sure no one was about to run them over. Lalla got out and squatted at the front of the van. Cristina stood watch while a couple of guys in a car next to us gawked, laughed, and honked their horn. Cristina didn't even bother to glare at them. I guess Lalla is having trouble with public exhibition.

It's making me want to piss as well.

Aside from that, we've been eating canned pineapple slices.

It's getting dark. That's when the bad shit seems to happen. That's when the dead catch up to us. How are we going to know where to run to during a traffic jam? If these things are sprinters and we're pinned here on a motorway then they're going to catch us with no problem. Even if we stay inside the van they'll tip it on its side, smash the windows open, and rip our arms off.

We haven't turned on the engine in two hours.

The radio said that a lot of other cities in Spain had to re-open after riots. People were too hungry and desperate to sit still with no trucks coming in. The President threatened to militarise the whole operation or something like that to force the trucks to move if they didn't do it on their own.

It's quiet inside the van. Outside is a different story. People are blasting their horns and shouting at the unmoving traffic. We've been at a standstill for a couple of hours and people are still blasting

their horns. Whhhhhhhy? Is it because doing anything is better than doing nothing? Maybe they're the type of morons who say, "Hey, at least I'm trying to get the traffic moving along."

I looked over at one honker and glared at him. He gave me the finger.

I bet there are already tree-hugger activists trying to protect the formerly dead, fighting for their rights, saying that they can be saved and returned to normal, or that they are normal. 'They're just infected with a disease.' At some point there has to be a limit. What happens if someone who is severely mentally handicapped has less function than the recently deceased? What happens if a non-human becomes more capable than even the lowest of humans? Would they still have some concept of bravery and honour? Believing in something greater? I can't imagine even the smartest of dogs believe in something greater like an afterlife. Animals do pretty much five things: hunt, brawl, eat, sleep, mate. I doubt zombies are able to mate. They are more like scavengers than hunters. Do they even sleep? That pretty much leaves them brawling and eating.

Huh, maybe we should round them up and use them to clear minefields.

Carlos senior has a friend of a friend who lives near Gibraltar. He said it's looking good. Maybe we can find a hotel or a hostel there. We're certainly going to need one. Rachel offered Cristina, Ediz, Azeem, and Lalla the option to come with us to Gibraltar. They're thinking about it.

We're still in the traffic jam.

My headache is back. I'm out of water. And I can't stop thinking about all the horrible ways of dying at the hands of a zombie, only to then return with the awareness that I'm dead but completely unable to stop chasing after my friends and ripping them apart as well.

2 August

The great exodus has begun. We made it to Seville, though Carlos senior suggested that we hitchhikers cross into town on foot, since he doesn't want to be arrested for trafficking people. That caused a bit of a stink, since we are all in Spain legally and should be able to move from one city to another, but the fight was mostly between the

two Carlos'. No one else was willing to weigh in all that much, since we just had a free ride out of Madrid as it was falling to riots and zombies.

So we walked the final stretch into Seville, which took an hour and a half. Senior drew us a map and some directions in case we wanted to find his house.

Guess what - Seville has phone reception. I called my folks, they're fine. There are riots in London. They saw the news. The riots in Madrid were nothing compared to what's been happening around Victoria Station. There are police at every Tube station, scanning people as they enter and exit. It's just a quick temperature scanner but already people are refusing. It's clashing against their rights, but the dumb ones start shouting and being abusive so the police arrest them. Mostly it sounds like the people being arrested are the 'No one tells me what to do' type.

Could you imagine the stupidity of those people? "Welcome to your first day on the job. Here's a form so we can get your bank details, address, and emergency contact. Fill this in and pop on over to Janine so you can get a scan card that lets you into the building."

"No one tells me what to do."

"Riiiiight. Do you actually want to work here?"

"Of course. But no one tells me what to do."

"You have an entry level position. And with that attitude you're always going to have an entry level position. Fill this in."

Jump forward to the end of the world.

"Those things are still out there. Who's going to take the first watch?"

"Dave can."

"The fuck I will."

"I took first watch last night. It's your turn."

"No one tells me what to do."

"Dave, cooperation is the key to survival."

"Then you shouldn't have all elected Phil as the leader when no one wants to cooperate with him."

And that's how Dave is left to fend for himself. One day he might even father a child and teach that little tyke the wisdom of being a douchebag. Both Dave and Dave junior will be glass-half-empty arseholes who complain that the world is always out to get them.

Anyway. The PM has talked about installing automatic full body scanners all over England. That worked so well with the TSA, didn't

it? We'll have perverts seeing people's outlines as if they're walking around without clothes on. The PM has assured us that these scanners are not capable of recording images, that they're for people's safety, and that they will reduce the need for a police presence, which is bullshit. The police will be required to protect the scanners because people will just smash them if they're left unattended. And, what's the point in having scanners if you can't arrest someone immediately who is dead, almost dead, or about to kill someone? Somehow the PM forgot to mention that titbit. It's like a burglar alarm at home. Yes, it will go off if there's an intruder, but it still takes the police at least ten minutes to get there. By then the intruder has either killed you or run off with your laptop and all your phones.

My folks wired me some money, enough for a couple of plane tickets. They did it without me asking. I have my own money, but I'm grateful they are still looking out for me. We had friends caught after one of the big Japanese earthquakes and the airlines hiked up the fares, six or seven times the normal cost, so my folks figured that, just because I have some money doesn't mean I could afford a price-gouging ticket. There are also quarantine measures at the airports, where everyone who has been in an affected country must see a doctor. Everyone who has been in an infected city must be sectioned off. At least if I make it back to England I'll be able to speak the same language.

When I make it back. Not if.

Azeem just called Carlos again to see what's been happening. Carlos, now safe and secure at home, has been checking the news. The airport in Seville has become something of a refugee camp. When flights were permitted to resume a couple of days ago there wasn't enough fuel for all the planes, so the airlines cancelled half the flights and raised the ticket prices on the remainder five-fold. Some people have been at the airport waiting for a flight for over a week.

I've tried to make a friend out of Azeem. We're all sticking together, which is good to see. Azeem seems to have a plan. He and Lalla will try to get back to Morocco, which is about a hundred kilometres away. It's certainly closer than any of the rest of us. He said we can stay with him if we have to. He owns a nice house, he says. His brother lives there rent-free and only has to pay the bills and maintain the property, so Azeem will come in and declare that we all have a bed or a sofa to sleep on. Rachel isn't so sure. It means we'll be heading in the wrong direction if we want to be heading

back to England, and getting back to England is something we desperately want to do. We're done with Spain. Being trapped in your own flat is a lot nicer than being trapped in someone else's, where you don't speak the language and you are having to be ridiculously gracious for every meal you receive.

I haven't eaten properly in over a week. God I miss burgers, chips, and pizza. I just want to see a big, juicy steak. Medium-well done, the size of my plate, stuffed with cheese, and served with a side of herb fries. Forget the veggies. Next to that will be a tall glass of lager. Next to that will be a buxom wench who laughs at my stupid jokes. Next to her will be the buxom wench's twin sister.

We have water and supplies now. We got water from a fountain and found a store that was still open. It was tough being in there, though. I was staring at a pack of Maltesers for five minutes. All the while there was a voice in the back of my head saying, "You can't afford that. You need to be very careful with your money." So I went and stared at some toilet paper, trying to decide which of the 3-ply options will last the longest. I couldn't even get the best value because I can't carry around 24 rolls with me under my arm. My backpack is already stuffed to the brim. The six of us settled on splitting a 12 pack and carrying 2 rolls each. It was more expensive than the 24 pack but we just don't have the space for 4 rolls each.

I found an ATM ten minutes after leaving the store and am loaded up now with cash, but still ... how the hell did something as simple as chocolate and toilet paper get the better of me like that?

Ah. Azeem just told us that he lives in Rabat, a hundred and fifty kilometres south of the Mediterranean. Ediz and Cristina just shook their heads.

I'm not sure where we're sleeping tonight.

Part 2.

I love the Italians!

We were all sitting in the shade of a bullring (nice building, actually), near the river, when Cristina heard a group of Italians

talking. She ran over and started talking to them. They came over and said *ciao*, told us they are Italian teachers in Seville and they invited us to spend the night on their floor. It's nothing fancy, but it's indoors with air conditioning! Holy fuck is it hot in Seville. Do you have any idea what it's like carrying a twenty one kilo backpack through the sweltering heat? It's crippling. Rachel has an eighteen kilo backpack and she's carrying a lot more weight around her stomach and thighs as well. We swapped packs for a while because the straps around my shoulders were a lot more comfortable than hers. That would have been funny trying to explain that to any police officer who stopped and searched us, given that I was now carrying a lot of bras and knickers.

The Italians here are awesome. There are three of them in this house, while three more live down the road. I can't actually remember who lives where. One of the Italians had invited her parents to visit. They've cooked as though they expected twenty people to show up, instead of just the eight Italians. So, there's plenty of food even with fourteen people eating. It was some kind of ragù dish with meatballs (oh my god they were incredible!) and bread on the side. I'm going to kiss every Italian I see.

Cristina started crying at one point. She blurted out that she missed her parents. She's a lot more homesick now than she ever let on. Case in point, she quickly climbed back into her pyjama bottoms. She hasn't done that since we've been on the road. She has always been mostly dressed when trying to sleep as though she's aware that she may need to run for her life. I guess she feels safe here, surrounded by her kin.

One of the Italian guys asked to be called Jack, since we couldn't pronounce his name. His English is excellent. It's making me feel a little insecure, actually, since here's a guy who's fluent in Italian, Spanish, and English. He was joking about Monty Python, asking if I have ever seen it. He said he fell in love with Spain after doing *El Camino de Santiago*. He said it's a walk from the farthest tip of Spain all the way to Italy. It took him a couple of months and he really did walk as much as he could. Yikes.

I took down Jack's contact info. He made me promise to email him when this whole mess is over. I asked for their thoughts on the situation, whether these creatures have risen from the dead or if they're suffering from a spectacular virus. Jack is certain they are still human. We got into a debate about vampires and zombies. Both are

undead, one is mindful the other is mindless. Cristina piped in. She seems to think that if these things are actually dead then they're a disease from Hell and Satan is somewhere on Earth. If the son of God can walk the Earth as Jesus, then a former angel of God can do the same. She got into a bit of a fight with Jack on that one and it spilled into Italian. I'm glad I kept my mouth shut because it sounded as though Jesus was able to convert many of his followers into mindless creatures and Satan has done the same. I know it's not exactly like that, but Cristina was saying that Jesus and Satan have been able to do the same thing, only Satan turned his followers into mindless drones that kill everything that isn't like them. Either way, zombies roaming the Earth does not prove that Satan exists. It only proves that there are zombies.

Rachel just came in with a weary smile on her face. She dug her thumb into the front of her shorts and pulled them out a few inches. "I've lost ten kilos since you arrived!" I went into the bathroom and found the scales. I've lost five kilos. I don't exactly have five kilos to lose! Those were essential kilos!

The issue currently facing Rachel is that her clothes are too big. Now, being a guy, I don't quite understand the problem there, you just put on a belt and go baggy. It's a tried and true method of the fashionably challenged. Rachel doesn't like that idea. She said she has to keep pulling up her knickers or else they would fall down to her ankles. I'm no scientist, but if she's wearing shorts then they wouldn't fall that far. I do appreciate that her bra strap slides down her arms and may be uncomfortable. She was talking about inadequate support. Apparently I should just trust her on this.

I was thinking about that pack of Maltesers again and I think I figured it out. Comfort food. A sense of normalcy. Having some chocolate during the apocalypse allows a few minutes where everything is okay, knowing that my life isn't actually in danger. I've been surrounded by coffee, laughs, great food, and people are starting to unwind in this house. It's a lot more relaxed here than it ever was in Madrid. Still as hot as balls though, only here we have air conditioning!

There isn't anything on the TV, just the news telling people to stay indoors. There's a curfew from dusk until dawn. The government is doing all it can. Online, things are different. There's

a video of a zombie in Barcelona saying the same thing we heard in Getafe from those two zombies. The same couple of words. 'Come' and 'Surrender'.

Ediz has a theory. "Maybe they were bitten by the same person. It could be some guy's last words as he died and now they're all stuck saying it because it's what they hear as they're dying and it's what they say as they're killing the next person."

"Why are they saying 'surrender'?"

"We're only hearing two words out of context. The guy, the first guy I mean, could have had friends over his shoulder and he's saying 'Come on! We will never surrender!' But now because his brain is mostly gone he can only repeat two words, again and again, like a song that skips two seconds when you play it, but it's the two important words that he's remembering. As he's biting other people they're hearing it and repeating it on to the next victim. Who knows, it could easily have been 'please.'"

If that's true, I wonder if the English zombies are saying, 'Pardon me.'

Anyway, I'm not sure how that would work but I guess anything's possible. Right now Africa is sounding better by the hour. We're only hearing about this mess in Europe, the US and Canada. Oh, guess what the Americans have been busy doing? Buying all the guns they can and supporting their Second Amendment Rights. I should've bought shares in Heckler & Koch a week ago.

### Part 3.

Lalla locked herself in the bathroom again, crying. Jack climbed in through the window and opened it up. No one is happy with her for locking us out like that, the selfish bitch. Why can't she just keep it together and think of other people, especially as she's a guest in someone else's house?

Ediz and I talked it over quickly. There's no way either of us want to head to Morocco with Lalla. If we have to put up with her bullshit and anti-social behaviour then it's just not worth it. She's about as useful as one of those zombies. So, if she gets us kicked out then we should ditch her.

Part 4.

I had an intriguing idea earlier and I'm glad I've now acted on it. I was trundling through the streets, staring at all the cars, thinking about the practicality of a zombie apocalypse. I tried to reason with myself that there is no way any government could let this thing explode out of control. In the movies the zombies seem to take over within a single day, leaving the survivors with whatever basic knowledge and skills they have. I can't do shit. I can sit at a desk, check invoices and answer the phone. As far as usefulness goes in an apocalypse I'd fall somewhere in the category of 'human shield'. I guess that's one reason why I've been struggling with this for the past few weeks – I am epically useless.

So I was walking around, coming up with scenarios and strategies, thinking about what I would do if a single zombie came around that corner, or if a horde of them started chasing us. Best thing I could do: jump into a van, hot wire it, bulldoze my way through them and out to freedom. If I get bogged down, grab a shotgun and start unloading on the fuckers. When I'm out of shells, use an axe.

Then a bout of reality came along and slapped me in the face. I can't hot wire a van. I've never fired a shotgun, nor do I really know how to load one. I've never properly used an axe. Even in my imagination I'm still as useless as a human shield.

I need maps. I need to learn how to hot wire cars and repair engines. I need to figure out how to repair a flat tire and not just change a flat tire (that one I already have covered). That was earlier today. Now, I'm glad to say, everything I could think of is printed out and stored safely in a waterproof plastic folder. In that pile are the secrets to building a fire without matches, how to build a shelter in the wilderness, how to dress wounds and broken limbs, how to eek out water from a desert, and everything else I could think of. In short: I have a guide on how to survive a zombie apocalypse. I have all of that already on my tablet, and in video form, but the electricity in this country has been unreliable.

I look at that stack of paper and think back to my other achievements, which don't amount to much even in the real world. I can fold a fitted sheet. I can type at 95 words a minute. I am a master of general trivia. I can bullshit my way through interviews. Can I use an RF scanner? Of course! That little lie got me a job. I

went home and learnt how to use one by watching Youtube. And, best of all, I can pull an all-nighter, get an A on assignments, and retain none of the information a semester later.

I've learned my name in Morse code. -- / .. / ... / ---

I'm still working on Rachel's. ... / .. / --- / .... / . / . . . .

I'm going to attempt to learn Cristina's and Ediz's tomorrow.

Ego aside, I've survived this long in a zombie apocalypse because there aren't enough zombies around and because my friends have been dragging my arse towards safety. It's time to step up my game.

You know what I forgot to print? Key phrases in other languages. Fucking hell. How did I manage to forget that one? I tried again and started shouting at the printer. The magenta cartridge was low so it wouldn't print in black. That's right, when one colour is gone all colours are gone. Who the hell designed this printer, Satan?

I'm going to go to Cristina and Ediz and anyone else I meet and get the top twenty most useful phrases to learn, and actually learn them. I hate printers. I may have punched that one a little too hard.

### 3 August

Rachel went to a store to buy new clothes, all cheap stuff, and threw out as much of her old clothes as she could afford. She said she can't lug eighteen kilos around anymore. She picked up three new t-shirts, three sports bras, three pairs of shorts and three pairs of knickers. She's keeping her socks and shoes. Everything else went into the trash. I guess she figures that she can wear one, wash one, have one to spare. She also threw away all of her non-walking pairs of shoes, her clubbing dress (which was expensive and only a month old), her curling iron, her make-up, a lot of her toiletries, just about everything. She replaced her stylish sunglasses with giant Jacki-O glasses because she kept squinting in the sunlight. All up, she spent a hundred euros. She's not going to ditch her laptop. I've been using it to type up some of my hand-written entries so I can email them to myself. If necessary I can tear out my old pages and use them to start a fire. If absolutely necessary I can tear them out and tell the police I was never in Madrid and they have no way to verify that (unless they check with the embassy, dumbass).

The weird thing about typing up old diary entries is that I don't remember writing them in the first place. There was so much that happened in Prague, Berlin, and Paris, so many people, so many nights of drinking. I did a bike ride through some forest in Berlin that seems impossibly distant now. Even in Madrid, Nadia went missing for a couple of days and Cristina had a shouting match with the landlady. I don't remember that happening. I'm trying to decypher my tiny, tiny writing.

We tried to leave Seville today but it wasn't possible. We bought tickets for a train tomorrow, heading to Santa Margarita, which Azeem assures me is towards Gibraltar. We gave some money to the Italians for food and allowing us to stay here. In the meantime, most of us are spending the day apart, taking it easy, trying not to kill each other with cabin fever.

If it wasn't for the impending apocalypse, Seville would actually be a great place to see at a leisurely stroll. They've got the Plaza de España which is frequently used in movies. It's a giant curved building / walkway that has the same kind of vibe for tourists as the Houses of Parliament have back home. There's a Gothic cathedral here that is the largest in the world. People were lining up for miles to go in and pray, hopefully to call for an end of the walking dead.

I've been learning a few Spanish phrases. I decided that I have been complaining about it for so long, I should actually shut up and learn something. Rachel told me that it would take two thousand hours of practice and study to be basically fluent in Spanish, or Italian, or French, or any western European language. I don't expect to ever be fluent in anything other than English, but after all of this time in Spain I should have something to show for it.

It was 45 degrees today. I wish I was making that up.

On a disquieting topic ... Rachel's previous roommates. We were looking over some old photos with the three French kids, Katy, Sofia, and everyone else. I hope they're okay. We have no news of them. We still have their email addresses, phone numbers, and addresses, but they haven't emailed any of us yet. It's weird how I ended up with Cristina and Ediz, and how we all stuck together. It could have easily been myself, Rachel, Katy and Sofia. We may have headed in another direction or stayed in Madrid.

I wonder if Louise made it back to Ireland.

4 August

Ah, England. The white cliffs of Dover. The overcast drizzle from a perfect summer's day. The general attitude that everything is going to be a bit shite. How I have missed you.

Too bad I'm still forced to fucking miss you because I have yet to leave stupid Spain.

The train was cancelled. There was a zombie on the track, heading towards us. I can't believe how people are reacting to this. So what if there's a zombie on the track? Run him the fuck over!

We were on the train, all of us, all sitting down waiting to depart. The doors were wide open and I even closed my eyes to try and sleep. I must have dozed for half an hour when I felt a tap against my leg. Rachel woke me up and said we were now pretty late. Sure enough, the driver came through each of the cabins and asked us all to leave, saying there was a problem with the track. We can line up for a refund. Yay. They won't be able to book us on any new trains until they've sorted the problem and cleared the track. This is the same thing that happened in Atocha and that went to hell, with all of us running away while the soldiers freaked out from being outnumbered and overwhelmed.

Azeem is looking around for a bus. They're operated by a different company. We're going to lose our train money, that's for sure. Nice little scam they have going on.

Part 2.

We're at the airport, still in Seville. The bullshit train fiasco started at 9am. Now it's 9pm. We've been sitting in the airport for six hours. Azeem called Carlos. He said we'll be able to fly out. All we have to do is pass quarantine and head home. Only home. They won't let anyone fly anywhere else.

What the fuck is the hold up? We're willing to pay these bullshit fares, why can't we just fly home already? Just fill out your paperwork and let us go on our way.

This of course means that our foursome plan of sticking together no matter what is now over. Rachel and I will leave Cristina and Ediz. There's just no way around it. They're going to have to do the same.

Cristina hasn't said anything in an hour. She's just staring off into space with a scowl. Looks like she has a headache.

Rachel keeps running her hand over her forehead.

Ediz has a Rubik's cube.

Azeem is leaning back with his eyes closed, dozing.

Lalla uses her toilet paper more to wipe her face than for wiping her arse. She can't have any of mine if she runs out.

It's busier than Atocha in here. People have been camping for days. That can't be at all smart. All it would take is one fast moving zombie to break in and it would be a feeding frenzy. This place has to be a complete safety hazard. It would take an hour to evacuate everyone if there was a fire.

The line to the bathroom is huge.

It was another 45 degree day. At least we have been inside for most of it, but there's no air conditioning and no breeze. We've just been sitting in our own puddles of sweat.

There's a fight going on at the far end of the terminal.

### Part 3.

Lalla has a scratch on the outside of her wrist and she doesn't know how she got it. Ediz insists that it's just her nervously scratching herself, which sounds logical. Only it's a pretty vicious scratch, not like a single swipe with your fingernails, but something that's been building continuously for days. Lalla looks like she's ready to crack at any moment from the pressure of the walking dead. This scratch of hers didn't do her any favours. I think it's time we left her behind. All she does is lock herself in the bathroom so she can cry and wail.

I dug into my pack, pulled out some disinfectant, and covered Lalla's scratch with a large band-aid. It's not much but at least it will stop her from poking at it again. The moment she realised that I helped her she started moaning about how she'll be spotted by the doctors and nurses. Any wound is a fast track to the quarantine area and she'll be locked away for days to prove that it wasn't a zombie bite. Well, bitch, keep it covered. I don't care how you do it, just do it.

She never even said, 'thank you'.

5 August

They're kicking us out of the airport.

6 August

I just had to fight tooth and nail to keep my diary. Cristina told us that to actually get anywhere we need to move as quickly and as lightly as possible. This isn't just for our comfort, this may be a situation where, on a plane, we won't be able to use the overhead compartments so we'll have to carry them all the time. If someone in authority sees that our bags are too big we might be delayed. So Cristina told us to get rid of absolutely everything.

Since the four of us (we're not counting Azeem and Lalla, since they're trying to get to Morocco and we're not) are in this together, we have to tell everyone what we're keeping and why. We've become sharers, apparently. Secretly, I think it's because Ediz had a quiet word with her about leaving people behind. I find that amusing because it's something I talked to Rachel about last night. I wasn't dumb enough to write it down anywhere and I'm glad I didn't. Cristina wanted to know what I've been writing about in case we get stopped by the authorities. Maybe I've written something that will incriminate us. Rachel had to talk me down from a fight and we all agreed that we could keep one item of personal value. This diary is mine. Everything else belongs to the group.

We all kinda broke down after that and decided that we're in this together. No one is leaving anyone behind. No one. Ever. We had to clear the air about whatever distrust we had about each other.

Deep breath.

"I'm afraid that everyone here has a very clear usefulness in the group except for me and that I'm seen as the tagalong, the one that you're all stuck with out of sheer politeness. When that politeness becomes too much to handle this whole 'no one is leaving anyone behind' thing is open for renegotiation. You may all split apart some time in the future but I will be the one that is purposefully left behind."

There were no soothing words from the others after that. Instead, it was Rachel's turn to confess. "I think you're going to leave us again."

Ouch.

“I won’t.” I could promise until I turned blue, but sometimes fears never go away.

Ediz’s turn. “England and Italy have been real assholes to the Turks for a loooong time. Even though you three had no part of it you ... you guys like me because you know me. But I came to Spain to learn Spanish. When I first arrived I was determined not to speak a word of English. If I had stuck to that you all would have just not bothered with me. And if I suddenly turned around in Atocha and said, ‘Hey guys, I actually understand everything you’ve been saying, let’s stick together,’ you would have thought that I was an asshole, even though: no, I was just trying to focus on Spanish. Thankfully you never said anything bad against the people who don’t speak English as well as you do but you also say just one word to them and then nothing again. I like you both, but I think as a whole English speakers have learned that using their native language can get them through doors that are denied to those who were not born in the right country to learn English from birth. Only now you two are seeing that doors don’t automatically open to you because of where you’re from, and the longer this goes on the more doors will close in your face. You will feel outraged but you won’t realise it’s because your free pass has run out and you have fallen to the same level as everyone else. People don’t like losing their place in life, they only like to go upwards. I think it’s going to get a lot worse for you two and when you become lost you will quickly become a hindrance. That’s what I’m afraid of.”

Cristina was last. “I’m afraid we’re going to promise to help each other no matter. Then the day will come when I need a doctor. I’ll be in too much pain to walk. I’ll be useless to you three. You’ll decide that it’s better to leave me because it’s easier than taking the risk of finding a doctor. You’ll promise that you’re going for help but you’ve already decided you’re just going to abandon me instead. So, yeah, we’re all helping each other right now, but that’s because no one has a broken leg or has a cut that needs a hundred stitches. When that happens it’s ‘leave the weakest person behind.’”

Isn’t clearing the air a wonderful thing?

So we’re all trying to get to different countries. Ediz wants to go back to Turkey, Cristina wants to get back to Italy, and Rachel and I want to go back to England. We got kicked out of the airport so who knows when any of that will happen.

As I was going through my pack and laying it all out for everyone to see I found an old snowboarding pass from when I was nineteen from Canada. That wasn't so bad, but it did give Cristina a chance to say: "See? You've been carrying that around and who knows what else you've got in there that you're not even aware of." I found a 256MB camera memory card and I have no idea how long that's been in there for. If it was 256GB it might be a little more useful, but only megabytes? I found a couple of mangled tissues and an empty Panadol wrapper. Aside from that, the backpack had been adequately slimmed down.

My wallet, however, was embarrassing. There were three condoms in there that expired a year ago. Two of the packs had been rubbed open and were dry. There's an emergency £20 tucked away in case I need to take a taxi home from somewhere. There's an old library card from my previous address, a return ticket for the Tube that's still unused, a student ID that expired a year and a half ago - seriously, what the hell am I doing with that? - a key to my old flat that I swore to my roommates I didn't have, which ended up costing me a couple of pounds to get a new one cut or risk losing our deposit, a receipt from a bar tab that I paid for and the lads were supposed to reimburse me for (they didn't), and a mish-mash of currencies. There's of course my usual ID, driver's license, bank card, and gym membership that I probably should have cancelled months ago. The rest is absolutely unnecessary.

Cristina was right. I have been carrying a lot of crap with me. Now it's gone. Thankfully she was impressed with my printed maps (I have one of Gibraltar and the surrounding area, plus one of Seville). She also liked my list of phrases in other languages and the skills I've been brandishing about, like how to light a fire, how to perform first-aid. I have a kit. No one else does. That puts me firmly in the 'essential' category. No more human shield for me!

Rachel had a good laugh at me when I pulled out my condoms. I kinda wish I had been able to do that in private, but no, we were all doing this at the same time so no one could sneak anything by the others. Drugs, I'm guessing, in case someone gets searched. Despite our desperate need to share everything we are still being as private as possible. They all had similar stuff to me, things that have been hiding there for years. Ediz swears that from now on he's only going to pack two shirts, two trousers and two pairs of shorts.

Rachel found an earring in her pack that she lost years ago. She

also found her return ticket to England which should have been used yesterday. That's sent her into a mild nervous panic. She's hoping someone will still honour it and send her home. No one has talked about what happens when we all need to separate, because that situation will come up eventually. Obviously if Cristina can get to Italy then she should go, even if we can't go with her. The same with Ediz. I'd rather not think about what will happen if there's only one seat left on an England-bound flight and that it'll be the last flight for a month. Maybe we'll flip a coin.

No, Rachel should go. She let me stay at her place for much longer than either of us expected. And I kinda have to do that stupid manly thing of women and children first. I abandoned her once, the day of the Atocha riot. I can't really leave her behind again.

Anyway, Cristina said the point of the exercise today was that we should be willing to open up our bags to anyone, especially anyone of authority, to allow us to move on quickly. The more crap we have, the longer it'll take to search us. And as a final note, she suggested that we each go through someone else's bag. I declined, so did Ediz, so did Rachel, since we'd all seen what we're all carrying. There's no need to go through someone else's sweaty used clothes looking for contraband.

It's a weird thing, really. We're actively living through a zombie outbreak. You would think that everyone in sight would be shagging like bunnies because it's the end of the world, but no. We're hot, sweaty, sleep deprived, and have been on full-blown stress mode for almost two weeks now. Showers are infrequent. The only music we have to set the mood is whatever was on our mp3 players. I've found that Slayer doesn't help to explode knickers from a girl. Pink Floyd might. I have seven hours worth of a storm from inside a cathedral, but that's to drown out a train ride or some asshole snoring nearby.

There's certainly no space for romance since we're in each other's faces all the time. The only candlelit dinner is because the power's off. The massages are because we've strained a muscle. There isn't enough wine in the world to convince any of us that we aren't frustrated, bored, sweaty, dehydrated, tired, in agony, and in desperate need for a spa. Rachel and Cristina both went to the bathroom and later threw out their razors, so I'm guessing now is the last time to seduce them before it's bush central. But, honestly, I'm so exhausted I probably couldn't get it up if they were both willing to go through with a threesome.

I see a lot of post-traumatic stress on everyone's faces. Having said that, it wouldn't be post-traumatic, since we're still in the traumatic environment. It's just 'stress'. They can probably see it on my own. It's hard to sleep and not just because of the heat. I wake up at the slightest creek thinking that the police or army are here for me. I'm less concerned about the zombies wandering around. No idea why. It just doesn't seem real. In the tunnel I saw someone die right in front of me and I keep thinking I should've helped them. There was a gurgling sound from the blood. I can still hear it and the shouting, "Hey! HEY!" when he realised what was happening to him. Then came more of a grunting kind of sound. It wasn't from the zombie. The guy being attacked ran out of things to say and was simply shouting some kind of noise like a gasp. It was the shock of realising that something was trying to eat him alive.

Whenever I drift off fully to sleep I wake up thinking that I'm supposed to help or that someone is pushing me to help - literally pushing me. Either I'm there as an unqualified medic or, yeah, a human shield. Either way I'm the next person in line to be attacked. It's just the noise I can't get away from.

I've had conversations with friends about a bar room brawl, that I will jump in if someone needs me and I expect them to do the same. The worst that will happen is someone glassing you in the face. There was never a conversation about what to do if a zombie has you. Probably because we all know that it's every man for himself.

I wake up and immediately try to remember where my pack is. I curse myself for not having it closer. I've fallen asleep with it in another room far too many times. I leave it to go and have a shower. What if that's when I need it the most?

There's something in me that seems to have been switched off as well, namely caring about things (otherwise known as emotions). I seem to be just in action mode, hearing about horrendous things and not caring about them, like the good old British way of doing things. Lalla seems to have suffered the opposite problem, caring about everything, which in an apocalypse is not a great approach.

It's around this time that I'm seriously missing the likes of Indiana Jones to save the day. Or better yet, The Doctor! He can whisk us all away in the TARDIS and solve the zombie epidemic all in one go.

Just in case anyone finds this diary and I am incapable of saying it, please feed me a giant burger and chips with melted Danish blue

cheese on both the burger and chips, no gerkins, no beetroot, no egg, just the buns, lettuce, burnt onion, patty, bacon, and Danish blue cheese. To go with that, I'll start with a pint of lager, move on to a coke, and wrap it up with a cappuccino.

And if anyone is feeling generous with that request, please also provide a foot rub.

You wouldn't believe how much waiting around there is during an apocalypse. Maybe I should buy a pair of knitting needles to while away the time. It certainly worked for my gran.

7 August

The other day there was no transport of any kind, now they're making up for lost time. There are trains everywhere, buses galore, and all the roads are now open. No planes though, it's all inter-Spain. You could hear cheers and cries of joy all from over the city when the news was first announced. I'm not sure why, I assume most people live here. Maybe they're just tired of all the tourists lounging around, clogging up their train stations and airports. I am sick of that as well. Stupid tourists. They're everywhere I look.

The government finally caved. Food was more of an issue. It really was a bone-headed idea to lock everyone in with only a handful of dead people disrupting the peace. I mean, there are something like fifty million people in this country and probably less than fifty zombies walking around. It hardly seems fair to punish everyone. But that is quite the typical knee-jerk reaction we've seen from governments as of late. The borders are still closed, though.

We're on a bus now, heading to Gibraltar. Lalla and Azeem are with us. In theory we should just be able to walk across the border. If not, maybe we can swim there.

I think someone behind me just threw up from travel sickness.

Part 2.

Roads are closed. We're turning back to Seville. We were only on the road for half an hour.

8 August

The Spanish President, Hernandez something, just came on TV and blew our minds. He admitted trying to silence the media regarding this 'outbreak' (he avoided all words relating to 'dead', 'horror', 'zombie' and 'riots'). He tried to explain his actions as in keeping with the rest of Europe, that they thought they were dealing with a medical outbreak that spread like the flu with some unusual symptoms. The sick walked around in delirium, in a semi-catatonic state, stopping only once in a while to speak to people.

The part that blew our minds was that he confirmed that these people were speaking in unison, not as some sort of cult or hoax, but were doing it all over the world. In the same voice. Literally the same voice. So somewhere in the world is a guy speaking telepathically and his voice is coming out of every zombie still standing. They're trying to identify the owner of the voice.

Let me just say how many fucking nightmares that's going to give me. Someone might actually be telepathic. Someone might actually be able to speak through dead people. Someone is using their skills to say 'surrender'.

Fuck. I just ...

How the hell am I going to sleep tonight knowing that there is a telepathic madman out there commanding a horde of zombies?

Is it the Devil? Everyone around me seems to think it is.

Hernandez then gave us the official figures from around Europe. Despite my language barrier it's still pretty easy to see a flag of a country next to a number of presumably walking deceased.

Spain - 231

France - 612

Germany - 179

Italy - 21

Portugal - 232

UK - 1,003

Canada - 78

U.S. - 740

What the hell has happened in England? Over a thousand? How could a country that's been on full alert after terror attacks and student protests and economic meltdown protests have managed to lose over a thousand people? Is it the same for the other countries, only they're not reporting the actual truth? How can Italy be doing

so well compared to her neighbours? I'm calling bullshit on Italy right now, those figures can't be right.

Either way though, everything is significantly worse today than it was yesterday. Yesterday we had a chance at flying out of here. Now? No way. England is under quarantine. They're not letting anyone in.

The BBC said there was a curfew in major cities and cameras were being set up to catch any more of the infected. The military has been mobilised and is on almost every street corner.

Oh, and get this ... our delightful Prime Minister has effectively ended every military occupation that England is going through right now. Seeing that home is much more of an important issue than fighting in the Middle East and Eastern Africa he's announced plans to immediately bring all the troops home so they can go on active duty to protect England from within. The flights began yesterday but the bulk of troops won't start leaving their locations for another two months. We're abandoning the countries we ripped apart. And he wants us to leave the European Union so they can take care of things on their own!

America, meanwhile, is saying that their commitment in these regions is still strong. You know how you have to occupy a country to stamp out communism and terrorism? Well, you have to do the same for zombies.

A thousand people in England. Jesus. How are they going to deal with a thousand rabid people with one voice? If they all have the same telepathic madman guiding them then there will be a plan. An objective. They'll go after the Houses of Parliament. They'll go after the Royal Family. They'll throw themselves at military bases and power plants until everyone has run out of bullets. They'll shut the country down and bring it to its knees. And then what? Turn us all? Lure us under the false promise of safety? Box us in and then let one zombie go crazy on us?

11 August

With flying to England something of an impossibility right now, we're on our way to Gibraltar. Azeem and Lalla are still with us. We're walking. That's right, we're walking two hundred kilometres to Gibraltar in the middle of the Spanish summer through something that feels like a desert. We're not the only ones this crazy

either. There are around fifty people in our group. A couple of cyclists zip by every now and then. Even the cheapest of bikes probably cost a thousand euro these days.

I've walked by a sign that has various destinations in kilometres. I keep thinking it's in miles and that we still have to go farther than that. God, that depresses me. Then I remember I'm not in England (you'd think all of this sunlight would be a reminder), then I perk up. Kilometres are shorter than miles! Then I remember that two hundred of anything is still really fucking far. It's the entire width of Ireland.

No buses are running. They're out of petrol. Because of the whole country going into shut down, no one was delivering any petrol, or at least not enough of it. Everyone else has stocked up and is saving it for an emergency. The price has tripled since I arrived, now standing at €5 a litre.

The trains aren't much help either. Most are on a reduced schedule, despite a previous build up of activity. They're saying that some of the tracks have been damaged or vandalised. There were images of zombies on the tracks smacking them with axes or clubs, trying to break them apart. Even if that happened in just one location it's managed to shut everything else down because no one is willing to risk overlooking a missing section of track and cause a couple of hundred deaths, especially when there aren't enough ambulances or hospital beds available. Any casualty would quickly become an abandoned fatality.

So that leaves walking. We all chipped in to buy a tarp, some cord, and a couple of collapsible poles. We're all walking whenever it is cool enough to do so. We stop at 10am and quickly set ourselves up in a camp, then hide under the tarp like it's a tent. Then we sweat out the day until 4pm. It doesn't get much cooler at night but at least we're out of the harshest of the sun. We then walk again for as long as possible. Some people keep going when others stop, some need frequent breaks.

As soon as we sit down I cook up a batch of rice. And by 'cook' I mean: pour a cup of rice and two cups of water into a pot, leave it in the sun for half an hour, and hope for the best. Rachel took the salt and pepper shakers from the apartment in Callao. Thank god she did because this mushy slush that can barely be considered rice needs all the flavouring it can get. I share what I have with the others and get to work making a second batch, because one cup of rice does not

go far with six people. If any of the shops are open in Gibraltar I'll try to pick up some curry paste.

This is our second day. It's the middle of the afternoon and most of my handwriting is smudged with sweat. We were unable to sleep for the middle six hours yesterday because people kept talking around us, or walking by. Sometimes we'd hear trucks honking on their horn to make sure no one was walking onto the road. We did hear a slam on the brakes, quickly followed by a lot of gasps and shrieks. None of us were willing to see what happened. I'm guessing there is at least one less person in the world after that mishap.

We then walked for a few hours, rested, walked some more, rested, and collapsed in agony at around 11pm. The six of us slept until dawn, then we got back to it. 200 kilometres from Seville to Gibraltar: it will take us at least four days to walk, probably five.

There are a few non-Spanish people with us. Some are Spaniards trying to get home to their families, or just to get to somewhere else, but at least half of us are from elsewhere. I heard a Welsh accent this morning but didn't say anything. I'm thinking now it might be a good idea to talk to more people to see if they can help me and Rachel. I have to remember to be more proactive. Someone in this pack can help me, I know it.

Two hundred kilometres with a backpack. By foot. Kill me now.

## Part 2.

Rachel just grabbed onto me and made me promise never to leave her alone. Someone in earshot has given her a bad feeling, but I don't know who. A few days ago she and Cristina were wary of me after I helped to drag Lalla out of the bathroom. They've both had a couple of meltdowns since the walk began. Cristina has shouted at me a couple of times. Not sure why.

Rachel has timing, I'll give her that. I was just about to go off and find the Welsh guy when Rachel began blubbering. Half an hour later Cristina needed to pee so she brought Rachel and Lalla with her. I had to stand on guard, with my back turned and facing the sweltering sun with enough sweat dripping into my eyes to blind me. We all brought our backpacks. Cristina was using hers as a shield from the crowd of onlookers who weren't all that interested in giving her some privacy.

I can only imagine the end of the world is going to jostle even more screws loose in people's heads. They're already looting. They're driving like assholes. Some car crashes have ended in brawls to the death because free reign has been pushed open a few more notches.

The police are going to be too overwhelmed to deal with everyone going batshit crazy. We're now becoming too afraid to investigate when someone screams. We'll run for cover and hope it was just a random bystander being raped, somewhere out of sight, and not someone being turned into a zombie.

This morning there was this woman shouting and screaming at some guy. We all turned to see what was going on. It was clear that he knew her. He kept shaking his head and trying to walk away. She followed and kept shouting at him in another language. It seemed very much like a, "Don't you walk away from me, you bastard!"

Let's face it: his life was in danger from the mob. If she kept it up and found someone to translate then she could have said anything. It would have been her word against his. There was a chance of the crowd turning on him regardless of what the truth was. What a magnificent adult she turned into.

If some bitch points a false accusation at me and starts screaming lies then the mob will turn on me. I wouldn't have done anything, nothing at all, but if Miss High-and-Mighty hasn't had a waitress to shout at for days and all of her pent-up bullshit drama needs some release then I'm an easy target. She will have singled me out for a reason and I'll never know if it's because I'm a threat or if I remind her of some asshole she knows. As far as she's concerned everyone needs to learn their place and that place is to respect her, even though she hasn't done a single goddamn thing to earn that respect. Pointing the blame at someone doesn't earn it. Letting someone else deal with your petty bullshit doesn't earn it either. So what if your Xanax just ran out? Are you presenting us with a solution that we will actually be able to implement within the next ten seconds? No? Then sit the fuck down.

### Part 3.

One of my first culture shocks in the world was seeing some of my old teachers on a pub crawl. They invited me to join them. I got to hear Mrs Higgins and Mr Cartright slurring their words together like

they were old friends. The idea that they once got trashed at college and shagged anyone that would let them didn't even cross my mind until Mrs Higgins gawked at one of the waitresses and said, "Look at the tits on her!" Then Mr Cartright started sweet talking the lady in question. Somewhere in this bizarro-world I was instructed to call them Kerrie and Tony.

The next culture shock was landing a job. I was all 'yes sir' and 'yes ma'am'. Biiiiiig mistake, especially in a warehouse.

"Jesus H Christ. 'Sir'? Where the fuck have you come from, Eton?" Soon followed by, "Let me guess, your school was a Saint-Something, yeah?"

Indeed it was. St. Edmonds.

"Figures. You ever see a wrench before?"

Then I was quickly guided over to the despatch office, sat in front of a computer, and told to process this stack of invoices while guys twice my age unloaded the back of freight containers.

You know who needs to meet the guys at my warehouse? The screaming woman from today. She had the whole, 'I'd like to speak with the manager' vibe about her. The type who will ruin your life through gossip.

Yep, this little adventure of mine is hardly the stuff of legend. There's an apocalypse going on and one middle class guy is simply trying to walk to safety through a desert. Producers from Hollywood will be lining up buy that story, no question there.

I flipped through some older entries in my diary. It turns out I'm an idiot. I watched the *Resident Evil* pentalogy. One of the things I apparently learned was to stretch and warm up before facing zombies. Have I done any stretching in the last two weeks? No. Did I even do any before or after a six hour walk with a backpack the weight of a small moon strapped to my shoulders? No. Given that high level of stupidity, I'm willing to bet that I'm exactly that kind of moron who rummages through the basement of an abandoned house, ignores the blood-smearred hand prints on the doors, walks past the array of axes and farming shears, and then screams in shock when an undead hand jumps out from the shadows and grabs onto me.

I'm dripping sweat onto my diary. I'm also wondering what will happen when my last pen runs out.

As for this two hundred kilometre trip, Ediz says it'll be a story to tell the kids one day. Maybe his kids. Certainly not mine. I don't

want to remember the look on everyone's face here. People are collapsing all around me. Some have actually seen the dead roaming around. For the rest it's just been news. News of zombies, news of quarantine and border control, news of a single voice speaking on behalf of every dead person walking through the streets, news of the country going into lock down. These people are at breaking point and all they've had to deal with is everyone's imagination.

Lalla is way ahead of them, of course. She won't stop crying. All I want to do is walk in peace and quiet or sit under the tarp in peace and quiet and she won't stop crying. Cristina is on a knife's edge as well and is about to go full on Italian. I see her flexing and balling her fingers into a fist whenever Lalla starts blubbering again. But we can't kick Azeem and Lalla out of the group because we're all in this together, heading for the same destination. Azeem has already helped us. We owe him. He might be able to help us again. Considering he plans on spending another hundred and fifty kilometres trekking with Lalla by his side then I can only presume that he has the patience of a saint. Or that he's part of an ancient order of knights, sworn to protect the Princess Lalla and bring her back to her people, where she will unite them with the crystals of Rabat and defeat the evil wizard living in the mountains.

Or she's just a blubbering fussy spot who can't keep her shit together.

#### Part 4.

I managed to convince Rachel to come with me to meet the Welsh guy. After a little hunting around we found him. Liam, who's been working in Edinburgh for the last five years, came to Barcelona for a buck's night. He and a few of the guys got so hammered they missed their flight home. The remaining flights were haphazard, what with the dead walking around and causing a disturbance. A couple of his friends were so desperate to get back to Edinburgh that they took a train to Paris, or at least that was the plan. They texted Liam at the border and said they couldn't go any farther, so they were stuck in Figueres or Girona or something like that. I briefly remember seeing those names on the drive after Nice.

Liam has an ex-girlfriend in Portugal so he's trying to go in that direction. I don't know how lucky he'll be since all of us seem to be

heading south and Portugal is directly west of us. He seems like an okay guy, but he's very much someone who will spend his entire paycheque in the bar and then swear at the barman for throwing him out. Rachel says he kept leering at her chest. Her t-shirt is covered in sweat and she still has the chest of a fat girl in a body that is rapidly slimming down. I lost five kilos before Madrid from all of the backpacking and not eating a full meal at lunch. My clothes are hanging off me. God knows what I weigh now, considering how little we've been able to eat and how much we've walked.

Liam didn't like it when I told him we've seen a zombie talk to us, telling us to surrender. I can't imagine many people being thrilled to hear that kind of news, but it did send Liam into a conspiracy theory head spin, so I might keep my opinions to myself later on.

It got me thinking again about that documentary I saw on those monkeys where the scientists played with the status of the group. Right now these zombies are not as brainy as monkeys, but they used to be human. And, technically, no one stops being human. Even if you're dead, you are still human, right? But no one is going to recognise that these zombies have rights, because they are obviously not human, even though they are. They've devolved. They are a contradiction to humanity. They probably don't even dream. Animals dream. I've seen it in cats and dogs.

I've also seen some severely mentally handicapped people out there, the kind who never learned how to speak. Some are bed ridden. They can scream and cry out for help but they can't even form words or recognise anything more than their own name. Even the dumbest of dogs can be trained to recognise a few commands. So where does that place a corpse who can walk around and follow someone's orders?

Cristina wishes she had her cigarettes.

## Part 5.

I know this is probably all bullshit but I did a couple of classes focussing on communication, especially in the media. Most of what I took out of it was a side by side comparison showing the aftermath of a hurricane before law and order was restored. One picture showed a black couple wading through the water with supplies in a child-sized dingy. The other was of a white couple swimming out of a

convenience store. One caption detailed looters. The other detailed survivors. Guess which race was portrayed as the looter?

What I always found interesting was what was missing, kinda like Sherlock Holmes' attention was drawn to the absence of the dog barking, thus pointing him towards the criminal being known to the dog. There have been quite a few things unmentioned in the last couple of weeks. First and foremost is that there hasn't been a single reported case of a zombie raping a human. Now, that's the kind of thing that would propel a story to the front page, or at least to the first five pages, since it is truly a horrific and terrifying act. If a group of soldiers go in and kill a dozen civilians while on an operation, that's tragic but casualties do happen. If they go in and rape a dozen civilians then there is no forgiving them. Rape is one of the greatest weapons of war and there hasn't been a single reported case of it happening with the zombies.

Believe me, if you really want to turn someone into an enemy within the media, just mention rape.

"We have a viral disease that is putting people into a semi-catatonic state with severely reduced brain capacity while also making them hyper-violent when they get close enough to someone else," is the story they're going with right now and people are running scared. These people will turn into a militia as soon as their wives, daughters, and friends are specifically targeted. Is that how you control the situation? 'All zombies are rapists'. That would give everyone permission to go out and take care of the problem themselves. Every single undead creature would be decapitated within a day.

I could ask Rachel or Cristina which they think is worse: being killed by a zombie and potentially turned into one or being raped. But Rachel's still pissed at me for introducing her to Liam and Cristina is going through a nicotine withdrawal.

These things also don't hack off people's limbs as punishment or as warnings, as some mercenaries and slave owners have been known to do. They also don't share camaraderie. I haven't seen anything where two zombies are working together. Walking together, maybe, and until we see more of this one voice thing in action then maybe they will always be loners. So that's another thing that separates us from them. People share camaraderie, that's how we have the mob mentality without discussing our plans with everyone else. The zombies haven't befriended any animals, which is telling. I don't

think mankind could ever trust another creature that didn't try to befriend an animal, especially a cute little puppy.

There was a bible group meeting last night where the leader said, 'the one voice' was Satan himself, commanding the undead to do his bidding. So yay, aside from the Xanax deprived housewives sowing discontent with a simple point of their finger I also have to be mindful of the group two tarps away from me who can recite swathes of bible verses off the top of their heads.

I wish Cristina had her cigarettes as well.

13 August

This is one of the few instances where I'm writing while seeing what's going on, as opposed to writing after the event. We're still on the road to Gibraltar. It's 8:07am. There's something of a pedestrian road block up ahead that's starting to swarm around us. There are two army trucks' worth of soldiers staring at everyone who walks by. They're not stopping us, but like watching the aftermath of a car crash everyone is moving slowly to see something they don't really want to see. It's not hard to follow the trail of gasps and subtle points to the right. Just ten metres off the road are three bodies. All dead.

It is the closest I've ever been to a dead person who remained dead while also open to the elements. I've been to funerals and I had my hand on the coffin once. But I can see these people now, slowly decomposing. I'm close enough to remember their faces if I wanted to. They would have died screaming, or died being terrified, never realising that a few hours later a group of foreigners would be walking by, gawking at them. No one came to help these people. One of the dead women's skull is embedded a little too deep into the ground, as though she was stomped and her head was caved in.

One of them is surely a zombie. It's hard to know which one. All of their clothes are ripped and torn, covered in dirt with blood covering them. If I were to guess I'd say one of the two women was the zombie, that it got a hold of the other woman and started attacking her, then the man stepped in to fight it off and was attacked in turn. The man is farther away. It looks like the woman he was protecting was able to get away for a moment. The zombie continued attacking the man until he fell, then the zombie was able to get to the woman. That doesn't quite make sense, since the woman should

have kept running unless she knew the man. None of them have backpacks. They all look Spanish. I can't quite figure out the order of the attack, but they're right there, three dead people on the side of the road and we're all walking by. None of the soldiers are getting too close. There's one guy in a white suit wearing a mask holding something that looks like a camera. Maybe it's infra-red.

I only saw one dead person before Spain: Grandpa George. I don't think I will ever want to go to another open casket funeral for as long as I live.

If this thing really does take over the world I might be dead in a week. Hell, I might be dead in the next few hours. I could be stumbling around, walking after Rachel and Cristina, biting and infecting everyone I meet.

My feet are in agony. It's like I've broken all the little bones and my arches have completely collapsed. Every step forward is murder. I have a sweat rash up my arse and if I scratch it anymore I'll go insane. To add to my wonderful jaunt through the countryside I keep walking through someone's farts.

14 August

The police are here in one long parked convoy of cars. It's 5am. They've been here for two hours already. We were all camping when the convoy stopped and woke us up, flashing their lights and getting everyone's passport details, finding out where we came from and how we got here. Cristina told us to say Getafe instead of Madrid. I don't know what the police would do to us if they found out we had escaped from the Atocha riot and made it this far.

They've been checking names and where we live. We told them we're trying to get to Gibraltar. They're on the radio forwarding all of our details and they're not even close to being done. I don't know if we're about to be arrested or will be allowed to carry on. They have a couple of sniffer dogs with them checking everyone's bag, so we're standing outside our tents feeling degraded while the men with guns go through what we have to make sure we're not thieves. I doubt any of this is legal, but I'm also betting they have acquired emergency powers allowing them to better protect their citizens from us thieving foreigners.

Only one of the officers is speaking in English. I know some of

the others can speak it as well because they don't need a translation when any of us speak, but they only talk to us in Spanish. It's making me feel useless, being unable to communicate in their language. Even Rachel has resorted to English because she doesn't want to run the chance of slipping up in Spanish and saying something that will get her in a lot of trouble. It's going to take a long time to go through fifty people and check us all. Even when people duck off to take a piss behind a tree the police shout and tell them to come back, thinking they might be trying to escape.

## Part 2.

It's 8am. The police are still here and they've brought along a pair of army trucks with guys in white suits and masks, checking everyone's temperature, asking if we have any problems. I do actually have a problem. It hurts when I piss and it takes forever for it to actually come out. I might be bursting to take a leak, then when I whip my dick out and stand in front of a tree there's nothing for a couple of minutes as though my bladder has changed it's mind, then it shoots me with a stabbing pain as though I'm to blame for not being able to do this. Then, at last: relief. The tip of my dick burns. It fades but occasionally I can feel a dribble of urine down my shorts. There's no way I'm telling the military guys that.

## Part 3.

To pass the time, I asked Cristina if the girls in Italy are any different from English girls. She said of course. She also said the guys are different. English guys will show they are attracted to you by ignoring you. Then comes the occasional locked eyes and nod to show that they acknowledge your existence. Then after a year or so they will initiate conversation.

I did ask specifically if the girls were different and I got an answer about guys. So ... maybe she's trying to seduce me?

Rachel and I got onto talking about guys and girls as well. We're on a two hundred kilometre walk so eventually we're going to talk about getting laid. She said her last boyfriend broke up with her because they didn't have sex enough, so how often is not enough? I

told her that, in my opinion and mine alone, five times a week is good. I also said that I get resentful at the ten day mark without sex. That's if I have a girlfriend. If I don't have a girlfriend then I don't get resentful because the expectation is that if I have a girlfriend I should be able to get laid a lot more frequently than if I don't have a girlfriend. I asked her how often she thinks is a good amount. Twice a week. How often was she and her boyfriend having sex? About twice a week. Her boyfriend thought it was more like twice a month. I'm siding with him on this one.

I wonder if the apocalypse will cause a surge in the population. If the power's off and no one can go online then of course people are going to get drunk and bored enough to have sex. But that's in the safety of a house, not out here with the army poking things into your ears.

15 August

We're close to Gibraltar. We should get there tomorrow before 10am, assuming everything goes well. Right now, 'things going well' has a fifty-fifty chance. There were riots and looting in Valencia and Barcelona. I don't quite understand the mentality, but a lot of people were pissed off about the army being there when they want independence. Some people got together and started throwing Molotov cocktails at the police, which is a stupid, stupid move, so the police responded by firing tear gas and water cannons into the crowd. Buildings were set ablaze and it was your usual riot and looting thing that got out of control. A couple of officers were killed when one guy in Barcelona drove a car straight into the police line. Apparently there were four hundred arrests last night and, get this, one of the people they arrested was cuffed and thrown into the back of the van so quickly that no one realised they had just arrested a zombie. He could still be in the back of the police van for all I know.

I've been confused by a particular phrase that has been used a lot in the last couple of days. By the grace of God. I've been hearing it everywhere. At first I thought it was coming from the bible thumpers to help them survive this ordeal, but no. In Spain it's become synonymous with a darker meaning. General Franco overthrew the government, proclaimed himself the de facto regent of the throne, and slowly added royal traditions to his style. One of them was, 'by

the grace of God'. The Spaniards haven't forgotten that he led them through a fascist dictatorship through most of the twentieth century and they're starting to see it rise again. It might be through the actual military or it might be through this one voice person who, by the grace of God, has risen the dead to join his army.

Things are not as jolly in other countries either. There are a lot of religious groups claiming it is now Hell on Earth, or the Rapture, or a sign from the various gods that it's time for a regime change. Iran has taken the line of 'There are no zombies in Iran.' Sure. Despite the media reporting otherwise, Iran refuses to budge.

According to the news, Syria is all but lost. It's weird thinking that a month ago the worst case scenario was an unending civil war that would level the entire country. Now it's a civil war with zombies rampaging through the streets and terrorist groups trying to strap explosives onto the running dead.

It's hard to get a good idea of what's happening in the world when there are a hundred news stories happening in Spain that seem more relevant to the Spanish people. When we switch over to the BBC they focus on England with a brief look at Europe and an even briefer look at the rest of the world.

Saudi Arabia seems to be heading towards a bad situation. Gunmen have surrounded the palace and are trying to break in. It'll be interesting to see what happens when the US realises that it has the strongest military force in the Middle East with easy pickings nearby and the need to protect their oil interests. All it takes is a couple of zombies on the street and the population is willing to turn against their government. This is no longer a peace time world, either. This is definitely a war. That means whichever president or prime minister was elected into power either sides with the Might is Right policy or they step aside and allow someone else to rule with an iron fist.

There seems to be only one topic of conversation coming out of the US: 'How will this affect the election?' Yeah, no need to worry about the economy, pensions, or healthcare, we want to know how the President is going to stop the zombies. "We need to increase our presence along the Mexico border," was one answer. I'm sorry, I thought the question was about zombies, not Mexicans.

So far every hopeful in the running has said, "God told me to run for president." 95% of the people who run for president are never elected and 95% of the voters seem to forget that four years ago

someone else said, “God told me to run for president.” I bet they also forgot the guy who said the same thing four years before that.

If this goes on for another month half of the world is going to be thrown into a civil war while the other half will be on a global land grab as a way to ‘protect their interests’.

## Part 2.

Rachel just measured her stomach, chest, and thighs. She stared at the results and measured again. She now has a 32 inch waist. She still has huge breasts which seem to get in her way. She’s been complaining about her chest and hips as though her whole skeleton is shrinking and causing her pain. She described it as being squeezed by a boa constrictor.

My belt is practically down by my knees. Not really, but for the sake or argument let’s say it is. I’ve got my travel wallet on the inside of my shorts so I don’t get pick-pocketed. When I arrived in Madrid I had moved down two notches on my belt. Now I’ve moved two more. I’m almost skin and bones.

There are jokes thrown about of being worked to death. People wake up on the street after what should have been a night of drinking. They kinda recognise that work is somewhere down this road and they’re trying to get there before the boss shouts at them for being late. They just haven’t realised that they’ve died. And there’s no time to waste! There are Works In Progress reports to update, wages to earn, families to murder. They’re not great jokes, but they’re there.

16 August

We’ve arrived, sort of, at Gibraltar. We’re still on the Spanish side of the border. Gibraltar is two hundred metres away. There’s a small camp building in a park and that’s where we’re stopping for now. It turns out lots of people had the idea to head for Gibraltar. Not all of them are English speakers. Everything is so damn narrow here. The streets are only wide enough for one car to drive along. Lots of really small cars are parked on the pavement. The buildings hang over the

street and are close enough that you can high five your neighbour with a whole road between you two. The pavement is about as wide as my hips. There are a couple of restaurants within sight but by the looks of things they're into price gouging.

The landmass of Gibraltar is smaller than I expected. On the map it's like a rocky finger sticking into the Mediterranean. The rock itself looks hilariously out of place compared to the relatively flat surroundings. It's a shoe-shaped mountain standing five times as high as the tallest apartment building in sight. By the looks of things you could walk from one side of Gibraltar to the other in ten minutes at a very leisurely stroll. Even the park we're staying in is proportionally strange. It's a big square but it takes up a third of the land.

To our right is the Atlantic Ocean. To our left is the Mediterranean. I'm just a two or three minute walk from two major bodies of water. Thankfully there is a public bathroom just across the road that still works, though it hasn't been cleaned in a while and I've nearly thrown up upon every visit. I still haven't taken a dump in there. I'm afraid I might pass out from the fumes. There are concrete shells here that look like WWII gun bunkers. We're surrounded by palm trees.

The locals look at us with incredible distrust. They keep to themselves and we try to leave them alone, since we're invading their home town and taking up residence wherever we want. That doesn't stop a few of the lads from shouting at the locals, that we should be treated no different than anyone else. Apparently the best way to be treated well is to shout at the person who is wary of you. Bravo, chaps. Bravo. I'm ashamed that some of those arseholes are English.

Everyone is sweating balls. The beach could be a good place to spend the rest of your days unless you're pasty white like I am and burn easily. I'm not going to last long here. My hat looks ridiculous and the brim is always covered in sweat.

So here's the situation. We're setting up camp in the open garden/park area which offers no protection at all. There is zero security. A zombie can wander through and have its pick of victims. With all the tarps and tents blocking the view no one will know where it is or what it's doing. If that happens in the middle of the night, amid screams and panic, then we're just going to end up running into a zombie that's stumbling towards us. We'll be too disorientated to have a full escape plan. Rachel thinks we should run

for the beach. Have you ever tried running on sand with a backpack? No. And you won't want to.

It took longer than we expected to walk, given all of the police blockades and frequent passport checks. My sweaty arse rash is still with me, right between the cheeks. It's not like losing an arm in a hydraulic press agony, it's slow and painful like the Chinese drip torture method. It's just a constant misery. I might have to lie here through the night and just wait for my body to recuperate.

Word around the street is that Germany is starting to accept refugees and displaced European nationals. The only problem is that everyone else's borders are closed and no one can actually get to Germany. If the apocalypse had started just a couple of weeks earlier I would have been okay. Fuck, if it had started a month later I would have been back home counting my blessings.

It's been 35 degrees all day. There's a cool breeze coming from the water but even so, 35 degrees is a lot to deal with. Still, it's 10 degrees cooler than Seville.

Somehow I walked two hundred kilometres in the desert heat without dying. Go me. And yeah, one day I might tell the kids about it.

## 17 August

It was impossible to fall asleep last night. We've picked a bad location to camp. Any second now one of those things will find us. It won't be the walking dead that kills us, it'll be the panicked humans trampling over our tarp as we try to stand up.

There was a muffled scream last night. We all sat up and looked around. Some people stood up to have a look. After twenty minutes we decided there was no zombie out there, it was just a muffled scream. It may have been someone having a nightmare. One person's nightmare led to a hundred people living in a panic at two in the morning.

We lined up today to get into Gibraltar. It turns out, we were only lining up to apply to get into Gibraltar. They didn't even check our paperwork. They said to come back tomorrow.

I caved and spent money to get a few jars of curry paste. I just couldn't go another day of eating plain mushy rice. At least now I can mix a teaspoon of paste into the pot as it sits in the sun, ready to

be kicked over by someone who's not looking where they're going. We're burning through the rice quickly, though. Six of us to feed from just five kilos. We've already gone through half the pack. I don't know if I'll be able to get any more paste in the next couple of days. We'll have to make this last.

Despite the agony of sleeping in parklands, La Linea de la Concepción is quite a nice place to stay in. The buildings are all colourful and a mix of various styles of architecture, the town is mostly clean and the beaches are free of litter. The roads, however, are so narrow that I don't trust going down them at all. The only time I will is if I can see someone else walking ahead or behind me. All it takes is for one sprinting zombie to charge through those bottle-neck roads and the rest of us will be running over the top of each other like rats through a corridor, hoping like hell that we're not being guided towards another zombie.

I've been practicing some first aid from my printed notes. I tried it out by wrapping bandages around Rachel's hand, wrist, arm, and ankle. I'd been making them far too tight. I also have a method of making disinfectant from common kitchen stuff. Use warm water from a very clean cup. Add a teaspoon of salt until it dissolves. Mix well. Add a tablespoon of vinegar. If there isn't any vinegar, use fresh lemon juice. Dab some cotton wool into the mixture and wipe the wound. Watch your patient howl, hiss, and question your medical expertise as you pour acid onto an open wound.

18 August

We've been lining up and sitting in what little shade there is while every Englishman in Spain fills out his details, speaking to the officials here who do a background check, a health check, find out where we've been up to two months prior to the outbreak. If they think I've been through every country that's become infected then I'm fucked. Thankfully I did not go through every country that's become infected, no. I arrived in France two months ago, was passport checked on the border of Spain, and now I'm trying to go home.

In slightly more upbeat news, I've asked Cristina and Ediz for their best recipes, something that screams homemade cooking. Why would I torture myself like this? Because I'm hungry. Really, really

hungry. And dreaming about food is better than dreaming about zombie-Rachel chasing after me.

Cristina was kind enough to offer me her recipe for ragù. She insists there's an accent on the u. Like the Spanish ú? No. The one where it points up to the left. Obtuse, maybe. Not sure. We don't really have accents in written English. She says we sometimes do. I challenged her. *Café. Résumé. Soufflé.*

Okay, smartypants, do any of those have the accent going the other way?

“Ragù.”

“That's cheating.”

“Maybe. But if you make this well then every man and woman will want to have sex with you.”

“You have my attention.”

So, the way past someone's underwear is:

1 kilo of beef (not mince) that can be slow cooked. Get this from a butcher, she tells me. Not from a supermarket.

1 onion, diced

3 cloves of garlic, minced

2 carrots, diced

2 sticks of celery, diced

2 handfuls of actual tomatoes, crushed

1 pack of tomato paste

1 cup of red wine. She specifies that this is ‘adult red wine, not student red wine.’ I might need help then from a qualified adult.

2 cups of beef stock

A splash of water

3 bay leaves

Sea salt and cracked pepper. Not the usual black pepper you get in a little shaker that's pre-cracked, but the kernels. Crack it fresh, she says. Tastes better.

Cook the beef in a pot that's already hot for a minute and a half on each side, remove. Turn the heat down to medium low. Cook the onions and garlic for 2 minutes. Add the carrots and celery. After 5 minutes add in the tomatoes and paste. Then add the wine, allow that to cook through for a minute or two. Add everything else, including the beef. Simmer for 2 hours. At the very end add a splash of balsamic vinegar and a pinch of sugar. Taste. If it's too sour, add another pinch of sugar. If it's too sweet, add the tiniest splash of vinegar.

Don't serve with hard pasta you got from the store. Some stores do sell fresh pasta in the refrigerator section where you'll find yoghurt. Add a sprinkle of parmesan cheese once you have plated everything. Serve with wine.

"And eat with chopsticks," I said. She scowled at me.

Ediz's recipe is far easier to remember. It's a kebab. Take as much cooked lamb as you want, shove it into a soft tortilla made from durum wheat flour (no idea what that is), fill it with salad and sauce. What kind of sauce? My choice. Probably Greek yoghurt. How much? As much as I want. Prep it before getting kasnickered and I'll be golden. Brilliant. Makes me think I can find this Greek yoghurt next to Cristina's fresh pasta.

I asked Rachel for her best recipe. Barbequed chicken and chips from down the road, next to the sushi place.

## 19 August

Bad news. Rachel and I can go into Gibraltar, as can the other British or Commonwealth people, but no one else. So we're stuck trying to figure out what to do. Azeem and Lalla are trying to get to Morocco so they said not to worry about them. But what about Cristina and Ediz? We pretty much led them here. I made several promises that I can't really keep anymore. But there's a waiting list as they can't let everyone in at the same time. They just don't have the resources to feed and water everyone. Some are able to fly out, but not many.

Going into Gibraltar is definitely safer than staying out here, sleeping under a tarp with zombies somewhere nearby. I'll gladly sleep in that airport over there. There's stress on everyone's faces, waiting in the open, even when we're lining up. People aren't paying attention to what's happening in front of them, they're more concerned about what's around that corner, creeping up on them. We're starting to hallucinate from the lack of sleep. Death is getting here one step at a time. It may take a few days or a few months, but one of those creatures is going to make it all the way down here. We've already pushed ourselves to the edge of the map. The only option we have after this is to either storm into a house and force the occupants to let us stay or run into the ocean.

We've been sleeping in our clothes. Can't risk not to, considering that we may have to run for our lives at any given moment. The trick

is to keep t-shirts rolled up to allow as much air onto your belly as possible.

What's really annoying is that we can see the great big rock of Gibraltar at all times. It's not a piddly little thing, either. It's a great big fist of a mountain poking out of the flat ground and shallow water. I've been told it's a hundred metres taller than the Eiffel Tower. That's our destination. Right there. No matter where you are in this town you can see it, and it's *soooo* close.

It must be doubly annoying for Azeem. You can see Morocco from here. Well, not *here* here, but from the docks. That's his home. We're trying to get into a British colony so that they will find a way for us to fly back to London, whereas he's trying to figure out how to cross the fifteen kilometre stretch of water and get home. He spends at least an hour a day staring across the water, working out how to make that happen.

Maybe I should marry Cristina and Ediz marries Rachel. Then as couples we might be able to get to England. That doesn't really help Cristina or Ediz get back home but it might get them out of Spain. I can't imagine Gibraltar will accept that, though. It will be painfully obvious that it's a marriage of convenience, especially when they find out we've known each other for only a month.

My drawing is getting better. I mean, it should, considering how much time I've been sitting around with nothing but a diary and a pen. I've got a six hour stretch of time in the afternoon with nothing else to do.

I guess it's only a matter of time before a bunch of millionaire musicians get together for a Z-Aid festival. You know what they could do instead? Send their private jets to Gibraltar and bring me home.

I had an idea for the next round of ads that'll be on TV. "Always on the run? Never sure where you'll spend tonight? You need Morty's Invisible, designed to drive those bad smells away from whichever crowd has followed you." At this point I'll pop up on TV with a cheerful smile on my face. "It's a life saver!"

Then there's: "Ever have to sleep in your clothes? Tired of that salty rash feeling when you wake up? Try Benson's 2-in-1 to revitalise your clothes so they won't let you down." There'll be a quick shot of a formerly dishevelled woman who has just had a shower, has her hair wrapped in a towel, and someone hands her a soothing tea. My smug face will interrupt this beautiful moment because the entire

campaign has been built around me. "I wouldn't be here were it not for Benson's 2-in-1. It literally saved my life!"

Basically, everyone here sweats through their clothes 24/7 and there isn't much chance for us to wash them. Do you know what it's like lining up to Gibraltar, wearing an itchy Hawaiian shirt, while everyone else is wearing something sensible?

## Part 2.

Tanks have rolled into protect several Saudi Arabian cities. Rebels are being fought. The price of oil has jumped.

There's still nothing on this 'One Voice' person and we haven't seen a zombie in a while. Perhaps the various militaries of the world have a handle on the situation.

We're still debating. Cristina is desperate to get to Italy, Ediz is heading for Turkey. Rachel and I want to stay in Gibraltar. This is probably going to be goodbye.

Oh, and chances are, once we're in Gibraltar, Spain won't let us back in. It's going to take a few more days to process us.

## Part 3.

So as we're sitting here, moping about, it was time to come clean with everything. Let's say we're all going to die. What is something you need to get off your chest, no matter how awful it is? The kind of thing you would tell a stranger because there's no way that information will be traced back to you.

I, once, stole a thousand pounds from my roommate in uni. In my defence he did fuck my girlfriend on my bed and I used the money to move out.

Rachel found out that her dad isn't really her dad. She once threatened her mum with the truth.

Cristina had a Single White Female friend who worshipped her, so Cristina said she was dying to get a tattoo of an octopus because they're cool. The SWF got a tattoo of an octopus and Cristina stopped seeing her again. Cristina also gossiped like crazy and revealed everyone's inner most secrets, including someone getting an abortion. It backfired on her and she lost all of her friends.

Ediz got a couple of blow jobs while in Chueca. If his family found out he says they would disown him. Ediz is very much straight, he says. He was just drunk and some guys were simply pulling his pants down and got to work.

#### Part 4.

We can't find Lalla. One of our rules is to tell everyone where you're going. She didn't. She just walked off. Her backpack is here so I assume she plans on coming back. I think if she does we should kick her out for breaking rule number one. Azeem is livid and keeps calling out her name. He's gone from tent to tent asking if anyone has seen her. I can't imagine that's eased our neighbour's concerns, that someone is missing. They'll be keeping an eye on us in case she comes back as a zombie.

Cristina finally let loose on the anti-Lalla rant. Her walking off is a hindrance since we now need to waste our time to look for her. It seems to be all her, her, her. We need to come up with some rules to decide how we're going to act if someone really is missing. I want to be harsh and say, 'fuck 'em, they walked off, they're on their own for the rest of their lives.' Only I walked off a couple of weeks ago and had to come grovelling back. Lalla doesn't strike me as the grovelling kind. She'll just lock herself in a bathroom and cry until someone takes pity on her.

She's not in the bathroom, by the way. We checked. We also checked the beach. We checked the streets and the restaurants and all the tents in our little community. What a fucking waste of a human life. How did she even make it this far in life without someone strangling her?

#### Part 5.

There are people on the side of the road with signs in a mix of languages. They've been standing there for a couple of hours. The ones in English read, 'Hunger will overthrow the country faster than politics,' 'Countries don't shut down because of 100 dead people.' Others have their names and phone numbers of parents, telling them that they love them. It's not exactly the most cheerful of moods,

knowing that these people are preparing themselves in case they die.

We need someone to stay in our tent at all times, to protect our gear. We've had people walk by, pretending to be lost or forgetful. They look at me sitting here with six bags. They know they can take me. I know it too. I will have to fight back if they try to rob us.

Being here is worse than Atocha. More and more people are arriving and the camp is spilling into the street. The locals are shouting at us, telling us to go back home. No shit! What the fuck do you think we're trying to do? There are always people standing in front of our tent, talking loudly, farting with their arses pointing in our direction. They're standing too close for any of us to relax. Hey, fuck face, this is where I sleep, stop shouting a conversation and stop looking in on us and our six backpacks full of clothes that won't fit you. Just fuck off over there and leave.

As soon as they move away someone else comes along and stands right in front of us, as though we have the best location in town. We don't. We're near the street and far from the bathroom, which is a blessing because it stinks like the arse end of a music festival, so why the hell are they standing *right there?*

Liam, the Welsh guy from Edinburgh, came over and told two of the guys standing in front of me to fuck off. And not in a sympathetic way, but in a way that would guarantee retaliation. I told Liam that wasn't necessary. He looked at me like I had just taken a dump on my own breakfast, since I was complaining about those guys when he came over. He thinks he did me a favour. He didn't. He was sitting under the tarp and shouted (at the two guys): "Hey, what the fuck is wrong with you cunts? Fuck off from here, okay?" Does he not understand that someone might snap? And not just snap with an outburst of their own choice of language but rather they'll snap and beat the fuck out of someone.

We're almost out of food.

Still no Lalla.

## Part 6.

Some people from the town have come up on bikes with baskets of food. I think they're church people. One of them is certainly a priest, giving prayers and blessings to people who accept the food. They're handing out bread rolls and something that looks like a Yorkshire

pudding. I don't care if they're Catholic, I'm going to get some food and be blessed!

#### Part 7.

When this is all over I'm coming back here. I'll find that church they all came from and give a princely donation. Or at least €20. That should cover a bread roll and a dumpling pudding thing.

I've been staring at the photos I took while in Paris and Madrid. It's like a world away now. We were blissfully unaware of the chaos surrounding us. I can't look at them for too long or else my phone will die.

People are putting their names on boards and sticking them up on lamp posts, with their names, a phone number, and a message to a loved one. Rachel and I just put our names up there. Writing a message to your parents because you might not ever see them again did not cheer us up.

There are people coming up to us, all Africans, trying to sell stuff like packs of tissues, boxes of sweets, and other useless junk. They say, "Please" when they come up, or "Por favour." The sweets were expensive but I bought some. I had to. I needed some kind of pick-me-up after all this sitting around in my own sweat. I've been sharing them with Rachel, Cristina, Ediz, and Azeem. We also jumped at the chance of buying tissues as we're running out of toilet paper.

#### Part 8.

We found Lalla. Or rather, Azeem found Lalla. One of the Africans who tried to sell us some crap knew Lalla was from Morocco. He invited her back to meet his friends because they are from Morocco as well. Lalla went without telling any of us. She was probably bullshitted into going over.

Azeem is barely saying a word, he's just sitting here steaming. He had to go in and pretty much rescue her. Her friendly captors were trying to convince her that there's a boat to Morocco if she can come up with the money. Azeem shouted at them and said no. They're scam artists. He shouted, "Show me the boat!" and they kept saying, "The boat is coming, it will be here." Granted, he said this in

Moroccan, translated it after the event into Spanish, which was then translated for my benefit into English by Cristina.

What was probably once a small and idyllic park now looks like a depressed version of the Glastonbury music festival. Someone was snoring last night. Someone else blurted out, "Oh, for fuck's sake, shut up!" every ten minutes. Someone else eventually shouted, "Be quiet!" So, yeah, when it's the day time everyone talks. When it's night time everyone shouts. I really need one of those African guys to come around with ear plugs, not packs of tissues.

20 August

Wow, that was a waste of time. I spent four hours waiting in line to get someone from Gibraltar to talk to us. He said there are no flights, no boats, we're in the wrong place, go somewhere else. I kept insisting that I'm a British citizen and he kept saying that I'm from England, this is Gibraltar.

What the fuck is wrong with you people, I'm trying to get home! I have eleven days to get back to London before I risk losing my job. Scratch that, I have eight days left to fly into London and three days of being stuck in quarantine. I've been stuck in this shitty place for four days without moving. Four fucking days, only to be told that they won't let anyone into Gibraltar until flights are permitted to resume, and they won't resume until Spain let's them use their airspace. Gibraltar's border is closed until some other country can get their shit together.

We're almost out of food. We have little in the way of money. We have no transport options. We are about to tear this town apart and hijack a plane.

And if I have to play another game of Pato I'm going to scream.

Part 2.

Liam is here with us. He's still trying to get to Portugal (which is on the other side of the country and yet he's still here ...) but he seems to have become intrigued with our notion of getting into Gibraltar. He keeps coming over to talk to us because we're now friends. Great. Does he not understand that Rachel wants nothing to do with him?

He has nothing but crass stories to tell and thinks it's endearing. Now, if I was in a bar with a couple of drinks in me, this conversation would be hysterical, but I can see Rachel glaring at me whenever Liam comes over, which is pretty much every hour without anything in particular to talk about.

He was talking about starting a business together when we get back to England. A pub called 'Almost There'. Then he was talking about building wind farms off the coast of Scotland and getting ahead of all the major companies on that one. "We can do it," he assures me. What's this 'we' he keeps talking about? Is he utterly delusional or simply making small talk?

### Part 3.

We can't stay here forever. Rachel and I are trying to get back to England, not Morocco, Turkey, or Italy. We have to think of ourselves. If there are no flights back to England then maybe there's a boat. Either way, I'm feeling pretty pissed off with England right now. I just want to get home and they are telling me to fuck off. I'm an English citizen for crying out loud and they don't care. Perhaps they think they have enough English citizens.

I need to work on my mastery of Zen. Every time I sit down to write something I end up in a ball of molten fury.

We're going to run out of rice tomorrow.

### 21 August

Last night our bitch-face neighbour wouldn't shut up. She was joyfully having a conversation at 2am for the whole world to hear. She's a shouter. And a cackler when it comes to laughing. And she has no clue that hundreds of people currently want her dead. The only problem is we don't know what she looks like. She was telling someone this story about how she went over to this guy's place and got drunk. She stayed the night and Paul kept trying to make the moves on her. How often do you think she needs to reiterate 'fuck off Paul' for her listener to understand? Twenty times. "I kept saying, 'fuck off Paul.' I had to keep saying, 'fuck off Paul.' He moved in with his hands and I kept saying, 'fuck off Paul.'" Anyway, bitch-face

went to her car and sat in the driver's seat until Paul came and sweet talked her back inside. Then came another spate of 'fuck off Paul's before she ended up back in her car again. Paul, being the stand up gentleman that he is, came out, poured a bottle of wine over her windscreen, so she drove off while being too drunk to drive. She ended up down the road and around the corner where she promptly decided to stop and sleep for the night in the driver's seat.

Someone finally snapped and told her to shut up.

"Hey, maybe you shouldn't listen!" shouted bitch-face.

"Yes! That is *exactly* what I want! To not have to listen to your story about fuck off Paul, so shut the fuck up so the hundred people who can hear you don't have to listen!"

"It's my birthday so I can do whatever the fuck I like!" shouted bitch-face.

Zen. Need to be a master of Zen.

Aside from that we're waiting. Waiting, waiting, waiting, bored of waiting, holy fuck why are we still waiting?

One of the Africans came along with soap. They're the little packs you find in hotels and each bar is likely to run out after just three washes. We bought one pack which has five small soaps in there and shared them out. We then went in pairs to the Atlantic and washed up. I was able to take my t-shirt off and soap up my entire upper body, face, and hair. Of course, getting enough water in my hands without dissolving the soap was an issue and my hair is now clumpy with dried soap stuck and salt water sticking it all together. I was also able to wash my balls with a handful of water. My arse rash has eased and no longer feels like a sauna down there. I now smell like cheap-hotel, which is quite a step up from broke-backpacking-street-urchin. I could probably sell proper body wash for a hundred quid.

A little while ago one of the restaurateurs came up to the park. We're all hungry and irritated at waiting. The restaurant guy told us there is a fresh batch of sea food being cooked up on a wood fire grill. Lots of paella. Lots of fish. Rachel, Cristina, Ediz, and I went off to get some. Azeem asked us to bring back some food for himself and Lalla while they mind the tarp. The food is expensive, like €35 for a plate of fish and rice. I haven't had anything fresh to eat since the church people came and handed out bread rolls, so I won't complain. What I can complain about is having less than €300 left, so I can't afford much more. At least here they can fish and grill without needing petrol or electricity.

I had my first espresso in days and it was heavenly. €5.50. I'm pretty sure I could buy a pack of espresso from the supermarket for that price and it would last two weeks. But, for once, sitting on those benches, looking out into the ocean, finally at or near Gibraltar and having a reasonable meal with a hot coffee ... it was divine. My headache went away. I didn't realise I even had one until it lifted. Must have been the caffeine fix all of a sudden. I'm in a much better mood because of it.

There is a chalk board outside with a list of locations and an update on the official count of zombies. People are writing out their names and next of kin on pieces of paper. The manager of this restaurant is taking all of the paper and storing it, promising he will contact those when he can and email them.

There's a map of Africa there with dots and scribbles from people showing where they all come from or where they travelled to. I must admit, I know fuck all about Africa. I know where Morocco is and that Casablanca is there. I know about the pyramids being in Egypt, I know that Star Wars was filmed in Tunisia, that the Congo is to be avoided, as is Zimbabwe and Somalia, and that South Africa is full of white people right down the bottom. I probably know a couple of other names of countries but they don't jump at me. Aside from that, I know shit about Africa, which is unfortunate. I know shit about central Asia as well, although I don't feel so guilty about that. It seems as though we've all seen the documentaries of humanitarian crisis in Africa, so we're supposed to feel guilty about that area, but no one ever speaks of central Asia where all of the 'stans live. No idea how to feel about those places.

There isn't much to do here except wait and distract ourselves, so Ediz suggested a game with the African map. We each try to name as many of the countries as possible without looking at the map and see how many we can get. I got nine (and have since forgotten what two of them were). Ediz got to thirty. I don't think I can even list thirty European countries.

Nope. I got to twenty. Either there aren't thirty countries in Europe or my brain has died from shock, lack of food, or it's the sweltering heat that keeps dripping sweat onto my diary.

At least I'm clean, though. Clean, caffeinated, and fed. Totally uncertain about the future, not even sure if I'll be able to eat anything in a week, but at least right now I'm doing okay. Even Rachel and Cristina are in better moods.

Whenever we go for a walk around the streets we have to take our backpacks with us. We just want to see what our options are. Mentally, I'm trying to map out escape routes and see what connects to what. We get shouted at by just about every local. Maybe they think we're coming to rob them, maybe they think we're trying to find an empty house to break into. We can't do too many walks because every time we come back to our camp site people seem to be getting closer and closer to our spot. It won't be long until they move in completely and try to take our place. Ediz will say, "Six people are here."

They will say, "There's only two of you and five of us. Move over."

"We're saving that space."

"There's no saving. They're not here so they lose it."

I need more coffee.

## Part 2.

I've been standing in the line for Gibraltar again, now for two hours. The guards are telling us that there are still no boats and no planes and they won't let anyone in until there are boats and planes available. In the meantime, I've been studying the hell out of my Internet notes. In theory, I can now hot wire a car and pick a lock. I don't have any picks or tools to break open a door, but I understand the theory. And if I find a magnifying glass I can start a fire with the sun. I'm learning how to make traps and how to hunt. It's still all theory, since I can't make a fire out here and there aren't any rabbits worth catching. Ugh, what if one of those rabbits is covered in zombie fleas?

## Part 3.

I've come back to the camp site and once again we're counting off the countries we know, continent by continent. We also try the capital cities but it's boring listening to people say the same places over and over again. There's still no electricity.

Liam has been sitting outside our tarp for an hour as though he's moving in with us whether we like it or not. He's brought some

people with him. There isn't enough space here for him and his dickhead friends. I keep fearing that every time I line up to get into Gibraltar I'll be turned away only to find that Liam's friends have taken our spot and have managed to kick us out.

Ediz was asking me why I still write a diary. It gives me something to do, I guess. I started writing a diary in high school and never stopped. One day my life might be interesting enough for an autobiography, but right now I'm in the middle of something that everyone else is going through and I'm not doing anything remotely heroic about it. I'm just plodding along.

22 August

I woke up with incredible abdominal pain and hurried outside the tent without my backpack, turned back and had to grab it. By then Ediz, Rachel, and Cristina were awake and convinced that I'd seen a zombie or a soldier and was making a run for it. I ran to the public toilet and had to take a dump with my backpack sitting on my lap because the floor was absolutely rank with filth. I must have been in there for an hour, squeezing and trying to go. Even when I pissed it came in drips and drabs, barely anything. I also noticed there was no toilet paper so I rummaged through my bag to ready a pack of pocket tissues. After bursting a vein I passed something that felt like a solid pebble. Then, with the force of a thousand suns, everything else came gushing out. After that little episode it felt like someone had wiped my arsehole with a Guatemalan insanity pepper. I might actually need to see a doctor soon. I was sitting on the can for so long my legs had gone numb. Took five minutes to stand up.

I have since spent the day lying under the smelly tarp feeling hotter than anything, trying to sleep and not move. Maybe if I don't move I won't feel hungry or thirsty.

Cristina is finally at the stage of not caring and got changed in front of us. She said the bathrooms smelled so bad that she can't go in there. Good God she is stunning. I caught a reasonable sight of her arse and some side-boob. She was careful not to look at anyone, despite there being five other people in the tarp.

The even better news is I haven't seen Liam all day.

23 August

Liam woke me up early. Rachel rolled over and huffed. I had my game face on of being unimpressed with Liam, hoping he would pick up on the signal, but he actually had something worthwhile to say. There are a few restaurants in the area offering jobs. We would have to carry the crates of fish from the boats to the restaurants, as well as any wood or coal or fuel that the restaurants need, and they will feed us. In exchange for an hour or two of labour they're offering us a free meal. I hadn't eaten yesterday so I agreed. I tapped Rachel on the shoulder, told her what I was doing, and got Ediz and Azeem to help. The work was pretty tedious, just carrying crates of fish from the shore to the restaurants and back again. The restaurants sometimes use vans but with petrol being a scarce commodity these days it's much cheaper using human labour. Some of the restaurants were twenty or thirty minutes away. We got lost a couple of times. Even so, we were done by ten, got fed, and we each brought back something for the girls. It's not much but it's free, kinda. Later today when the sun goes down a little I'm going to line up in front of Gibraltar again and try to find out when flights or boats might resume. It's stupid because the zombies are already in every country and probably in every city. We all know what one looks like so we're not going to let any of them onto a plane, and yet they're stranding millions of people.

It's the first time in days that I've left my backpack in the tent. It was all I could think about while I was lugging about the crates of fish. There are zombies somewhere in the country and I was at least a half hour walk, maybe a fifteen minute run, back to my things. If just one of those things popped up while I was carrying fish to a restaurant then I'm sure someone would have stolen my things, leaving me pretty much dead. And if I caught whoever robbed me I'd probably end up as a murderer and I'd walk towards Portugal.

Part 2.

I just came back from venting to Ediz by the beach. He had an interesting point which I had forgotten about: the zombies managed to spread before anyone realised there were zombies. It wasn't an instant transformation, it was gradual, so someone could be infected,

get on a plane as a human, land in London and spend the next few days getting worse before turning into a full blown zombie.

### Part 3.

There are Africans going from tent to tent saying there are boats we can take, fishing boats even, which will help us get to any country we want. It seems like the dodgiest thing ever. Even Azeem tells them to piss off, but still these guys hang around.

24 August

Today was the same as yesterday – woke up to carry fish to restaurants, got fed, brought food back, waited under a tarp for six hours, got hassled by people trying to get us to take a boat to some far off country, waited in line to see what's going on in Gibraltar, waited for the electricity to come back on, took another painful dump and felt my arse burning, and did my best to be polite to Liam, even when he asked me if I thought he had a chance with Cristina. No, you idiot, you certainly do not.

Carrying fish in crates by hand is exhausting. Each crate is about fifteen kilos and we have to carry it against our stomachs for up to half an hour at a time. My hands cramped up and started to blister from the bits of plastic that were sticking out. The salt water is also rubbing against my skin and burning me. My arms are like jelly the moment I drop off my load. Then I head back to the shore and do it all over again, following instructions that are in Spanish or broken English (at best), following hand gestures as though I know where this restaurant is or that restaurant is not. I don't even have a map. I just have to remember the instructions by brute-force use of memory. "Bring this to Casa Iberica, down that street, fourth road on the left, take the next road right, go up, you'll see it." If I happen to see a local I need to ask them, "Casa Iberica?" They wave in some general direction and then through divine luck I manage to get to the right place. I hurry back to the shore and get shouted at for taking my time.

I'm getting better at mentally mapping out La Linea de la Concepción. The streets are narrow and a virtual death trap, but

most of them go north to south or east to west. Some squiggle about but it's not as bad as central London. Every so often, though, you come to a fork in the road that goes kinda left and kinda right. The roads aren't perfectly straight either, so you can only see a hundred metres down one way and up the other. If they were straight then we'd have a better chance of spotting a zombie if it was chasing after us.

25 August

There was no work for me at the docks today. I got there too late. Gonna be hungry for a while. I can now recite forty African countries. I need to be back in London in a week or else I lose my job.

28 August

It's Sunday. Nothing's open. We've been waiting here for twelve days now. England has pushed their quarantine up to five days. I have no Internet to tell work that I won't be back in time. I'll be fired for not turning up.

29 August

I had just delivered two crates of fish this morning and was about to offload a third from the boat when I looked into the water and saw a human body. It had been dead for a while and, thankfully, wasn't moving. Maybe it was a zombie. Maybe it was an innocent person who drowned. I can't help but think that there are people fishing in zombie-infested waters, that the fish might be eating the zombies, and that I'm eating those fish. I don't know what to do about it. I delivered the fish and was told they're out of rice, so the only thing available is fish. I ate it anyway.

My arms are going to fall off. I did six trips with crates of fish. Three hours of carrying fifteen kilos against my stomach.

I've lost another inch around my waist. So has Rachel. Please let me get to a cheeseburger and a coke.

We went off to find the church that helped us out before and volunteered there. I told them I could patch up a wall or a roof if necessary. They smiled and said no. Turns out, people have been volunteering there for days. Everything has already been repaired and replaced.

29 August

Big mistake. I washed all of my clothes in the ocean and now they're itchy and salty and it feels worse than sweat.

I don't think I've had a decent conversation in days. Probably weeks. None of us are all that chatty. We have a deck of cards and keep playing the same games over and over without any of us really improving. We keep fighting the wind. It's a stupid losing battle.

Fourteen fucking days we've been here, waiting, with no sign of help. Forty two days since zombies were reported to be real. Would someone please tell me what the fucking delay is!?

30 August

I'm feeling a little sheepish here, but ... I found €10 on the ground. There it was, lying on the road against the curb. No one was around. I scooped it up, pocketed it immediately, and kept on walking. If anyone had seen me it would have been fairly obvious, since I had to rest a crate's worth of fish against my knee just to bend down.

My hands have been getting a decent shredding from carrying the load of fish but it's my stomach that's had it worse. I rest the plastic crate just an inch below my belly button and I come back with friction burns like you wouldn't believe. But, with the €10 in my pocket, all I could think of was how to spend it.

Chances are I'm still going to be staring at Gibraltar for another week. A couple of planes have flown in and out and every time they do I look up in hope that maybe flights have resumed and that I'll be on one of them by this time tomorrow. I line up at the border and the official tells us all that flights have not resumed, despite the fact that planes are taking off and landing.

Another problem that has started to creep in is, the longer we're all here, the higher the chance it is that a zombie will get to us. We

managed to walk from Seville to La Linea de la Concepción in, what, five days? Six? We stopped during the hottest part of the day and again at night, but even a slow moving zombie could reach us in the same amount of time if it just kept on walking without taking a break. So, with the increasing certainty that we're going to die here, I decided not to save my new-found money and instead have a time-out and reclaim some sense of sanity.

Rachel and Cristina had been fighting with one of our neighbours and had retreated to the Mediterranean to try to calm down. Azeem stayed put under the tarp to keep Lalla company. I decided to shout Ediz to half a coffee. He was speechless at the gesture. I wish I could say it was out of the kindness of my heart, but I need someone to back me up if I'm ever in trouble. Rachel will, no problem. Cristina has a decent conscience. Ediz is a good guy and quick thinking, but that quick thinking might lead to a problem if he decides that I've just become a liability due to some accident. He pitched in some money, I used the change from the €10, and we shared a large cappuccino and a cheese bagel while staring across the Atlantic. It was glorious.

I finally asked why Lalla had spent the last three weeks crying. I always assumed it was the obvious – that she's a nervous wreck and the walking dead are terrifying her. It dawned on me that I had never bothered to find out, I just immediately blamed her for being useless. Maybe she lost her entire family and they tried to kill her. Maybe Azeem kidnapped her and she can't communicate with anyone to get their help. I find that one unlikely because here there are people who speak the same language as her and she hasn't tried to escape. But you never know. Ediz had the answer and I wish it was more interesting than my imagination. She's homesick, has never travelled before, had never been more than a night away from her parents before coming to Spain. Just the slightest bit of anxiety in her life catapults her into a full blown attack of hysterics. Azeem puts up with her because she's his cousin. Apparently she's also something of a shrieker when something jumps at her. If Ediz is right then she's just scored herself a one-way ticket to abandonedville if we're in a life or death situation. If she shrieks while we're hiding quietly ...

Ediz and I stayed on that beach for about an hour, sitting quietly, staring at the horizon.

3 September

We're in Morocco.

There was a scream and a scramble yesterday, just after 10am. There might have been a thousand people in the park waiting for Gibraltar to open and along came a zombie, just casually wandering through our camp. I have no idea how it got this far. It was the kind of scream we were all expecting and yet none of us were ready for the following stampede.

Rachel and I were in the middle of a card game when it happened. All of a sudden everyone looked up, pointed in one direction, and then shit was on. People grabbed their packs and ran, crashing into tarps and tents, getting knocked over by everyone else who joined the fray, getting trampled.

The zombie called out, "Surrender," in that same voice. It kept stumbling forward, like a drunken goat herder pushing all of the pretty little humans into a bottle neck.

There's nothing but narrow streets. Cars can squeeze through one at a time. I've seen pictures of the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona where thousands of people are crammed into long and thin roads with several ferocious bulls racing along them. It looks like suicide. Here, people were pushing into each other with no idea of where to go. We were all bordering on exhaustion from the moment the zombie found us. My lungs were burning before I even left the campsite. I had a stitch in my side the moment I hit the road. Cars were trying to run me over. The drivers saw a thousand refugees racing towards them in a violent thrall and every – single – fucking – one of them hit the accelerator and drove straight into us.

Did they get away with it? Some did. The others were yanked out of the driver's seat, beaten unconscious, and then each car was a prized possession to be won by the alpha-male refugees.

Guess what happened then? Yeah. Alpha-males drove into the next lot of refugees. Some headed straight for Gibraltar. Some tried to find the closest way out of town.

The rest of us were crammed between the buildings, hurrying forward. Those who were the farthest away couldn't see where the zombie was so they stopped and waited, while those who knew exactly where the zombie was kept trying to push through the deadlocked crowd to get the fuck away.

I saw one of the officers try to pepper spray the zombie to no

effect. Another used his police car to drive up to it slowly, trying to push it away, but the zombie stumbled around and the car was not as manoeuvrable as you'd think, so the zombie just kept walking after us. It looked like it was once a security guard. He was missing a shoe.

I was hit from behind by a car. I survived with bruises. Others were not as fortunate. There was a trail of injuries all around me. One woman howled with both of her legs twisting in the wrong direction. Another woman had broken her pelvis. More had gashes and grazes along the side of their hands, arms, and faces. Some had bloodied noses from a fist-fight. I was banged up from hitting the bumper but I was able to turn in time and land on my backpack. I got poked in the kidneys by a saucepan handle.

The car crashed straight into a wall. Three people dragged the driver out and kicked him over and over again. He had his hands up for a while.

Rachel and Ediz ran back to me to see if I was still alive. Ediz wanted to beat the driver to death as well, considering the guy probably just killed a lot of people and would have killed more if he hadn't crashed. We checked the bodies to see if Cristina was among them. She wasn't. Nor was she anywhere in sight.

The locals were standing on the balconies and windows, pointing at the zombie, shouting to the crowd to tell them where to go. People on the ground were being stupid and weren't paying attention. If a local pointed at a zombie some of the escapees thought that they should go in the direction the local was pointing. Idiots. It was only when we were on Calle San Pedro, another narrow street, that shit really got out of hand. The locals were looking in both directions and quickly slammed their windows shut.

There was a zombie on each end of the street. We were trapped. And, like I said, these streets are wide enough for just one car to drive and one car to park, so in one single step the zombie could cover each wall.

There was a lot of shouting but not a lot of screaming. Everyone was shouting at the zombie to leave and shouting at everyone else to back up and clear some space. The zombies kept approaching, closing in, saying over and over, "Surrender." One guy near me dropped his backpack from his shoulders and used it as a flail, holding onto the straps and spinning it around to clobber the former security guard. It worked. The zombie fell and Mr Flail was able to get away. The zombie climbed back up as people were trying to run

through the gap. I can't believe how quiet it actually was when people darted past.

It caught another guy and lunged at full speed into his arm, biting through his shirt and spilling blood. The silence was over. The guy yelped in fright and pulled himself back, stumbling into the wall as the zombie jumped at him. Then he fell into a horrified, "Stop! Stop! No! Please! No!"

I didn't help him. I had never felt my heart shudder against my chest like it had then; barely able to move and exhausted, knowing that I should try to help, but knowing it was too late to do anything. There was an opening on the street behind the zombie while it focussed on killing the man against the wall. People were pushing each other to the side as they tried to squeeze past.

I ran for it and had to hope like hell that Rachel and Ediz would make it in time. Rachel made it out after me. Ediz did not. He got locked in as the zombie turned on someone else and pinned them against the opposite wall. Then came another round of shrieks and screams. Ediz ran back the way we all came.

Thousands of people were lost and the sun was too high in the sky to know where to go. People were jogging and running everywhere. Some had no idea that they were running towards the walking dead. Others thought they would be safe if they went to the beach.

Plenty of people were hobbling with sprained ankles, broken legs, or holding their wrists after taking a fall. A lot of the survivors now won't be able to move faster than a walking zombie. They might be dead by now too.

We made it back to the outskirts of the camp. People were moving through the tarps grabbing whatever was left behind before rummaging through the next makeshift tent. Asshole thieves.

Either way, the camp looked like another death trap. For all we knew there was a zombie waiting in there for us. Or someone who was bitten who would then turn into one of them just as we walked past. It would grab onto our ankle and pull us towards its jaws.

All the blue, green, and white bits of fabric were fluttering about, making it impossible to walk through safely. And that's the problem with having a rendezvous point in the middle of obstacles like that.

Rachel assured me that Cristina would be okay. She has a knife on her at all times. I ... did not know that.

People were already racing past us, trying to get back to the camp

to grab whatever they had left behind. I figured the site was free of zombies since there were a dozen people running through without being grabbed and killed. If we had waited any longer where we were we would have been trampled by a hundred people who finally figured out how to get back to the site. We went to the second rendezvous point, by the track and field car park on the Mediterranean side of the beach.

We were the first to turn up. I expected the beach to be deserted. Nope. There were people sunbathing who were completely oblivious to the terror that was happening less than a mile away. People were scrambling about, wary of each other in case they were bitten. Rachel hit me on the arm for some stupid reason. I don't remember saying anything that warranted such an attack.

From the distant north Azeem and Lalla emerged. For the first time since meeting her, Lalla was not crying. Go figure. We waited, watching more people come and go, hearing the occasional shot in the background, but for the most part it was quiet. You don't exactly scream or shout when you're trying to run and hide.

Ediz was next. He stumbled around saying that he had got lost and disorientated. He saw someone trampled to death. There was no sign of Cristina.

We waited. People were rushing the Gibraltar border not thinking that a zombie could easily do the same, but when you have it in your mind to reach a certain destination then by holy fuck that's the only thing that matters to you.

Ediz and Azeem headed back towards the camp to see if there was anything salvageable from our tarp. They waited on the outskirts to see if they were about to face a zombie horde while the rest of us stared at the water wondering what the hell we would do if zombies came at us from the north and south. The guys came back saying there wasn't much of anything anymore. People had grabbed what they could and scrambled before anyone caught them.

So, fuck, we'd lost our shade from the Spanish sun.

Two hours later, Cristina staggered along from the north. She had run clear out of town and reached the Atlantic side. She got separated in the crush of bodies and was hit by a car. It wasn't anything too bad, she just banged her leg and fell on top of the bonnet. She hobbled away. It took her an hour to criss-cross the northern side of town and another hour to get back to us.

There was no way we were going to stay here with zombies

walking around. God knows how many people were going to be turned within the next few hours. A dozen? A thousand? Not only that, we had no idea what to do as soon as it got dark. The adrenaline was going to keep us awake, no question there, but those things don't need to sleep. We do. Eventually we're going to have to find somewhere to hide and rest.

At six o'clock one of the Moroccans found us still standing on the beach. At last Azeem asked him how much the boat would cost. €2,000 per person. Azeem swore at him and by the sound of things he swore at the guy's entire family as well. The Moroccan told us that was how much it cost and there are a thousand people here who will pay anything to get away. Cristina asked how much it was to Italy. €5,000. Let's just be clear – from here to Morocco is about ten miles. It's half the distance that people swim to cross the Channel. I'm not saying it's doable for anyone but the best of swimmers but it shouldn't even cost €200, let alone €2,000. Azeem death stared the guy and told him: "You show me the boat and then drop the price."

"The boat will be here," the man said.

"When?"

"When it gets here."

So we waited.

Someone had fallen in their attempt to run and managed to injure themselves. He limped along with a grazed leg. It looked like another zombie attack and people were shouting at him to stay back. He insisted he hadn't been attacked but we weren't taking any chances. Someone shouted, "I have a gun. I'm going to shoot you if you come anywhere near me."

I hope the police finally grew some balls and shot the zombies when they posed an actual threat. Meanwhile, several people had been injured and possibly killed because of the slow reaction by the authorities. A lot of people rushed the border to Gibraltar. More shots were fired, some people were tackled. I have no idea how many people made it across but we should have done the same.

The boat to Morocco drifted through the dark without any lights on and without any power. Our 'guide' led a group of twenty people up the shore for an hour for a meet and greet, away from civilisation so that no one could see what we were doing. I thought he was about to pull a gun on us and take all of our money. He was doing that slimy charismatic thing of constantly reassuring us that the boat was just up ahead, but he was reassuring us so often that it was no longer

reassuring. Rachel squeezed my hand the whole trip. She knew it was a bad idea. Ediz kept flexing his fingers, readying himself for a fight. Cristina told Rachel that if anything happens, gouge their eyes. That's all it would take – gouge their eyes. And don't be a wimp about it either. Take their fucking eyes out. Then they won't be able to chase you.

"It's just up here. Not far," the Moroccan kept saying. Meanwhile, none of us had the money to pay.

"Not far now."

It looked like a tug boat, a sorry sight with a crew of four who didn't seem at all happy to see us. They were as paranoid as anything, kept looking around for the police or coast guard and kept harassing our guide as though he was late. Then came the squabble over money. Azeem did most of the talking and it was good to see someone actually in control. He looked around the twenty would-be passengers and knew none of them wanted to go and that none of them could pay the full amount. He said the most we will pay is €100 each. The Moroccans balked and told him to go fuck himself. Azeem told them that it's either €100 each or they spend the whole night squabbling over money and get caught by the coast guard and have their boat sunk. When they swore at him he knew the slang and swore back. When they threatened to leave he called their bluff and said that there was no way they were going to leave empty handed. Even €100 was better than nothing. They swore about the fuel it cost to do the journey, the risk, and Azeem counter-argued and would not budge from €100.

This went on for hours. At one stage someone got pissed off enough that he handed over all of his money and just climbed onto the boat. It was like a bitch-slap in Azeem's face. Then Ediz had the balls to just push €100 into the guide's hand and climbed onto the boat along with a threat of what he would do if someone forced him to get off. Azeem turned to the crowd and said: "€100 everyone. Let's go." Money was exchanged, people climbed on board, and now it was up to the Moroccans to argue amongst themselves.

Needless to say, time became a pressing issue. The boat people insisted on collecting more money from everyone on board before they left. Some gave, some didn't. There was a lot of shouting at passengers and at one point twelve men stood facing the Moroccans and it became clear that a fight was about to erupt. Everyone had already decided on the level of violence they were willing to commit.

I certainly had. We out numbered the boat people. We could take it from them.

Once again our guide tried to calm everyone down by asking for more money. Azeem offered €10 more once they get to Morocco. Yeah, he was being an asshole, but it was after midnight at this point and who knew how many zombies were out there by now. They'd had fourteen hours to strengthen their numbers.

At 1am we pushed off, now exhausted and done with arguing. They tried shouting at us again and we had just grown silent. Our minds were made up and we were bored of not going anywhere. So, with our crew very pissed off and our guide staying in Spain, we pushed off and pattered through the Mediterranean towards Africa.

All we knew was that staying in Spain hadn't worked and come morning the area would be overrun with zombies. Yes, it is going to be a shit-storm when we get to Africa without visas while trying to find a way back home, but this was something I only really considered while actually on the boat. It dawned on me that I had only followed the pack because someone was in charge. Azeem told Cristina that it might be easier getting to Italy through Africa than from Spain. That certainly seems true from how closed off Spain felt. So I guess Rachel and I are going to follow Cristina and head to Italy as well. Ediz too. Azeem said he would help us when we arrived to secure some kind of transport, maybe another boat or possibly a plane. At this stage I'm willing to hire a private jet to fly us anywhere, but I don't fancy the idea of being shot down over the Mediterranean.

I was sure the Moroccans were about to pull a gun on us and demand more money. Maybe they would throw us overboard, but no. They remained quiet and for three hours we pattered through the darkness. We landed on the east coast of Morocco, just south of some place called Ceuta. Apparently Ceuta is an exclave of Spain. It is to Spain what Gibraltar is to England.

The boat pulled up to a shabby dock just before 4am. We paid more money to leave.

So, yeah. We're now in Morocco. Azeem kissed the ground, Lalla hasn't cried once, and I'm wondering how the fuck this is going to help me get back to England.

We're in front of a small town now. Azeem went to talk to some shop people as they were opening up, telling them of our situation and asking some basic questions. Someone gave him a phone to use

and he called home. One by one we were allowed to use the phone but I couldn't get through to my parents. Rachel couldn't get through to hers either. We went to the back of the line and waited again, but there was nothing on our second attempt either.

Cristina was able to speak to her brother in Milan. His wife's family are from Sicily so he gave Cristina the address in case Cristina needs to go there. She came back with tears in her eyes and said the Prime Minister lied about the number of zombies in Italy. It was supposed to be around 20 and that was all. Nope. 500. 100 of those are in Milan. Cristina's family have boarded up the house and only leave when there are armed escorts.

Azeem came back with a newspaper. Things are ... kinda shitty around the world.

Algeria – there's an uprising and it's as violent as hell.

Saudi Arabia – overthrown by rebels. Loyalists are fighting them and claiming that the country hasn't been overthrown at all.

Syria – nothing but terrorists, rebels, and zombies.

Spain – the President has resigned over the handling of the crisis and admitted that shutting everything down was a stupid, stupid mistake.

Italy – the Prime Minister lied about the zombies and claims that he was relying on news that was several days old.

UK – has not pulled any troops out of the Middle East. That sounds like a defensive strategy to me, waiting to see what happens with the surrounding countries. The UK is in a complete lock down.

US – They've invaded Haiti, for some reason. They went in and bombed the fuck out of the country. Drones are flying overhead and ground troops are going door to door. There's no oil in Haiti so why the fuck are they there?

Last world wide count of zombies (which may include deceased zombies, if that's the phrase) – 17,800.

So ... shit. 17,800 zombies in two months. It's spreading, no question. And they're saying every single one is roaming around saying, "Surrender," all in the same voice. Satan is taking over the world. In a week there'll be at least 10,000 more zombies. There's no central basing, no obvious command. Nor is there any kind of sensible way of dealing with these things either. An army may be able to fight another army quite well, that's what they're trained to do, but they're terrible when it comes to individuals. There's also no intelligence info the NSA can use to anticipate the next attack.

My money isn't accepted here. I have no food, no water, I don't speak the language, and it's now harder getting back to England. Why the fuck am I even in Africa? I'm sure I've lost my job by now. I just want to go home and see Basil.

## Part 2.

Okay, I came down pretty hard on Africans in Spain earlier. Two people have turned me around – Azeem and Mel.

The moment Azeem landed in Morocco he set to work to try and get everyone back home. That's no easy feat since there were twenty of us on the boat. Some people would've high-tailed it the moment they landed on their home shore in case the police turned up and arrested everyone. Azeem is acting like the United Nations here, calling up everyone he knows and trying to sweet talk the locals into helping us illegal Europeans.

The next saviour until the end of time is Mel. She's a local. She heard about our landing from a friend of a friend so she came to see if she could help. There we were, standing by some shops wondering if we were about to break into them. Then along came Mel. We wondered if we were about to have some trouble with her. Nope. She began blabbering away in English, courtesy of her being a former exchange student at the University of Maryland. In a word, she's adorable. She invited the twenty of us back to her small apartment so that we could use the shower and have something to eat and drink. Who are we to pass up an offer of hospitality like that?

Her English name is Mel. She did give us her Moroccan name but it's a mouthful, so Mel is easier to remember. We've been using her computer, drinking her tea (caffeine!) and having flatbreads and hummus.

It really is a small apartment, just one bedroom and one mixed kitchen/meals/lounge area. There's a communal bathroom down the corridor but she said no one should give us a problem as long as Mel's front door is wide open. She's already learnt all of our names, knows where we're from and is doing her best to help us.

So, yeah, I may have been a little harsh on Moroccans. Azeem pulled through for us, Mel is awesome, and Lalla ... has calmed down a little. There's a bus this evening. Azeem is hoping to be on it and arrive home tomorrow morning with Lalla by his side. With any

luck, their ordeal will be over.

Huh, tomorrow morning. I can't even imagine being home tomorrow morning. I don't even know if I'll be home in a week. I should have gone back to work three days ago. And yet here I am, on a completely different continent than the one I started on yesterday, having just spent the last two weeks living under a tarp in a park working for one meal a day.

Mel said she thought the whole world was going mad because no one here has seen a single zombie in the street. Then again, this is a small town so it would be a little strange to see one wandering about. The locals are unsurprisingly suspicious of us, as though we are the zombies they've been warned about. Perhaps they think the end of the world is actually upon us because Europeans have fled to Africa for safety.

England is closed until further notice. Cristina has offered to take us to Italy so until we get a better offer we're going with her. Azeem is trying to secure us a boat but we don't have any money. There are fishing boats but they can't make the seven hundred mile trip. Taking a plane is also not a good idea because we'd have to do it illegally. I imagine the various governments have now established a 'shoot down all illegal aircraft' policy.

### Part 3.

We all went to the ATM and withdrew money, enough to pay back Mel. She took the cash and splurged on a lot of food. So we paid her again. Now we can eat with a healthy conscience. And holy crap did we gorge ourselves. So fat. So full. I love food. I wish I had more of it. We all shared, eating couscous, strips of fish, nuts, dates and cheese. It was simple food and lots of it because cooking for twenty people in one small apartment isn't realistic. In the store I grabbed a box of chocolates and a pack of coffee. I don't care if I have to drink it cold. I don't care if I have to eat the granules out of the pack with a wet finger. I'm going to have coffee with me at all times. I ate half of the chocolates in one sitting. Oh god it was good.

We've all been talking about the craziness in the world. I want to know why the US took this opportunity to invade Haiti when there are so many more worthwhile countries to go after. Haiti has little strategic or economic value. The only thing that makes sense is that

Patient Zero comes from Haiti and they might still be there. The problem is they were bombing a lot of the country. They weren't trying to isolate someone and check their blood for a cure, they were bombing the fuck out of everything in sight. In the politest wording, they've been cleansing the area. The US did something like that in Panama before building the canal, but that was getting rid of mosquitoes to combat malaria.

The insane theory is that The One Voice is in Haiti and he's controlling all of the zombies from there. Could it be that the US has declared war on Satan and are about to nuke him?

We found an underground news source. God bless the Internet. Somewhere there are buildings running on generators or solar panels with servers in the basement contacting the rest of the world. Vigilante groups have sprung up, taking on the zombie scourge. I imagine half of America is rubbing their hands in glee right now, finally able to use their assault rifles and cache of weapons.

You know all of those ships in millionaire's row in Monaco? They're gone. And in Hong Kong? Gone. Most of the marinas and docks are empty. Anyone who's got a boat large enough to survive this thing is out in the ocean, waiting it out. Just sitting there. Waiting. At least the billionaires on their mega yachts have plenty of entertainment. I wonder what their staff feel, knowing that their friends and families on land are at risk of being quarantined, all the while they're safe and serving Mr Russian Billionaire his cocktail and watching their resources dwindle. Mr Oligarch will be there, stroking his white cat, watching the world crumble on the news. Then, when the very last zombie has died screaming in a hail of US-led bullets, he can coast back to land and make a fortune rebuilding every city in sight.

I imagine most of the economies will take a near unrecoverable pounding from this outbreak, but the rich will have resources and contacts and will be able to swoop in with government assistance and buy up half of the world, sit back and run a privatised dictatorship.

But what the hell do I know? I'm just a poor sap living out of someone's lounge in Morocco. It's not like I can do anything about the billions of other people. I can barely control my own life. I've spent the last month and a half going with the crowd and relying on other people's generosity.

You know what's awful? I'd probably tell a group of strangers to piss off if they came begging me for help. And hell no, I would not

let them stay at my place, go through my fridge, my books and magazines. I'm sure they're lovely people but I am not an easily trusting person. Maybe it's the tiredness and stress of the situation. I'm having a hard time caring about other people's feelings right now.

Knowing my luck, I'll be saved by some Russian billionaire who stayed with the plebs on land and have to eat my words. If he gets me back to London and Basil then I don't really care who I have to thank and kiss.

In other news, I got to shave for the first time since leaving Seville. I looked like a hobo. I definitely have a tan line around my face where my beard used to be. I look ridiculous. I tried going with the Tony Stark exploded goatee thing. I ended up cutting a notch a little too deep and it was too far gone to be saved. So I went for the Tom Selleck moustache instead. Rachel took one look at me and told me 'no'. I came back a minute later with the Hitler. She asked if I wanted to be stabbed. I'm now clean shaven.

I sent a message to everyone I know to say I'm still alive and was trying to get to Gibraltar. I bet someone I know will pull a few strings that will allow me and Rachel to cross the border and be on the first plane home, only I won't be there any more because I'm in Africa.

Cristina has promised that when we get to Sicily we can stay with her family for as long as necessary. She keeps talking about them owning a nice villa with a large vegetable garden, so large that they give food to their neighbours because they can't possibly eat it all. It's summer so that food is going to be fresh and delicious.

#### Part 4.

One of the neighbours is shouting at Mel. It sounds like Mel is trying to plead with the guy. What are the chances that the police are about to come and arrest a whole bunch of illegal immigrants hiding in Mel's apartment? We've only been here for two hours.

#### Part 5.

Mel has taken Ediz and Cristina out to haggle for a boat. Either we're buying a boat or chartering one to drop us off in Italy. I ... really

don't know how that's going to go. It's not like renting a car at the airport where these things are common, this is like renting a car with no documentation while being completely obvious that we are in this country illegally.

## Part 6.

Mel, Ediz, and Cristina came back. There was no boat available. It's too far to Italy. We would need a serious vessel to get there and the journey would take several days. I can't believe I said this out loud, but I suggested we hire or steal a plane. Rachel thought it was a pretty good idea. Cristina agreed. None of us can fly. I mean, we've all seen Indiana Jones do it so how hard can it be? Admittedly he had some trouble with landing, and the plane was already flying when he climbed into the cockpit, and, yes, they did crash moments after he got behind the controls, so ... yeah, let's not steal a plane.

They did come back with something unsettling. There's a video from the US. The President came on TV and authorised the use of deadly force in Haiti. There's a coup going on and for some reason the US decided to bomb the fuck out of the place. Why? Ediz says it's related to our situation, that there are dead people walking around saying the same thing. I can understand zombies taking over the world. I can't understand zombies staging a coup.

We're going to wait out the night and see if we can travel tomorrow, legally or not.

Of course, before we all went to bed (which at this point is on the floor in Mel's apartment) the four of us had THE TALK. It's the general consensus that none of us want to turn into one of them, so who is willing to kill who if it comes to that? I told them under no circumstance was anyone to kill me or try to kill me. My philosophy has always been to hope for the best and live another day. I've never been the suicide type. I'm honestly terrified of the idea. It may be bad today and it may be worse tomorrow, but what if I'm still alive in ten years, a changed and better person because I made it through that awful time?

Rachel, though, said: "If we're stuck with no way out I'm going to end it my way, not theirs. I don't want to be responsible for biting anyone and ruining the lives of everyone who knew me."

Yaaaaaaaay.

Please don't do it until you know for sure. Please. You might be five seconds away from a lucky break that spares your life. You being alive might actually help me be alive. Hell, just having someone else there might be all it takes to keep me going in this fucked up world.

So we asked for details. The girls didn't want any mess or any pain. Neither do I for that matter, but a bullet would be better if something is actively breaking down your door compared to taking pills and waiting fifteen minutes for them to take effect. Turns out they've been thinking about this for a while. If we're in lock-down the girls are going to tape a bag over their head and suffocate themselves.

I understand that Cristina's a little hysterical and I see her clutching onto her necklace quite often, but she said that now was the time for me to accept that God is real. I hated doing this, but I asked if, on her death bed, she would convert to Islam. She gave me that look where she was about to freak out at me. Thankfully Ediz was there to calm her down so I asked if she was going to die a Catholic because she lived as a Catholic. She said yes. I asked if there was any way she would convert to Islam on her death bed and she said no. So I told her I was going to die an atheist because I lived as an atheist and there was no power anywhere in the universe that was going to make me convert to Islam, Catholicism, Judaism or Taoism moments before I died. I don't have a soul hiding inside me waiting to be saved. Nor have I been telling the world that I didn't believe in God when I really did, all because I was pissed off at Him.

She asked how I could explain the walking dead. Clearly, someone *can* explain the walking dead and in all likelihood that person is in Haiti. I'm also willing to bet that the White House and Pentagon are throwing all of their resources into finding out what's making the dead come back to life, so someone there can explain this mess as well. As for me, I can't explain shit.

The conversation petered out after that.

Why the fuck am I in Africa?

4 September

My head is killing me. Rachel woke up in the middle of the night hacking her guts up, coughing like she had just smoked a life time's worth of cigarettes. She's spent the last hour blowing her nose. So

that's going to be fun, knowing that we're all about to catch her cold with no access to pain killers. But seriously, my head is in so much agony that the light through the window is nearly blinding me.

The girls are going out to find a boat. Twelve people got on the bus with Azeem, including Lalla. They're going to try their luck in Casablanca.

Part 2.

I can't see out of one eye.

5 September

I'm working through a migraine. Last night the other three had to have another TALK. What do we do if one of us (me) can't be moved and our window of opportunity to get out slips away? They agreed to carry me.

My brain is trying to push in every direction against my skull and I need to lie down with chicken soup and only leave my bed to go to the bathroom. But I can't because I have no chicken soup and all I have to lie on is Mel's sofa. My legs hang off the end.

Rachel keeps apologising for being sick. She has some weird stomach thing. She keeps burping despite not eating much and she apologises for her farts. They smell like rotten eggs. She spent most of today just lying on cushions. We barely talked.

Mel's probably wondering what will happen if two illegal immigrants die on her floor.

6 September

Mel's neighbours broke in, grabbed us, and literally dragged us all out of the building and threw us onto the street. They were shouting at us all like we should understand what they was saying. They seemed to become even more irate when, clearly, none of us knew what any of them were talking about, like why the hell were we in their country if we didn't speak their language?

Were they about to beat us to death? It certainly looked like it.

Were they about to kill us? If we had stayed then we would have found out. They shouted loud enough for the whole street to come out and watch. As we were leaving some of the douchier of douchebags followed us with their chests blaring, still shouting, making sure that we weren't going to come back. Some picked up pebbles from the ground and hurled them at us.

As we were walking away I couldn't help but get that picture from Schindler's List out of my head, the one where the little girl is shouting, "Goodbye Jews!" We really were thrown out on the street like trash, for no other reason than because we were there seeking refuge.

We're now at the dock, waiting.

My head is a little better. I haven't had a migraine this bad in years. Rachel is still sick.

At this point I can't man up. I'm going to time out and be a wuss bag. I hereby promote Cristina to honorary man. Bet she'll be thrilled.

## Part 2.

Boat. Liberated. We have done so.

We didn't steal it, no. But uh, we now have a boat.

And somehow it's my fault.

We were at the dock. There were twenty empty, shitty boats in front of us, bobbing against the tide. Maybe 'boat' is an exaggeration. 'Raft with a motor' might be more apt, but for all intents and purposes we're calling this thing a boat. We're also calling it Phil because some smartarse thought that by giving it a name it will force the gods of luck to watch out for us when we need it the most. 'Death Trap One' would have been my next choice.

Back at the dock, and behind us, was a beaten down four wheel drive. I was pretty sure one of those boats ran on diesel and the four wheel drive had something in its tank. So I made a stupid suggestion. After an hour of sucking out diesel from every car and bus we could find, and another hour of trying to hot wire Phil ... here we are. It's Rachel, Cristina, Ediz, and myself, and fuuuuuuuck this was a bad idea. It's barely a fishing boat but it was the only one we could get started. If someone catches us we're dead. If a wave comes along and topples us, we're dead. There's no way we can get to Italy from here.

It's all open, there's no cover, no shelter from the sun or the spray, and whenever we need to relieve ourselves we have to piss in a container. Did I mention spray and wind? 'Why is the container this empty?' you might ask. It's because the wind caused us to mostly piss in the boat.

We're each taking turns at the motor. We're sticking to the coast for as long as possible because if we run out of diesel we need to get to the shore quickly. The theory is that we skim along the edge of the map until we get to Tunisia. Then, when the whole country drops to the south we head dead east and stumble onto Sicily. It's a hundred miles from Tunisia to Sicily, but it's several hundred more to get to that point from here. We're going to need to run aground several times, steal or buy diesel, and keep going with whatever food we have in our packs.

I doubt we're even doing five miles an hour. If we were doing five then ... wait. Maths conversion time. Cristina knows kilometres, I know miles. We are a thousand miles away. It doesn't take a genius to work out that it is going to take us 200 hours of constant travel to reach Italy. That's eight days. Eight days out here with nothing to drink or eat. Eight days dealing with a sunburn. With Phil's engine puttering all night none of us will be sleeping. We're going to kill each other long before we get to Sicily.

And you know what's fucked up? All of Morocco has electricity. We didn't have much of that in Spain, but here? Fuck it, let the people have power!

At this point I think I would be willing to suck a sweaty man's dick for an aspirin. He can fuck me as well if that meant I could get on a plane back to London.

7 September

We had to stop for most of the night. We found a dock much like the one we liberated the boat from. Instead of going to all of the cars and buses we decided to bust open as many boats as possible and drain them of their diesel. That took a while and the girls were on look out while we were all trying to do this in the dark, but we filled the tank and had two small barrels that would each hold a few litres, then we tried to get going. We managed to bump against a rock or scrape over something and it nearly threw us into the water. We were

only a mile away from the dock and decided it was best to not kill ourselves by crashing into rocks. So we beached the boat and tried to sleep. There was one of us on alert the whole time. I had two hours to myself, staring into the dark, thinking shit over. What the hell was I on alert for? Zombies or humans? I couldn't see a damn thing.

To combat the sun we're wearing long clothes and we've wrapped t-shirts around our heads. It's not enough. I feel my skin blistering and I'm still not completely over my migraine. We're going to run out of fresh water today. I can't believe I'm saying this, but we all agreed to save our urine and drink it in an emergency. I can't believe I'm also saying this, but it was my suggestion.

Rachel's cold is steady. She has nothing to blow her nose with and she's staring at the water like she wants to die. Cristina hums to herself every now and then. Ediz keeps saying we should've tried stopping at the place we've just passed, without saying, "We should stop at the next place." He says, "We should've stopped back there." Me? I'm manning up. I guess. Refusing to let mother nature kill me.

## Part 2.

We are ... somewhere. We stopped to barter for food and water. The people here didn't want clothes. We tried to pay them in euro but that's not what they use here. Ediz tried to pray with them to encourage them to help the less fortunate. Most people ignored us. We can't rob these people. We were able to refill our water bottles but that was it.

When I mentioned that it might take us eight days to get to Sicily I was overly optimistic. Since we need to stop every day to refuel as well as sleep it will take us ten days at best. Realistically? Double that.

## Part 3.

We had to stop again. It's just after dusk now. Cristina was able to get us a loaf of bread. She let an old man squeeze her boobs in exchange for bread. She said she didn't care. It did draw some attention and other people were priming themselves to have a go. They wanted to see her boobs and they tried to get her to take her shirt off but she refused. All that for a loaf of bread. I can't believe

how blasé she seemed about it. We have one and a half slices each for breakfast and then we'll be out of food again.

8 September

So here's the thing about diesel engines. You can't let them run out of diesel. Ever. If you do you have to pull the engine apart and bring it back to life by using a workshop's worth of tools. If you're like us, out on the high seas without any diesel in sight, without a single wrench, then your engine is completely fucked and won't be starting up again.

So we're walking. Through Africa. On zero energy. Farewell, Phil. Let's see if we can get to Sicily any faster on foot.

I keep thinking of those distances. If by some quirk of fate we find ourselves in Tunisia with another boat, ready to sail directly to Sicily, it will still take us twenty days to walk from here to there. Twenty days under an African sun with no food, no water, no money, and nothing but an ass load of misery to motivate us.

I also keep thinking that these zombies are likely to double in number every day. Some will die or be killed by neighbours, police or soldiers, but enough will make it. We've been out of Spain for, what, five days now? There were almost 18,000 of them on that day. There could be a hundred thousand of them now. There could be a million by the time we get to Italy. This is what I think about. I think about what would happen if I saw a zombie right now. I'm not armed. I'd have to out run it. I think about what would happen if it caught up to me.

Sometimes I think I should find a job that I'm happy with and stay there, eeking out a pleasant experience and read books in my spare time, learn to paint or play the piano. The Buddhist approach, I guess. Find the happiness within yourself. Then my daydreams shift to me working as many jobs at the same time as possible, just gunning for the paycheque so that I can retire in twenty years and then learn the piano, read books and do whatever.

Mostly I think about food.

There's going to be paranoia about travelling. International food is going to be heavily scrutinised and quarantined. So realistically the best case scenario for the next five years is that I'll be back in England, limited to British food and heavy racism until the last of the zombie

plague is wiped out. Burkas will be banned, that's a given. You can't run the risk of a zombie walking around under a burka.

It might be beneficial if we're able to get back into manufacturing, like building cars again. There will be austerity measures. What skills do I have to survive a depression-era Britain? Sweet fuck all. I will be standing in line for some work placement program. They will see my incredible list of skills and size me up.

"It says here you would like to help repopulate the human race?"

"Yes, sir," I will say.

"Do you have experience in that?"

"Not as much as I would like."

"You mentioned you have a Bachelor of Arts."

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"I ... sorry?"

"Why did you choose to study a Bachelor of Arts?"

"... Because I needed a degree."

"Upon completion of your degree you worked in a warehouse office?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doing invoicing and filling out orders."

"Yes, sir."

"Are you fluent in any languages besides English?"

"Bullshit and sarcasm, sir."

"Excuse me?"

"I mean, no. But I do exceptionally well at trivia nights."

"Can you fly a plane?"

"Fly? Yes."

"Can you land it as well?"

"No."

"Can you build wind farms off the coast of Scotland?"

"That would be a new line of work for me."

"I see. So what, specifically, can you do for the benefit of your country that others cannot?"

## Part 2.

Cristina allowed another old man to slip his hand under her shirt and play with her boobs in exchange for two cans of tuna. She wasn't

wearing a bra because it no longer fits. Rachel is having the same problem. The clothes they bought in Spain are now too baggy.

None of us have had a shower in days. We scrub with whatever water we can find but it's not enough. We have some soap but we're still washing ourselves while either fully dressed or in our underwear. Our underwear doesn't fit any more, so ... yeah. I've seen a fair bit of Rachel and Cristina's bush in more than just one glance and I wish I could say I was turned on, but I'm so fucking hungry that I can't even get aroused anymore.

Between here and Tunisia is Algeria. I have no idea how we're going to cross the border. My shoes are breaking apart. The roads are shit. No one is stopping to give us a lift. I have blisters.

My headache is coming back.

10 September

We're fucked. Utterly fucked. No way out of Africa fucked.

We were arrested by the Moroccan police, driven to a police station in the back of a van, and thrown into holding cells. Cristina and Rachel were taken to one side of the building. Ediz and I were held in the other side. We weren't going to see the girls again.

We all have the same story; that we were travelling through Casablanca when this madness started and couldn't get home, so we tried to find some other way of getting back. That story holds up for about as long as it takes to look through someone's passport. None of us have any record of legal entry into the country, so how do four people travelling together with no stamps or visas or anything like that appear to the police? Not well.

The situation at the time was worse than we imagined. We begged and pleaded for them to help us get back home. We asked for phone calls, to speak to the British government, and those were denied. We asked for human compassion. We asked if there was any way for us to get to England. Failing that, was there any way of getting to Italy? Then we asked if there was any way we could get out of the police station and continue towards Algeria like we've been doing for the past couple of days.

The police officer snorted when I suggested Algeria. Apparently we're near the border, less than an hour's drive. He asked if we really wanted to go there. Ediz and I said yes but only with Cristina and

Rachel accompanying us. We hadn't seen the girls in eight hours. Our bags were confiscated. We were talking ourselves in circles. It's the first time we've been separated and the moment the police segregated us it felt like we were facing a firing squad, that the officers were just itching for an excuse to pull the trigger, waiting for us to fuck up by even a little. I was supposed to watch out for Rachel and I was powerless to stop anyone taking her away. I was supposed to keep my bag with me at all times. For the first time in months I didn't know where it was. They might as well have stripped me naked and walked me through the streets.

I began thinking about any way out of there. Maybe Cristina would bargain her way out like she had bargained for food. What would it take for someone to allow her and three undocumented immigrants out of a holding cell to wander through your country again? Maybe she would go through all of that only for us to be arrested again a day later.

An officer led Ediz and I back into a cell. There was an old toilet out in the open for us to use. It smelled like it hadn't been cleaned in years. There was no toilet paper. We waited for another six hours, sleeping occasionally. Then they brought me out again. They went through my belongings. They asked me to explain why I had paperwork explaining how to hot wire a car, maps of the Mediterranean, how to set traps, and basic surgery. I did my best to explain that we're in the middle of a zombie apocalypse and those things may be important. I was grilled for another few hours as though I was the one responsible for the uprising, as though I brought it with me, and if I didn't bring it with me then people like me (illegals) did. Firing squad. Itchy fingers. All they needed was for me to become so tired that I accidentally said 'yes' to something and they would have me.

Ediz was able to get just one phrase from an inmate in another cell. "You don't want to go to Algeria."

After several more hours, Ediz and I were released. Our bags and passports were given back to us and, nauseatingly, we noticed that our passports were now stamped as though we had just come from Algeria. I thought the officers were doing us a favour so I thanked them profusely. It turns out I am an idiot.

They led us through a courtyard and pushed us onto a bus that had its engine running idly. There was still no sign of Rachel and Cristina so Ediz and I stalled, refusing to climb on board until we

saw the girls. The officers didn't take too kindly to us refusing to get on the bus and they literally pushed us on board.

The engine was running for ten minutes without us moving. We were about to leave Rachel and Cristina behind. Whatever was happening with the Algerian stamp in our passports couldn't have been a good sign, but what did I know? We were about to be dumped across the border. If that happened, Ediz would've looked at me and decided that I wasn't worth it. I had been too much of a pain in the arse with my headaches and lack of language skills.

Ediz spoke Arabic and could blend in. He was better off on his own. I would've been left to wander northern Africa with no language skills, no survival skills, and I would have been farther away from England than I had ever been in my life. No one would ever know what had happened to me. Rachel and Cristina would have been stranded in a Moroccan police station. The authorities here would have done more damage to us than any zombie uprising could, simply by separating us.

Then we saw them. The girls were led out towards the bus and then stopped in the middle of the courtyard. The police were looking over to the bus and talking to themselves while the girls had to stand around doing nothing. Ediz caught one look at Rachel and Cristina and mumbled: "Shit, what happened to them?"

The girls were then pushed onto the bus and told to sit at the front. They saw us at the back and knew we were there, but they didn't look remotely happy. The driver all but kicked the bus into gear and we lurched forward, out of the police compound, and headed for the Algerian border.

Now, here is why going to Algeria was a colossally bad idea: the government there has collapsed, rebels are looting the entire country, and a warlord has set himself up as a god-king. Not just a king, not just a god, but a combination of the two. At least, that's how he's being talked about over the state radio station. Millions of people are leaving Algeria as quickly as they can. Morocco has set up one hell of a blockade at the border and aren't taking any chances in letting people in. Algeria is in a full blown exodus because of a coup with an insane and delusional dictator running the show and ... we're now in Algeria.

The police kicked us off the bus and forced us through a fence, telling us to fuck off. The gate clicked behind us. Then we figured out why our passports had been stamped. This was officially our last

port of call so they were deporting us.

That's right, I've been deported from Morocco. One day I might laugh about that. Right now, though, we're pretty fucked. And guess what a US destroyer is doing out in the Mediterranean? Bombing the fuck out of the country I'm standing in. I'm told an aircraft carrier is going to help. I'm a tad disappointed by that.

Oh yeah, there are rebels here. And not just a few, no! A handful of rebels would be easy to deal with. The real number, I'm told, is fifteen thousand.

In this very city. The one I'm in. Fifteen thousand rebels are just around the corner fighting the forces of a god-king.

So yeah, we're pretty fucked. We are mostly white, mid-twenties, easily ransomable, and if we don't fetch a high enough price then we could be beheaded. I like my head. It's an integral part to my happy-go-lucky lifestyle. And that's if the humans catch us. If the non-humans catch us ... well, we'll become Satan's bitch.

I asked the girls if they were okay. They didn't want to talk about it. What I have learned is that Cristina is a smart cookie. As soon as we were all separated she started to fake Rachel's symptoms. Nothing too severe to cause a panic, just looking fluey, nauseous, and very unappealing to anyone who might've tried to touch her.

The border was cluttered with Algerians sitting in their cars, huddled together. It was exactly like Atocha with everyone on the brink of a riot. And ho boy, do we stand out in a crowd.

We are now utterly dependant on Ediz. He can speak to these people. They were asking him about Morocco, he was asking them about Algeria. There's a name for the warlord who has taken over the country – Louis Boyer. Now, I know that France used to control Algeria, but the common names around here are Ahmed, Abdel, Aziz, Ahlam ... okay, a lot of names starting with 'A', but they definitely have an Arabic ring to them. Louis Boyer is not from Algeria. He's Haitian. Which might go some way in explaining why the US has sent an aircraft carrier to kill him.

Boyer spent a few years living and working in northern Africa. The majority of his time was in Algeria. The locals are surprised that a foreigner has managed to come in and conquer their country in two months. We've heard a dozen different stories and none seem to really align with common sense, but as of today this is what everyone seems to agree on:

There are pro-Boyer rebels and anti-Boyer rebels. The anti-Boyer

rebels shoot zombies. The pro-Boyer rebels do not. Boyer arrived in Algeria, from Haiti, on the 10th of July, two days before I got to Madrid. His previous work here was as a businessman, one of the senior kind of businessmen who signs contracts and makes shit happen. A future CEO, basically. The consensus from the locals, who have heard about him for years, was that he was an arrogant asshole, a bully, a briber, an exploiter, and he would've walked over the corpse of his mother if it could help make him some money. He was here for five years and made a name for himself in the press. Then he left. Now he's back and he's overthrown the government. He's trying to seize the rest of the country as well. Wonderful.

We asked about getting a boat but the navy won't be happy to see us. What's left of the military has gone into a state of panicked emergency. If they see a little dingy zipping along the coastline they will open fire. So we asked about getting a car, truck or bus to drive to Tunisia. We got to see a lot of shaking heads, especially since we don't have the money to do any of these magical things we dream about. Ediz told us that these people are now trying to head to Mali and we might want to consider joining them. I asked how far away that is. It's two thousand kilometres south, into the heart of Africa. I asked that we not consider that as an actual possibility. Ediz said we might not have a choice.

I'll point out that it's two thousand kilometres to the *border* of Mali. From there it's still another thousand kilometres to get to a city that can help us. From there we would have to cross through Burkina Faso or the Ivory Coast and hope that Ghana will take us in. Essentially we would have to travel through that whole fat belly part of Africa that sticks out into the Atlantic. It's two thousand eight hundred miles.

I didn't want to know how far away that actually was. Ediz knows. Now I know. I didn't want to know but now I do. It's the same distance from London to the Iranian border.

At this rate, we're not leaving Africa. We can't risk going any farther into Algeria because it's a warlord's paradise. We certainly can't go along the coast because there are rebel fighters, zombies, two navies, and panicked militants who are trying to kill each other. What chance do we have of surviving that? None.

Boyer spends a lot of time on TV, mocking the West, saying 'we' (meaning himself and his loyal followers) will take back this world and restore power to its rightful owner. He says the West will pay for

their attacks on Haiti.

We've been able to scrounge together some food but we'll be out in a day. Cristina is adamant about getting to Italy. At least there she can help us. But we're still a thousand miles away from Sicily and our options of getting there are quickly becoming exhausted.

11 September

I arrived into Madrid with a thirty four inch waist. I'm now down to twenty eight.

Some of Rachel's underwear is missing after the police station. I asked her what happened. She and Cristina were held in different rooms for hours. Rachel spent most of her time crying. Cristina still won't talk about it. She just says that nothing happened and she's fine.

We're in a convoy of cars. Rachel and I are together. Cristina and Ediz are in a different car. We're heading south. We were able to convince some people to let us join them. One of the guys knows of a river south of here. There's fish in there. We can eat the fish and stay at the river for as long as necessary. They have a water filter here so we can drink it. It will only take another hour to get there, assuming they're not all driving into the desert to kill us foreigners, but I'm not getting that vibe from them. We were able to tell them about Morocco and Spain and that no one should be trying to go there. We've been trading information for the last couple of hours in very broken languages with a lot of gesturing about. Ediz told me they didn't leave because of the zombies, they left because of Boyer.

Part 2.

The river turned out to be a mark of genius. Two of the guys had nets and we each had a fish to ourselves. I usually don't like fish but I devoured this one quickly. It only took a few minutes on the fire and it was one of the most satisfying meals I've ever had.

There are two Omar's here, an Akim, Ali, Aziz, and I can't remember the other names. Forgive me. I will learn them all in time. I introduced myself to everyone and thanked them all. I made an effort to be more social, especially since someone caught me a fish

and let me use their water filter so I could drink. Oh, and someone also drove me here and I have no way to pay for their petrol. I did my best to smile and I actually sang a few songs. Everyone knows the Star Wars theme and I tried to re-enact that movie in two minutes. Everything was fine until I started to pew pew lasers with a resounding boom at the end. Only then did I remember that everyone here is escaping a civil war.

It's getting cold. It might be the first cool night I've had since leaving Paris.

There are seventeen of us sitting around five cars. I'm here with people who were born in Algeria, have never left the country, and it took a madman from Haiti to change all of that. Want to know something that's troubling these people? When the zombies speak as a single voice it isn't Boyer's. It belongs to someone else.

You know what? Just about everyone thinks they will survive a zombie apocalypse. I'm looking around everyone and there isn't a single person who was adequately prepared, even when the first sign of zombies emerged. The only people who think they're ready are crazy Americans who go off to the wilderness in a cabin with stockpiles of food. That's not dealing with the situation, that's running and hiding, like we're all doing right now. Dealing with it is putting an end to the zombie horde so that humans can reclaim the Earth as their own.

I spent a solid hour helping a guy fix his car. I don't know anything about the engine but I did what I could to help out. It turns out the notes and diagrams I downloaded are useful only in theory. Practice reveals that I'm inept. I stared under the bonnet then climbed into the car a few times to try and get it started. I'm guessing there was a problem with the radiator and it was rattling against something else, so we tied a bunch of long grass around the grill to hold it in place.

One of the Algerian's asked how old we all are. They were surprised to hear that I'm twenty three. I'm not sure if I look younger or older to them, but most of the guys here are in their forties or fifties. We're just kids in their eyes. I'm still waiting for that moment when I feel like an adult. So far it hasn't happened. My dad said that feeling only really kicks in when your kid starts primary school, so I'm a long way off.

## Part 3.

It's late and few of us can sleep. The Algerians ask us what the rest of the world is like, mostly in regards to the zombie outbreak. We ask the Algerians what it's like as well. It's just your basic exchange of information. I was able to go through my diary and pull out some numbers of infected countries. I'm glad I wrote that down, it shows that I might have some use after all. People are still huddled together in whisper mode. Some of them think they can wait it out right where we are. They talk about the previous uprisings in northern Africa, so they have a fair idea of how long it takes rebels or government fighters to battle it out before there is a cease-fire. I can't imagine the zombies will agree to a cease-fire. Seven months seems to be the consensus of how long it takes to overthrow a government and defeat the last of the old regime. They've been at it for two months already, so our group is wondering if they can survive here for five more months before they risk going back home.

I asked Rachel about waiting here. She's determined to get back to her mum and she's been crying because she knew it was a mistake to head south in Spain instead of north. I actually agree. We've had a clusterfuck of problems since going south. It always felt as though we didn't have a choice, but we did. We just took the easier way and tagged along. Crossing the Mediterranean was also a mistake. Cristina and Ediz agree. If we stayed in Spain we would've had a chance, but we can't seem to sit still. We're trying to stay together while having three different destinations in mind.

There's no way we're going to wait for five months when even the two weeks next to Gibraltar was a nightmare. I imagine we could stay here for a couple of days but that will be the height of it. We'll sit around tomorrow, kinda relaxing, trying to settle in, but the next day will be unbearable. There will be the heat of Algeria to contend with and the restless burden that we should be doing something instead of sitting around. Then the third day will be miserable and we'll come up with contingency plans. People will be sunburned and covered in blisters. We'll smell. People will start pissing in the river or using it to bathe and it will scare away the fish or make us sick if we drink the water. Then we'll remember that zombie apocalypses don't get easier, they only get worse, so while we're waiting in the middle of nowhere something bad is happening everywhere else. I give us a week, tops. After that, we're leaving. In the meantime I've

been studying my arse off with these phrases I've got from Rachel, Cristina, Ediz, and other people.

My hands are blistered to hell from trying to light a fire with sticks and tinder. I have a lighter and some matches but I'm going to have to learn how to do this one day. I have a tiny magnifying glass as well but that will only work in direct sunlight.

My first aid kit is running low. I've used disinfectant on people's hands and feet, wrapped some gauze around cuts and wounds. Mostly people are deciding to leave their cuts to the open air.

I broke the ice by showing my phone and photos to everyone. They liked seeing the pretty girls and the silly faces we made, especially some of the roommates from Madrid. Sofia, Louise, Katy, Camille, Nadia ... I have no idea where any of them are. Some of the guys laughed, nodded and pointed to whatever girl I was with. Then they pulled out their own phones and showed me their families. There was a little girl smiling with her hair in a blue ribbon. I was sitting next to her grandfather and he kept repeating her name, but for the life of me I can't remember. I was running out of battery so I had to turn off my phone. Thankfully I still have my solar powered charger but it's a cheap piece of shit that will take days to recharge. There's no signal here. Can't call anyone or get online.

Once again, we're sleeping in the wilderness with no protection from a zombie if it happens to stumble along and find us. The wildlife keeps snapping my attention around. We can't stay here for months. One of those things will eventually get here. They always do. They just keep coming and coming. The wait will drive us towards an act of stupidity.

It was awkward when the men here started to pray. It's painfully obvious that we are outsiders and dependent on their kindness.

I've noticed that people fall into two categories: good guys and arseholes. You can usually tell right away who is who. So far there's only one arsehole in our group but I'm trying not to jump to any conclusions. He didn't seem the least bit interested in shaking my hand.

12 September

Boyer is on the radio. Everyone is listening quietly, no one is interrupting. I don't speak Algerian. I have no idea what's going on.

A couple of times the group looked around at myself, Rachel, and Cristina. I guess Boyer is talking about foreigners. We certainly stick out, that's for sure.

## Part 2.

Okay, we've been given a translated summary. Boyer is doing away with the old regime. He's trying to unite the people. He had a slight mention of the zombie horde, saying that the old government has allowed the misery to rise and that previous atrocities are coming back to haunt them. He also said that foreigners, invaders and 'The West' will be hunted down and exiled. Algeria will not fall under a new colonial power. I guess that explains why everyone was looking at us. He called us spies and agents of the Devil.

He's your typical politician, I suppose. He speaks out against the bad stuff that happens in government while he does exactly the same, then he blames someone else and keeps on doing it. If he's got control of the radio then he has more power than the opposition. Perhaps these zombies have a controlled agenda and they aren't just mindless wanderers. If they can speak with the one voice then maybe the one voice can guide them towards a radio station and take it over.

Why has no single government trusted its people with the truth? None of them have told us exactly what is going on or how to deal with the situation. They're just protecting their own arses by keeping everyone else in the dark and hoping we'll trust them when the dust settles.

15 September

Needless to say, we didn't stay long by the river. Cristina was eager to leave because she ran out of tampons.

We've arrived in Ghardaia, a place that took a few minutes to spell and about an hour to pronounce correctly. I'm told we're in the middle of the northern part of the country, far from the coast. I asked for a distance and was told we're a two day drive. It took us two days to drive here from the river. It was too bumpy to write anything in the car. When we did stop it was to repair broken wheels or busted radiators or something else. We worked through last night to fix an

exhaust pipe that hit a rock and was rattling about. I may have slept for four hours in the last two days.

The Algerians who brought us have been beyond hospitable. We parked the cars at the entrance of the city. Us, being tourists, waited in the back of the cars while people got a good look at us. The guys we've been travelling with went out and tried to find places for us to stay. They were gone for an hour and came back with clothes. We're dressed in turbans and full desert attire. We don't blend in at all. I feel like a janitor who's wearing his first suit to go to a wedding surrounded by upper class snobs. The turbans have face wraps and the guys tried to show us how to put them on correctly. Cristina and Rachel are in burkas. If anyone knows we're white then they might be compelled to report us to the authorities. The walk from the car to the middle of town was a little surreal. It's as shoulder to shoulder as Disneyland on a free-entry day. It's also really obvious with our backpacks and lack of local knowledge that we don't belong here.

Ghardaia, I must say, is somewhere I would return to if this wasn't the end of the world. It's a tightly packed, small city where everything looks like it's made from mud brick. The city is built in the desert so there's sand everywhere. There aren't so much roads as pathways. There's no concrete at all. Most people are wearing t-shirts and baseball caps, so it's even harder to blend in with our borrowed outfits. We're avoiding the main 'roads' as much as possible and we've kept to the outskirts of town.

We're staying on someone's floor. It's a one-room ground-floor apartment. The owner, Ahmed, lives in this tiny room and has offered it to the four of us. It's a little scary knowing that all of our Algerian contacts have left. Perhaps they're rounding up the police, but I've had nothing but good vibes from our driver so I'm trying to stay optimistic. Cristina, Rachel, and Ediz are quietly shitting themselves but I'm doing my best to reinforce some positive thinking. If this blows up in my face they'll never believe me again. If it works well then I might regain some of their trust.

I'm not sure why I think I've lost their trust, perhaps because I had a migraine not too long ago and they all but had to carry me to safety. It's been an uneasy ride through all of this and there are times when we just wanted to kill each other. We're making nothing but bad decisions and we all recognise it, but sometimes making a bad decision is better than making no decision.

We should have gone to Rabat with Azeem and Lalla.

It's occurred to me that I've been sleeping next to Rachel for two months. The four of us are barely capable of talking to each other, but we don't dare leave each other in case we get separated for good. Who knows when a zombie will come out here? Who knows when the police will throw us into a cell and go through our things again? I sleep with my back pack as a pillow and I still wake up three times a night to make sure it's still there.

The convoy of cars decided on Ghardaia because it really is in the middle of nowhere. Algiers could be nuked and Ghardaia will just keep on going. I doubt the zombies would make it far through the desert, either. As strange as it sounds, Africa might end up doing the best out of this apocalypse since there are large stretches of inhospitable land which makes it a nuisance for a zombie to walk through. Not that it would care, mind you.

## Part 2.

Ahmed came back. He's a cook. He's also just nineteen. He has cracked skin and wrinkles which make him look thirty. He brought us back some dates and dessert from his restaurant. Ediz was speaking to him and he says there hasn't been a single zombie in the area. Ahmed says it's ridiculous that the rest of the world believes what is happening. I guess they're a little isolated here.

We got an update from Algiers. Fighter jets and bombers have been attacking the government buildings. I'm under the impression that what happened in Haiti is now happening here. Ahmed is a little uneasy about the bombings and the militant uprising because someone is attacking his home country.

I say 'a little uneasy'. Far from it. But there's little he can do and he's far away from the carnage.

It's quiet outside. There isn't much traffic and there isn't much music. It seems peaceful. I wonder how long we'll be here for.

## 16 September

Last night, Ahmed was making some serious moves on Cristina. She pretended she didn't understand. He said she could sleep in his bed and when she refused he came down to lie on the ground next to her.

As soon as Rachel figured out what he was doing she pulled my arm around her waist. We spent most of the night awkwardly spooning. When we woke up she thanked me for not making a move.

Cristina wants to leave. She said Ahmed kept feeling her up through the night. She even got up to move and he followed her. She farted on him. That got him to leave and go back to his bed. We're going to be kicked out soon, I can tell. It's a shame. He was nice yesterday, now he just seems like a prick.

## Part 2.

Okay, so we didn't leave the city, we just moved to another house. This one has a family so already Cristina feels more comfortable, but she told Ediz that as far as anyone else is concerned they are now boyfriend and girlfriend. He countered and said that they would have to be married to deter a lot of people. So, Cristina and Ediz are now 'married'. Guess what kind of conversation I had with Rachel today? Yeah. We too are 'married'.

Cristina and Rachel are helping the wife of the family cook. I did my best at waving to the little boy here and playing some basic games. He's never seen a white guy before and I terrify him with my pasty-white vampire skin.

I haven't seen much of the city. I'm in full hiding mode, so I can't go sight seeing when I could be arrested on the spot.

17 September

We're still in Ghardaia. There are no obvious plans to leave. We want to leave but there's no one who will take us away from here. Apparently this is the safest place to be – in a desert city five hundred miles from the capital city. I was able to get a few minutes online and I sent an email to my folks. There were a dozen from them and I glanced at the most recent. They're still alive. England has locked itself off from the rest of the world. I couldn't read it all because I didn't have the time. The email that really fucking pissed me off was from work. I'm out of a job. No surprise, really, since I was supposed to be back seventeen days ago. But I sent them emails a month ago explaining my situation.

Rachel and I are not going to be able to get back into England for a long, long time. Not that it really matters right now since we're not able to leave Ghardaia for a long, long time either.

20 September

Still in Ghardaia. Rachel and Cristina have been staying at 'home' with Bahija and the kids. They're bored out of their minds. Apparently the kids spend all day calling out: "BaBAH! BaBAH!"

Ediz and I have been working for Abbas. We're working for food, basically. I can't complain because he and Bahija are feeding us and putting us up in their home, plus it's better being busy than sitting around being bored. We're doing minimum wage stuff like cleaning, lifting, and carrying crates from one place to another. It's the least we could do, considering that we'd be dead without someone's hospitality.

It's been decent food. Mostly stew. Chickpeas, bits of potato, tomatoes, and onions. Sometimes flat bread on the side. The variation comes in the amount of pepper that goes into the dish.

Ediz and I are out in the streets wearing disguises, which might pass at the first glance but the moment someone locks onto my eyes they know I'm out of place. We're carrying crates and shopping to other people. They talk to us but we can't respond, or at least I can't respond, because I don't know the language. Ediz doesn't say much because they can hear his accent and know he's a foreigner. Sometimes we get shouted at.

We're being treated well. If I ever get out of here and make some money I might come back and pay everyone a visit, legitimately this time. This whole situation probably sucks for Abbas and Bahija as well. They probably don't like to have people stay at their house with no end in sight, invading their privacy and begging for work, shelter, and food. If any of us say the wrong thing we'll be kicked out.

I haven't been able to blow off steam in two months and it's driving me up the walls. In Spain three of us could speak the language to some degree. In Morocco a lot of the locals also spoke English. Here we need Ediz to communicate all the time and his accent gives him away.

22 September

Rachel was awake all night with horrendous cramps. She spent two hours squatting at the toilet with diarrhoea. She came back in a cold sweat. I asked if she needed the doctor but she shook her head and cried herself to sleep.

23 September

Cristina came to me and asked if Rachel was pregnant. Imagine my surprise with that. Cristina said there was so much blood coming out of Rachel that she thought she had a miscarriage.

25 September

A doctor came to see Rachel. I had to be there because I'm her husband. He wasn't pleased to see that we were white and hiding in burkas and turbans. Nor was he pleased that Ediz and Cristina had to be there for translation and moral support. The doctor inspected Rachel with all of us in the room. It's not the greatest of sights seeing your friend with her legs up in the air, sweating and bleeding, convinced that she's about to die.

Rachel is not pregnant. Nor was she. It's not pleasant to write about, but she had intestinal worms, probably from infected water or badly cooked meat. The three of us broke into a sweat when we heard that because we've been eating and drinking the same thing. The doctor didn't give Rachel any medication. Bahija has some home remedies that she's trying. We are all going to have to stay put to make sure we're clear of worms as well.

Rachel's now fifty three kilos. She's lost more than twenty kilos since leaving England. I'm down to sixty five. I was seventy eight when I left. I was seventy two when I arrived in Madrid.

There's no update from Clint. I have no idea where he is or what he's doing. I just want to know that Basil is okay but that asshole won't reply to any of my emails. The lease is in his name and I'd kinda like to know if I still have a room in my apartment.

3 October

I honestly didn't know what date it was until I asked Abbas. I'd lost track. It doesn't even feel like the 3rd of October. I'm not sure what it should feel like, but to go more than a week without a diary entry is doing my head in, considering some days had eight or nine entries in them.

I've been learning phrases in Arabic thanks to Ediz. I had been doing the same with Spanish and Italian. I don't remember any Spanish or Italian any more. Nor will I remember much Arabic by the time I get back home.

We're leaving Ghardaia today. There's a bus that can take us towards Tunisia. We were finally able to do enough work for Abbas to pay for a bus ticket for the four of us. He explained to the driver what the situation is. I can't tell you how relieved I am to be leaving. All of that walking around through the city was a nightmare. The crates have given me blisters on top of blisters and my fingers are shredded.

The bombing of Algiers continues. The borders are closed. There are still some trucks that can get through but they are carefully inspected and bribes are needed. We don't have enough money to bribe anyone.

Rachel is feeling better. Cristina had a bout of sympathy sickness. Our weight loss has stabilised. Our headaches have gone and our stay here has actually done us some good. I was able to send a quick email to my folks telling them where I was and what our plan is. Italy still remains the best option.

I'm just waiting for the other shoe to drop. Every time we've travelled something has fucked us up and we've all been convinced that it would have been better to go in the other direction. We have no idea what we're going to do when we get to the border. We have no idea where to go or who to speak to. We have no idea what will happen if rebels form a blockade and throw us off the bus. They'll probably film us as they shoot us for being spies. I wish I was exaggerating about that part but I've seen the news.

The apocalypse was supposed to unite everyone against a common enemy. Instead it's turned into a desperate grab for power and revenge.

5 October

I'm selling my soul to the BBC.

We were on the bus for fourteen hours and nearly died of heat and boredom. When we got to our destination someone in a uniform approached us. They put me onto the phone with a BBC news correspondent in Tunis, Tunisia. I was finally useful! I spoke to Simon Gillard, who, like other journalists in northern Africa, is kinda stuck where he is with no way out and are doing reports on life amid a zombie outbreak. He was able to convince the uniformed man to get us onto a train and fit us with Press Passes. We're still in Algeria but we're on the train now, heading north, so that we can cross the border. When we're in Tunisia we're going to call Simon again and he'll get us to his hotel. He said it will take a few days to get there, but Tunis is not as badly affected by the outbreak of undead and guided missiles.

This kind of excitement is almost too much to bare. Hearing another English voice for the first time in months was a joy. The train is rocky and slow. We're almost there. Just a few more days of traversing borders and unknown countries and we'll be okay.

Part 2.

We've been stopped for six hours. Everyone was escorted off the train so that the police could inspect it. Then all of our IDs were checked and double checked. We were waiting outside in the sun for three hours, slowly burning to a crisp. We were shitting ourselves again but the Moroccans seemed to have done us a favour by stamping our passports illegally. We gave the police here Simon's phone number. I don't know if they spoke to him or not but the senior guy didn't seem all that interested in dealing with the BBC.

Finally we were allowed back on the train. We were the last ones to board. Everyone was staring at us, blaming us for making them wait, thinking that we were causing their delay. We're sitting quietly now, hoping that no one is going to pick a fight. I've been on hundreds of trains in my life and there is always, always someone on board looking to stir some shit up.

7 October

I am officially over this apocalypse. We're still in Algeria. We're at the border of Tunisia. We can see the Mediterranean. We've been on the phone with Simon several times already and we're getting nothing from the border people. Simon has been trying his best to get every expat he can to his hotel. He's been in contact with everyone he knows to bring everyone to safety. There are many foreign correspondents stranded around Africa and they're all helping each other. The border guards aren't helping anyone but themselves.

It's been endless travelling and waiting and begging for help and never knowing where I am or what the morning will bring, but it has not brought me anything positive. I am over it. We've been eating street food and whatever we can find at convenience stores, but mostly Ediz goes in, murmurs in an accent, while the rest of us hide in an alley to stop anyone from reporting us.

We've had to explain our situation to the police so many fucking times. It's the same story to the same people. I don't know how many times we can keep going, but they don't seem to believe us that we just want to get out of Algeria. Your country is being bombed to fuck by an American carrier group and your 'rebels' are actually zombies, of course we want to leave!

8 October

We found out why the police were unhelpful. They were stalling us. They called Boyer's people and told them there are western spies here trying to flee the country. Just fucking wonderful, no?

We were on the street at one of the bus terminals when we saw the police pointing at us. We ran. For those first ten seconds we knew it was a mistake to run from armed police. They were shouting at us in the crowd and we were sure we were about to be shot. Literally shot. They were going to kill us, all because we ran like criminals.

We hid in an alley by crawling under a couple of dumpsters. I won't describe the smell under there, or our nerves, or the state of our clothes and backpacks afterwards, but we stayed lying flat on our stomachs for an hour.

Boyer's everywhere in the media now. He's on TV, billboards,

radio, newspapers, and he's calling for the execution of all foreigners because we're all spies. That's right, the leader of a country has called upon the entire nation to kill me because I'm white and trapped in their fucking country.

So we broke into a car and stole it. It took me ten minutes to figure out how to start the stupid thing. Ediz is the designated driver as he looks more Algerian than the rest of us. Rachel, Cristina, and I had to hunker down and not draw attention to ourselves, which is hard when we come to a stop at traffic lights and there's a truck driver next to us staring into our car.

And, for the first time since arriving in Africa, I've seen an actual zombie. And not just one or two like in Getafe, no. I've seen five today. Most people were keeping their distance. Some drivers in vans and trucks must have been actively driving into them, squishing them on the road. We saw the remains of two dead zombies lying in the street, their stomachs squashed in by tyres. We've been hearing gunshots and alarms going on for a while. Explosions happen every couple of hours. I don't know how much longer I'll survive in a country that's in the throes of a civil war.

We pulled over to find a map. Cristina noticed a zombie standing in the doorway just off an alley. It was standing there like some kind of bouncer at a night club. It turned and stared at us with its vacant eyes.

"We should go back," I said.

The creature cocked its head to one side. After what must have been a fifteen second wait it finally said: "English."

"Holy fuck, it understands us," Rachel said.

The creature ran at us in a full sprint. Ediz shifted into reverse and got the fuck out of there.

## Part 2.

We were able to get to a phone and we called Simon, told him what's going on. He wasn't happy with what happened to us. He asked us where we were and we had to give him some basic directions. He told us to stay put and call back after two hours, then he might have some good news.

We called back. He has someone coming to meet us, someone who works in the Algerian media who has ties with the BBC.

I wonder what will happen when I have to detail to the quarantine people in Heathrow my last three months. So far we've stolen a boat, a car, have crossed several borders illegally, which makes us undoubtedly criminals by any government's standards. If I ever see a foreigner in England trying to make a few pennies to stay alive I'm going to give them money. I've been at this for almost three months and I want to die from shame and misery. I want to go back home, see Basil, have an hour long bath, and climb into my warm bed. I will happily do despatch invoicing for the rest of my days if it means I can have a reliable, yet unspectacular, life.

### Part 3.

So I've just had a two hour interview for TV. I certainly wasn't expecting that to happen this morning, but I definitely owe Simon and Billy a world of thanks for helping us all out like this.

Billy is Simon's guy. He found us after a couple of hours. We were on the side of the road hiding in our stolen car, wondering if Simon's guy would find us before the locals gave us away to the police. Billy put us in the back of his van and brought us to his TV station. We spent an hour hiding in a store room while he figured out what to do with us.

He found a journalist who spoke perfect English. He interviewed us all in one of the manager's offices. The manager wasn't there. It took us a while to warm up to having a camera shoved in our faces but the journalist was able to get us to tell our stories. I tried to look somewhat decent by rolling the sleeves of my shirt up to my elbows, but I haven't had much chance to wash that shirt and it was kinda itchy. Billy said it won't be aired in Algeria for a while, first he wants to get us to Simon in Tunis. We stuffed our faces with coffee, biscuits, and bagels when it was done.

The world around us is grim. Zombies have been attacking power plants by running at them in droves and breaking through doors, trying to make the whole place go critical. Security forces responded by protecting sensitive areas. So zombies started attacking power lines by climbing up the poles and pulling on the cables. Lots of zombies, dangling away, until the cables broke. If that didn't work they would claw at the poles until they fell over. Then they targeted train lines by digging under the tracks. Eventually the train would

nose dive into the ground and derail. If that didn't work the zombies would blockade the tracks with rubble, fallen trees, or multiple cars that have been carried into place. Do you know how difficult it is to protect every inch of train line? They've also been breaking apart bridges with pickaxes, tearing up the ground so that nothing can drive over them.

The US President finally came out and addressed the world, telling us to pray and stay close to our loved ones. He said the Haitian (who still remains unidentified) has managed to rise from the dead and is able to control the recently deceased. He told us to stay clear of anyone who appears close to death but we should show restraint and calm.

The US have been attacking Algeria, trying to kill Boyer, who is now listed as one of the Haitian's lieutenants. The Haitian has at least twenty known lieutenants around the world. He's going for world domination. All of them were in Haiti in June. I'm willing to bet all of them died and were resurrected. I also bet this isn't what the fundamentalist Christians thought would happen on the second coming of Jesus, where a dead man rises and spreads his word to unite the people. I know he's not Jesus, but the amount of zombie Jesus jokes I've told in the past are finally coming back to haunt me.

Here is the latest tally of a select few countries.

Country	Dead	Infected	Missing
Australia	250	120	600
Canada	1,000	200	800
China	13,000	1,000	1,000
France	3,000	6,500	4,000
Germany	7,900	1,100	12,000
Italy	7,000	6,000	6,000
Japan	500	500	1,000
Mexico	19,000	2,000	5,000
Russia	5,000	3,500	7,400
Spain	17,500	7,000	12,500
UK	8,000	2,400	4,000
US	24,000	5,200	18,000

The US doesn't seem to be doing very well. Then again, they do have a monstrous population.

I asked if there was somewhere we could sleep tonight. Billy said he's going to try to get us to the border at 3am, when everyone is tired and stupid. Cristina and Rachel are having a nap on a sofa while I'm mentally gearing up for being shot at by the border guards.

I asked Billy if I could send an email to my folks. So here I am, typing up everything from my diary and emailing it to myself and to my parents, so that there is at least a record of me being alive. There were a couple of emails from Alana asking if I'm okay. I guess that means she's still alive, living the dream with her new boyfriend, while I picked the most fucked up time to go travelling through Europe.

#### Part 4.

It's 4:30. At 3 o'clock we went looking for Billy and couldn't find him. We saw a pair of police vans outside the building and feared the worst. We might be on our own again.

#### 9 October

You were the brightest light in the darkest storms,  
You were the music that put a smile on my day,  
You were the sense of hope in a troubled world,  
You were the best I could have hoped for in a friend.  
My dearest Cristina, may you rest in eternal peace.  
I will never forget you.

No one is safe anymore.

#### Part 2.

Rachel grabbed my diary and threw it against the window, shouted at me, then collapsed in tears. I tried to console her and she didn't want anything to do with me, all because I was writing down everything that was happening to us instead of doing something useful.

There's only three of us now and my world has been torn apart.

Billy never came back. We thought something had happened to him, like he was arrested by Boyer's people. We called Simon in Tunis. He told us to leave. We found the keys to a van and drove off with Ediz at the wheel again. We also swiped a company mobile phone so we can call Simon whenever we need to. The mass exodus of Algeria continues. The border to Tunisia looks like a mass of people trying to break through. There was a man on a speaker telling everyone to return to their homes, no one will cross this border.

According to the map there's a national park that crosses the border south of us. If we can drive across, or even walk across, we would be one step closer to Simon in Tunis and a lot closer to mainland Europe again.

Going south meant heading through another city, the same city that used to be occupied by everyone scrambling at the border, willing to abandon their homes just to get out alive.

Billy's phone allowed us to check where the road blocks were and hopefully how to avoid them, but the streets turn against themselves and the updates on the phone weren't as reliable as we needed. We got stuck, wedged in between cars trying to U-turn in every direction. Every car was creeping through the red traffic lights, causing a nightmare of a jam. When people walked by they banged their fists against our van, shouting something about the news crew being scum.

It took us an hour to turn around in a ten metre space. There were gunshots in the distance. Smoke from fires. Barricades of burnt out cars. Shop fronts were torched. People were lying dead on the street. I refreshed Billy's phone. Our road was blocked on all sides.

The gun shots were getting closer. All four of us were peering out of the windows, trying to see if we were up against zombies or militia.

Ediz slammed on the accelerator, knocking the three of us back. "Hold on to something!" he shouted.

He side swiped a parked car, bounced up onto the footpath, knocked over what must have been a stop sign, and broke through the edge of the barricade. We didn't hear any shouting or gunshots. We'd popped a tyre, though. It was like trying to drive with a washing machine going through its full spin cycle in the back.

"It's not my car, I don't care," said Ediz. We kept on going for another few minutes until a teeth-grinding *clunk* killed our front wheel. We couldn't steer anymore.

If we had stopped and got out thirty seconds earlier Cristina would still be alive. Maybe Ediz, Rachel, or I would have died in her place, but in that moment whichever god was looking out for Cristina had his back turned against her.

There was an explosion down the street, like a café had just been bombed. People ran in our direction, cars hurtled down the street, and whoever was driving was more interested in watching what was happening behind them than focussing on the road in front.

I saw the quickest flick of the steering wheel before the driver even hit the brakes. The other side of the road was blocked with oncoming cars that had ground to a stop. There was only one free area the driver could go – the footpath. The footpath that four of us were standing on.

In a city ripped apart by a coup, a civil war, and the undead, it was a dipshit cunt fuck up of a driver who killed Cristina.

She had managed to turn at the last second. When I got to my feet I saw that she was trapped against the ground with her backpack under the car. She was gasping. She had taken the full force of a car crash against her back, went face forward into the pavement and hit the ground with the full weight of a car on top of her.

Half of her –

I don't think I can do this.

Half of her head –

No. I can't.

She was crushed. She stopped breathing before we were able to pull her free.

The driver got out of the car with a banged up face and blood spewing down him. He pointed at us, shouted something, and ran off.

Some of the bodies from the explosion up the street didn't stay down. Some slumped around and fell over again. Some crawled away, some tried to push themselves up and collapsed from a lack of strength. Others ... were no longer human.

I can't remember who pulled me away. I can't remember much except for running. I just have a final image of Cristina with tears in her eyes with some kind of recognition that this was it.

All we needed was to have stopped thirty seconds earlier and my friend would still be alive.

There was another road block in sight. The air was scorched with smoke, gun shots, cars and trucks blasting their way through traffic. I figured out what the first explosion was. The militia were fighting a nest of undead. They blew up a building the zombies were hiding in. The moment the dust cleared we were met with a dozen guttural howls, like a tracheotomy ward was trying to clear its throat from phlegm. There was rapid fire gunshots as the zombies were lured out into the open. Moments later there were more gargles, more gunshots, then less gargles and less gunshots. There was not a single scream or cry for help.

I peered around the corner. Something like twenty bodies were lying face down on the ground near our van. There had been cars on the road, people walking by with no immediate sign of trouble. Then: boom, gunshots, gurgling, more gunshot, bodies. We were just there and now there were dead people in the street.

Why the fuck did we choose this street over all others?

Whatever happened with the militia must have triggered some kind of immediate retaliation from the Haitian. The streets around us were silent. The ones in the distance still had the hum of traffic. Then came a new hum.

We had to go.

But where?

We needed binoculars and we had none. We checked the phone for any information but the refresh rate was only suitable for walkers, not runners, and only if people took the time to register every single zombie in sight. We had no idea if we were being boxed in or if there was an opening somewhere nearby.

We stopped in an alley, climbed up onto an upturned bin, and broke a window with the jab of a knife. We scrambled inside and waited. The howl came within seconds. The Haitian sent everything he had at the militia, trapping them in. Pops of gunshots echoed through the street. Wisps from bullets streamed past us. And we had nothing to do but wait to die.

We didn't dare move for three hours. When we did it was only because the news on our phones was telling us that things were about to get a lot worse. I think that was the first time any of us spoke to each other.

We headed downstairs and found the front of the building had

been smashed open. Outside were bodies piled on top of each other. Cars were on fire. Gun shots were distant. Zombies didn't seem to be in sight. We had an hour's worth of sunlight left.

We're in a car now. I'm in the back on my own because Rachel is still pissed off with me and my diary. One of the dead bodies had car keys in his pocket. We tried maybe a hundred cars on the road before we found his. There's not a lot of petrol in the tank.

We're heading south. Again.

### Part 3.

We've stopped for the night. We ran out of road. You know what's a bad idea? Driving through an unlit national park at night time. We couldn't see the massive ditch that we drove into. The car is beached and not going anywhere. We're going to sleep here for the night and walk in the morning. In a straight line we are a hundred miles to Tunis. If we walk it will take us three days. By now I should be aware that my guesstimates with time and distances are wildly ambitious, so let's just assume that we won't arrive for another month.

### 10 October

None of us laughed, but I have another joke from the Ediz archive. What's the most difficult thing about cooking a vegetable? Figuring out what to do with the wheelchair.

Anyway. Cristina's head against the concrete is the only thing I've been thinking about. She had tears in her eyes. None of us slept last night.

We've spent all day walking through the wilderness. It's a grassland area with the occasional tree in the distance or swamp for us to avoid. I have no idea where we are except that after eleven hours of walking we are most certainly in Tunisia. We can hear a highway in the distance but can't see it yet. The one thing I can describe about this parkland – bugs. Motherfucking bugs. Lots of them. I've spent more energy swatting them away than walking. You know how the dream is not that everything was easier, just that you were better at everything? Not this time. This is the perfect time when I wish everything was easier. I don't want to be better at walking through

Africa swatting bugs away from my ears, I just want the walk to be a quarter of the length and the bugs to be a thousand miles away from me.

We're out of service range on our phones. Someone's going to have to tell Cristina's family.

11 October

We're in Tunis. We made it to the hotel. We've met Simon. More updates tomorrow.

12 October

Here's the summary: we continued walking along the edge of a highway for hours until we got to some place called Beja. We were able to swap our dead mobile phone from Algeria for the use of another one by a driver who stopped to see if we were okay. We called Simon, Simon spoke to the driver to see where we were, the driver drove us to where he was going, which was Majaz Al Bab, and Simon sent a news van to come and get us. The drive to the hotel took two hours. We passed several check points but we had media passes that said we were journalists. Back in Algeria I was married. In Tunisia I'm a journalist. I'm hoping in the next place I might get to be an astronaut or something.

We got to the hotel and met Simon. He's from Bristol and has saved our arses so many times over the last few days that I will never be able to repay him. We met with several international journalists. They gave us food, we had a shower, then we did a number of interviews with different journalists asking us the same sort of questions. I made a vow not to talk about Cristina on camera. I can't deal with it right now. I answered their questions matter-of-factly. Simon expected four people to arrive. Three showed up. As long as I don't mention her name on camera then they won't see me break.

Rachel, though ... That was the first thing that spilled out of her. She burst into tears, saying that she saw her friend die. I walked out of the room, ready to punch someone. I shouted at Rachel later, that she was willing to tell the world that Cristina was dead before her family even found out. That didn't go down well. Simon handed me

a satellite phone. I must have paced around our room for half an hour before I even knew what to say. I dialled and hung up so many times that I started to berate myself for being a coward.

Simon came in, dialled the number, and handed me the phone. As soon as someone picked up he left.

I've never had to tell someone that their daughter died in front of me. Her parents knew of me. And Rachel and Ediz. Cristina had given them my contact details and told them who she was travelling with. Her last email was in Morocco. They asked if Rachel and Ediz were still okay. I might be over thinking it, but I'm pretty sure they were wondering why the one person to die happened to be their daughter.

Even though Simon left me in peace I spent most of the phone call in the bathroom behind a locked door. A couple of hours later I was still balling my eyes out. All I needed then was half a dozen people to break open the lock and drag me out like I was useless lump of a human being. I guess I owe Lalla an apology.

At dinner Simon said that the more I do and the more famous I become in my travels, the more likely it is that I can write a book and have it published. I told him that I'm writing a diary about my experiences. He said that would be perfect. I also have photos of zombies and places on my phone. I've recharged that and loaded what I have onto my email account.

Rachel and I have a twin room to ourselves. The BBC are covering our expenses and Simon said not to worry about it, it's an international hotel and people are treated well here. There's also an aircraft carrier off the coast. Jets are taking off day and night as they bomb the fuck out of Algeria, trying to take out Boyer. Let's hope they get him before he creeps into Tunisia.

I finally had a decent meal. Stew and couscous. Chickpeas, chopped potatoes, onions, and tomatoes. Plus pepper. Lots of pepper. How the hell do you eat couscous with a fork?

We asked if it was now possible to return to England. Simon said we would be quarantined for at least a month before we were allowed back in. That's fine with me, since I'm interpreting that as twenty four hour room service and a bed. They've set up a couple of quarantine centres on the Isle of Wight, Isle of Man, and even up on the Scottish Hebrides. The restrictions in and out of England are still fierce, especially from Tunisia, since we are so close to Algeria and this zombie warlord.

England is not doing too well. There are riots everywhere. The government is enacting strict new laws and they are starting to force people to work. If you were unemployed, fear not! Now you're working, whether you want to or not. Were you too fat and on disability? Now you're working.

My clothes have all been washed and my bag has been packed again. You never know when you need to run at a moment's notice.

I can't stop thinking about her head.

14 October

Not much happening here. We're not allowed to leave the building. We take turns on the computer and are able to call our families. I spent an hour in the bath this morning, just soaking myself, listening to some music through my phone. Pink Floyd. Not quite bliss, but certainly better than stumbling through Algeria.

Clint is alive. He's in Essex with his folks. Basil is with him. Our street was set upon by zombies so he left. I wish I could say that I was happy about that, but I've been too pissed off for days that I can't even properly function. He's not in London and has no plans to return. I'm not in London with no way to get back. He's decided not to pay any rent on our flat. What about my things? "It's just stuff," he says. That's not how it works, asshole. I want to be able to choose what to keep and what to ditch, I don't want that to be all up to you. I have my computer, camera, and guitar. I have clothes. The landlord is just going to take all of that for himself when you don't pay rent. "You can always buy another computer," he said. What about everything on there? There's more than just games on there, there's ten years worth of diary entries!

I've been staring at my flat key for a while, going crazy about not being able to save my things.

Rachel is making do. We've all been checked out by a doctor and we're all on pills for worms, in case we're still infected. It's not great to talk about, but considering it might have killed Rachel it's better having pills for something awkward than writhing in agony. I've been sleeping twelve hours straight since getting here, trying to make up for all the sleeping in cars, vans, on sofas, or on floors for the past eon.

We got into contact with Moroccan Mel. We thanked her

immensely and gave her an update of what's been happening with us. She's doing okay. Her neighbours (the ones who literally threw us onto the street) ignore her but nothing much has changed. We were able to speak to Azeem in Rabad. He and Lalla are doing okay. We spoke to the families of Katy and Sofia and they are doing well. We asked them to thank their daughters for their help and it was nice to hear their relief that their little ones have grown up to become decent people. Unfortunately we weren't able to give them any news about where they are, only that they helped us in Madrid. That wasn't entirely true, but I'd want them to tell my folks that I was something of a hero during an apocalypse. That kind of pride would last them a lifetime.

People all over the world are having their pets euthanised. I guess they'd prefer to have someone else put down Waffles or Whiskers so that they don't attack them when they join the league of undead.

Rachel seems to constantly murmur in her sleep these days.

16 October

One of the more horrendous ideas that has popped into my head is thinking about the actual state of mind of the undead. Some of them still remember their names just after they turn. We've seen that happen. If there is actually someone else controlling them then what if it takes that person some time to assume full control? You would feel your ability to control yourself slip away. They might still be conscious as they lumber around for days or weeks, recognising the streets they grew up on? They could be like those paralysed victims, trapped in their own bodies, unable to express themselves and ignored by doctors and nurses because they haven't found a way to respond.

What if these people are killing their families while realising what they're doing?

Part 2.

Do you know there are evangelicals all over the world raising money and not putting it to good causes? They're building fortresses for themselves, hiring private security teams, and buying attack

helicopters. Bullshit charities have sprung up to help the victims of the apocalypse, only the money is going straight to criminal fucktards. What used to be multi-vitamins now flood the streets as 'cures'.

I keep dreaming that I'm in the middle of a semi-destroyed city. It's been hit by bombs and explosions. I have no idea how I volunteered but I'm forming a human chain, linking arms with hundreds of others in a show of peace. I'm hoping that this sign of humanity is enough to stop the hundreds of zombies racing towards us through the streets. We can hear their snarls getting louder. We can hear them climbing over trucks and cars that were used as barricades to keep them out. Our peaceful act will stop them. They might have killed the first human chain, they might have killed the second. But we are confident that they won't kill us because we are protecting children and pregnant women. The creatures will stop. They will turn around. They will listen to us when we ask for peace. We will argue about how to divide this small patch of land that they so desperately want, but we will be fair.

Then I feel the push coming from behind like a mosh pit surging forward, only now I can't get my arms away from those linked to me and the zombies are still racing forward, snarling, about to kill me. And then I recognise the first and second human chains of peace are front and centre, about to attack us because we mean nothing to them.

20 October

Sometimes the news decides not to air stories of a graphic nature. But that's all we have here. Stories of a graphic nature. We're surrounded by journalists who need to share everything they've just seen. So now I've seen it as well. Sometimes they need someone to see what they've seen, not because they have a story of a life time, but because they need to offload some of the misery. I've seen too much unedited footage from survivors.

Yesterday there was a boy walking through the streets of Syria in his blue pyjamas. Someone shot him in the stomach. He didn't even flinch. Just kept on walking. Someone shot him in the head. Half of his skull just exploded away. He didn't drop down like you would expect. He looked down at the ground where bits of his head had

fallen out. He staggered from side to side to regain his balance, swaying like Clint does after downing half a dozen shots of Sambuca. The boy reached for the ground as though he had dropped something important. Bits of his head continued to fall out. Then down he went. After a moment to regain whatever senses he had, he crawled forward. Someone shot him again, this time in the side of his chest. He didn't flinch. Just kept crawling forward. They shot again and again. I asked Lachlen to put his phone away. He told me the video went on for another twenty minutes. By then the boy had crawled close enough for one of the shooters to get a point blank shot, taking out the rest of his head. He stopped crawling after that.

I didn't sleep last night.

Not all of their stories are deemed suitable for television. Mine was. Simon loved it. Perseverance and all that bullshit. I bumped into him today. He looked worse than Lachlen. His hand was also bandaged from punching a hole in the wall. He said it was one of the dumbest things he could've done because the hospitals have a queue stretching for miles. Sounds like the perfect place for a zombie ambush. And believe me, the zombies know it as well. There are police and concerned locals protecting hospitals, but if the boy in the pyjamas is anything to go by then it will take an entire clip or magazine to bring down just one zombie. How many gunmen are there protecting a hospital? Maybe four.

The reason for Simon punching a wall? He had interviewed a twelve year old girl who had the wherewithal to film the demise of her family. Her dad was a cook at an international restaurant. He promised to bring them back some food. He came back alright. He broke into their house. The girl had a crippled nine year old brother. He has ... *had* ... an arm missing from birth, his other arm was malformed and tiny, and he couldn't walk. He needed a wheelchair to move around. His dad went after him first. The boy was screaming and couldn't fight back. I heard all of this from the girl's bedroom, through her phone, as she pleaded with her dad to stop. The girl climbed out of her bedroom window to get to safety. I saw a flash of the dad through the curtains. His face was covered in blood. His eyes were white and enraged. He locked onto his daughter and ran straight at her, completely unaware of the window. He broke through the glass and fell over it, slicing his stomach open. He crawled out and shredded most of his abdomen and legs. Guess what eventually did him in? A car and a bat. You could see the driver

hesitate. He clipped the dad's leg on the first pass. It probably broke his knee cap. Then the driver backed up. There's a certain sound you never want to hear. It's your dad's chest breaking from the weight of a car driving over him. Or your friend's skull hitting the pavement because they're being crushed by an arsehole driver. Either way.

It's the sound I heard today from the girl's phone. She was hiding behind a neighbour's tree. Then she bawled her eyes out and kept screaming, "Baba". I spent enough time with Adalia and Ayman in Ghardaia to know that she was calling for her dad. The neighbours had to hold her back as her dad kept trying to lift his arm up. He reached out for her. One of the neighbours had a baseball bat with him. He edged forward and took a couple of swings. I have to wonder if the neighbour even knew if 'Baba' was a zombie or not. It was perfectly obvious before he was hit by a car but after that? Not so much. He could have just been a hit and run victim. This guy might have put him out of his misery without knowing if he was a member of the undead.

Then her brother crawled out of the house like a worm. Occasionally he rolled along the ground because he only had one half decent arm. The guy with the bat took care of him.

I can't even imagine cracking someone's head open with a bat, even if that someone was a murderer. One day I might have to take a weapon to a disabled kid's skull because it's either his life or mine.

I can still hear his screams from his bedroom rattling through my head.

Today was not a good day.

25 October

I don't want to sound ungrateful, but I'm bored. I have a comfortable bed, a nice room, food at the ready, and I can lounge around in a bath for hours on end. But, seriously, there is nothing to do. I am a master of Freecell on Clint's former tablet. Considering he's left all my stuff in my flat, it's now my tablet. I've beaten all of his high scores. Spider Solitaire is still a challenge. Either he was cheating or had an epic bout of good fortune because his high score is almost unbeatable.

Every country now has a great firewall protecting them, limiting their citizens from the panicked footage that exists *only* from

overseas. Rebels have taken over several countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Central America. Riots are occurring in every country. Governments are cracking down on dissidents and don't want to encourage their citizens to do anything that jeopardises the smooth implementation of iron fisted control. After all, parliament and congress always do what's best for their people.

We're not allowed to leave the hotel. There are gun shots outside so I'm not willing to leave anyway. There's a plume of smoke which can be seen out of every window. It's been like that since we arrived. There's some fighting between the walking dead and the locals, but rebels are taking care of the problem. One of the American reporters went out yesterday to get some new coverage and never came back. I met with him a few times over coffee. He was a bit of a dick. Simon said he was forever talking about the Arabs taking any opportunity they had to bomb Israel and Israel had every right to protect itself, even if that meant taking pre-emptive measures. That's not why I found him a dick, though. It's because he kept talking about the US election as though the fate of the world rests on its decision. They vote in three weeks. The Republicans are going to take it, it's a given. They're pro-war and a zombie uprising is just what they needed to reclaim the White House.

We've been in contact with the British government. We're in a hot spot right now so they won't fly anyone out, not even to a quarantine facility. We're on a waiting list. We've been here for two weeks and still all they can tell us is that we're on a waiting list.

Rachel and Ediz are both bored out of their minds as well. We barely talk to each other. There's nothing really to talk about. We've spent so long in each other's company that we're all sick and tired of each other. Ediz accidentally called Rachel 'Cristina' the other day.

My folks didn't stay for long in Eastbourne. They returned to London and my dad has started working again. They also broke into my flat and moved all of my stuff. Thank god for small mercies.

I tried to write a book like Simon said, but whenever I think about it I feel as though I'm a neurotic useless git, which is probably true, but it's not something I want to dwell on. Simon said I should send my diary to a ghost writer and let them embellish for all it's worth. We'll see.

I would almost kill for a burger. There's a gourmet burger joint just ten minutes from my place in London. They cover it with blue cheese sauce and the curly fries are drenched in cheese. The burger

is huge. Served with bacon and caramalised onion. I'm ready to gorge on that stuff and keep on eating until I pass out. It's all I've been thinking about for the last week. Why? Here's a hint:

Two cows are standing in a paddock. One says to the other: "Are you afraid of mad cow disease?"

"Nah," says the other.

"Oh? Why's that?"

"Because I'm a tractor."

Thaaaaaat's right. There are now fears of mad cow disease all over again. I will not be having a delicious, succulent, juicy burger drenched in blue cheese sauce because England is about to go beef free. They're also afraid that the beef has been contaminated by zombies.

Rachel has been trying to teach me some basic salsa dance moves she picked up before I arrived in Spain. Left foot goes here, right foot goes there. Now do it without thinking about it. You'd expect that would be easy, right? It isn't! I'm not even going to imagine that one day I'll be able to impress people with my mad cha-cha-cha skills. I'm calling it now: dancing is for other people.

2 November

We're about to die. None of us have slept in days. NATO is bombing Tunis. We evacuated the hotel days ago and we've been hiding in a hospital ever since. The rebels were over powered. The zombies came en mass. There are thousands of them in the streets, all chanting "Surrender!" in a mix of languages. I haven't had time to write until now because this is literally the first moment I've had time to sit down with a moment to breathe.

The gun battles got worse a week ago. There were explosions and grenades and bombs going off everywhere. The zombies were keeping to themselves, quietly populating their numbers. A group of them would go into a building, break the doors down and infect everyone, then they would wait. They waited for days. Then, like cockroaches, they flooded the streets and went on the offensive, going door to door and infecting anyone they could find. They moved in hundreds, if not in the thousands.

There were gunships in the air and helicopters firing into crowds of zombies. We could see them from our hotel, shooting into the

streets. Then the Tunisian President came on TV. He was quite clearly a zombie and he was murmuring “Surrender,” over and over again. He gave a speech. It was the Haitian’s voice, the same one we heard in Spain. He sounded weak, but that could be because he’s controlling a vast number of the undead. The NATO bombing run started not long after that. Apparently the strategy by the zombies of hiding, waiting, and racing as one was world wide and happened all at the same time.

We’re in the actual apocalypse now. There aren’t enough bullets in the world to end this.

We waited for four days in the hotel listening to the bombs. No one came in to work, meaning we had free access to the kitchen but supplies quickly ran out. We knew we would have to run soon. A bomb went off, rattling the side of the hotel. All of the reporters left at once.

We went from building to building, trying to hide and scrounge up some food. We could hear the fighting, the cackles from the zombies, and I saw more dead bodies in the street than I could ever care to imagine. Bodies piled up high to create a roadblock. Arms moving about in every pile from the undead who were too injured to be of any more use. There were smashed open skulls, missing limbs, people who were eaten in a frenzy. I saw a man’s stomach and intestines lying on the ground. I saw a zombie throw a baby against a wall.

We got to the coast and were trying to flag down a British ship. Simon had a Union Flag with him and was waving it around. No one came to get us. When the zombies stormed the beach we retreated back to the streets. They chased us all through the night. We managed to get to a hospital. We’re going to stay here and hope no one bombs us.

The building keeps rattling. Bombs are going off. I’m about to throw up.

3 November

One of the reporters has managed to get a boat to come to us. We’re leaving.

4 November

It took longer than we expected. We left at dawn. Ten hours later the boat finally showed up. Someone fucked up their timing. It looks like we're on a sight-seeing mini cruise, or something people use to go snorkelling. It's big, though. There are nineteen of us on board. We're heading north east. If Cristina was here she might be jumping up and down because it's taking us to Sicily. The problem is there's no way we're going to get through. There seems to be an armada of naval ships between us and Italy.

I saw a zombie suicide bomber blow himself up. It ran straight towards a soldier's roadblock. The soldiers didn't fire back, they just ran. The explosion sounded like a balloon bursting. Then there was bits of blood and clothing flying through the air before landing across both sides of the street. I heard a howl of agony from someone who didn't get far enough away when the bomb went off.

*Fuuuuuuuck* there are zombies in the water and they're all swimming towards us. Some are wearing French naval uniforms. They're thrashing about, coming at us from all sides.

5 November

One zombie got close enough for us to drop an anchor on its head. That slowed it down. We see the rest of them through binoculars swimming in all sorts of directions. It's daylight now and I'm seeing splotches of colour.

It's my mum's birthday. She's fifty nine. Happy Birthday Mum. Hope it's a good one.

The Italian coast guard is coming towards us.

Well that didn't work. We were stopped and boarded by the coast guard. They didn't want anyone getting to Italy. We explained that we are all European and are escaping a war zone. Tough shit. We could see Sicily from our boat. As soon as the coast guard made it clear that we weren't going to reach land, people started jumping into the water, trying to swim for the coast. The guard drew his pistol

and took aim at us on the boat. He'd lost control. As soon as we saw the gun at us we all jumped into the water. Fuck him. We didn't believe that he would shoot nineteen of us. And he didn't. It took them almost an hour to round everyone up and pick us out of the water. We're now being escorted back to Africa. The people around me say that as soon as we're far enough away from Sicily, the coast guard will turn around and we will have to try again.

Do you have any idea what it was like to jump overboard with tins of pineapple and tuna in their bags, like some people did, and then expect to swim? I'm surprised no one drowned.

It's night time. We're trying again. Back in the hospital, as soon as I heard about a boat, I covered everything I had in plastic bags. Whatever it takes to keep my stuff dry.

I've just wished Rachel and Ediz all the best. Again. This one feels like we might actually die, especially if we jump into the water again.

This is potentially my final entry. We're in sight of Sicily for the second time today. The owner of the boat says he'll get us as close as possible to the coast but he can't risk beaching himself. We're going to have to swim and avoid the rocks. I can't swim all that well with a backpack, nor in heavy waves. If anyone finds this diary, floating through the water, please let my parents know that I'm aware that I'm about to do the dumbest thing ever in my life in about half an hour, but I don't have much choice. I would like to say that I'm not going to stop swimming, but I haven't eaten today and my legs are shaking from hunger.

I can hear the dead thrashing about in the water. They're coming for us.

6 November

I didn't die. Rachel and Ediz didn't die either. Three of our people never reached the coast. We believe they drowned. We had to jump earlier than we expected because the coast guard started shooting at us. Someone shouted into the dark: "We're Italians! Don't shoot!" They shot anyway. We scattered like rats and dove into the water. It

was only as I got my first breath of air that I realised I had jumped in the wrong direction. Everyone was calling everyone else's name to make sure they were still alive. I had stuffed two life jackets into my pack to keep it afloat. It was probably what saved my life. By the time I got to where everyone else had started they were long gone and I was way behind.

My watch is dead. It got smashed. I liked that fucking watch. I ditched it. Even though it barely weighs a thing, it weighs something. I've had it for six years and now it's lying on a beach in Sicily.

Incidentally, this is my first time in Italy. It took me almost an hour of lying on the sand before I had the strength to stand up. I think I was swimming for more than an hour. People swam in to help me onto the shore. They say I was moving so slowly they thought I was a zombie.

## Part 2.

We've split up. Most of us didn't want to but we were too big of a group to walk through Sicily and go unnoticed. There are six of us travelling together. We've had to duck a few times to avoid the police. No doubt the coast guard have called us in. People will be actively looking for us.

7 November

Motherfucking Italians. So we were caught. Are we in a police station? No. Are we in an internment camp? Yes. Are we segregated by race? Yes.

We were split up, shoved onto different buses, and Ediz's went first. We haven't seen him since. He looks Middle Eastern so that's likely a draw back. Simon, Rachel, and I were on the second bus. We haven't seen any Italians in our camp, aside from the authorities. We all have Red Cross style care packages. I ate my biscuits and drank my water. There's no easy way to say this but we're ... sitting in a death trap, surrounded by fences covered in razor wire, and make no mistake about it, we are all prisoners, caught for being illegal immigrants, and we're going to be treated with the harshest of penalties.

We haven't entered the main facility yet. We still need to be processed by a doctor and have our stories verified. That should be fun, considering I have a massive gap in my recent history from lining up in front of Gibraltar to suddenly arriving in Sicily with a Brit who definitely came from Tunis.

We're just sitting around, waiting to see if we succumb to an infection. Maybe we'll go on a hunger strike. Will that stop the authorities? What would they care? If we starve, we starve. One less person to worry about.

Some of the people around here were backpackers, travellers, guests, just like us, except most of these people never left Sicily. The camps have been around for six weeks or so. It's been in all the papers, apparently. How the hell did we not hear about this? Here I am, another illegal immigrant and I'm rounded up in a concentration camp. They keep saying it's not a concentration camp, but it certainly feels like one. We're all smooshed in here. English, French, Germans, Australians, even some Spanish people, which makes me feel right at home again. They speak good English here, except the Italian guards remember their English only when it's convenient.

8 November

Waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, fucking waiting, nothing to do but waiting. I hate waiting. We're still not zombies. Waiting.

9 November

Wow, we finally got to see a doctor. I am happy to report that I am not a member of the league of undead. Take *that* asshole doctors! Nor is anyone else who travelled with us. That means we get to go into the bigger internment camp! Yay us.

What a novelty this is. Waiting in line for food packages, standing around and making small talk. Can't wait to do this again tomorrow.

Rachel's made a friend, a girl who seems miserable all the time. Rachel really needs to aim a little higher. I was able to joke around with Simon a bit, but he's pissed off that he's a senior journalist who's had all of his BBC access denied by the locals. Whenever he

complains to the Italians they remind him that he is an illegal immigrant and doesn't belong here. Simon doesn't have a legal leg to stand on. None of us do. We need to be grateful that there are walls and fences between us and the horde of undead. But I've seen those things run, climb, swim, and blow themselves up for a good cause, so these walls and fences don't really mean shit in terms of keeping us alive, they're just here to force us to behave.

We sleep six to a room in bunk beds. It seriously feels like a locked-in school camp. All of the women are in one half of the compound, all of the men are in another half. I see Rachel each morning and we ask each other if we're okay. We see each other before heading off for the night. Simon spends most of his day talking to everyone, getting their life stories. Always a journalist.

It was election day yesterday in the States. It was the lowest turn out in over a century. Most people just wanted to avoid being out in the open. The police and military were in position to protect voters but it wasn't enough. Over a hundred separate attacks were reported. Some zombies had suicide vests, others targeted car parks, train stations, and shopping malls. Lots of people died. Only the hardcore voters came out, and in equal numbers too. They still don't know who won the election. There are plenty of reports of electoral fraud, rigging, and talks of going to the supreme court. On top of that, there's a large discrepancy between the popular vote versus the electoral college numbers.

By the way, it's now taboo to use the phrase 'die hard'. 'Hardcore' is more appropriate, I'm told. I wonder if Hardcore with a Vengeance is now the most torrented film on the interwebs.

10 November

There were gun shots last night. I'm going to assume that no one tried to escape, but rather the zombies are getting closer. We're trapped behind a chain fence that I'm sure can be climbed with ease. The razor wire might be an issue if you're worried about losing a lot of blood, but that's only a concern if you're a human trying to get out. If you're a zombie trying to get in then a little razor wire won't be a problem, because right in front of you will be a feast the likes you've only dreamed of; a thousand warm blooded bodies to bite and turn.

More waiting. More care packages. I got so bored I hung around a few Germans and English guys talking about rugby. I know dick about rugby. By the time we get out of here I'm going to be an expert without every having seen a game. There are some people playing handball against a wall and it occurred to me that this is exactly what they would do in prison.

11 November

More gun shots last night. Lots of gun shots. There were helicopters in the middle of the night, search lights, and we all crawled to the windows to see if we were in trouble.

Even when there aren't gun shots I wake up flinching. The beds squeak. The doors creak. People snore and groan. People are restless when they can't sleep so they toss and turn and wake the rest of us up.

According to Simon, who's done his research, the zombie outbreak in Italy and Sicily is far worse than reported, potentially by a factor of ten. According to my latest figures I had 6,000 infected. Simon is sure it's upwards of 50,000. There are 5,000 of us locked away in here and the compound is full. A single zombie can infect us all. If it's able to infect just a couple of people it won't take long before everyone is ripping each other apart.

Simon has also come to the rescue with information. It can take just a few minutes to convert a human to a zombie. The closer you are to death the sooner it takes to turn you into one of them. It's all about the quantity of infected blood or saliva that enters your blood stream. In real terms, a simple scratch or a wound that requires a band aid won't turn you into a zombie. You might get sick, like with the flu, but you probably won't turn. You might die from your wound, though, as it is resistant to healing and will kill your immune system. By then the common cold will be strong enough to end you. If a creature mauls you to death you don't stand a chance. Within a couple of minutes you'll rise again. Some of them remember their names upon rising but that quickly fades. One backpacker here lost her husband. She was staggering backwards after the attack, looking at him as he started to move again. He seemed to remember his name. An hour later he had no recognition of her. She kept screaming his name and he ignored her like she didn't exist. He just

walked the other way. So, I guess, zombies aren't out to kill everyone, they're here to follow a plan. She followed him for six hours before someone shot him in the head.

12 November

Simon came to me this morning telling me not to go anywhere without seeing someone's ID. He said people are being shipped out as part of a forced labour crew. We brought Rachel in on the conversation and she thought it would be a good idea to pretend to be sick. Simon cautioned her about that, saying that if someone thinks she's sick then they'll quarantine her for days to see if she's been infected by a zombie. Simon is convinced that we don't want to take that risk. So what? We either lie in bed with a doctor keeping his distance or be used as slave labour. What's the problem in lying?

We spent the day trying to contact the British embassy but we're shit out of luck. They want to know how we got from Tunisia to Sicily. By boat. They wanted official details and they didn't like that we're potentially spreading the infection. They've taken the hard line that we must follow the rules at all costs and we should've stayed in Tunisia. That's quite a stand. Simon isn't surprised. Everyone is on lock down, in damage control, and the governments are trying to stop the spread of the infection. The problem is the infection is already in every country.

The situation in Korea looked to be pretty good until last week. Then there was an outbreak from the North. Thousands of zombies hurried across the borders of China and South Korea. Some swam all the way to Japan. Mines went off, shots were fired, but enough made it through to fuck shit up. I'm told that 50,000 South Koreans died in the first night alone.

13 November

No, I won't fucking calm down! I brought my bag to the shower like I always do. It is never more than a metre away from me. I closed the shower curtain over and when I was done someone had gone through my backpack and had helped themselves to whatever they wanted. They took my phone, toothbrushes, my toothpaste, my cans of food,

a couple of t-shirts, my first-aid kit, a pen, and some paper. What the fuck? Why the hell would someone do this to me? I want to punch out any fucker who walks around wearing one of my t-shirts. I'm going to rip their fucking head off. Seriously. You fuckers have been in Sicily this whole time in a lap of luxury compared to the shit storm I've had to go through. I had to become a thief to survive, so you can bet your ass that I will beat the fuck out of whoever robbed me. And my fucking phone? That had all of my photos on it, all of my contacts, and is utterly useless to anyone else! It's my fucking phone! Mine! God fucking damn it I want to find the bastard who robbed me and just strangle him until his eyes pop out of his head. It will be worth it just to find him.

14 November

I hate this place so, so much.

16 November

Rachel's gone.

I saw her at breakfast. We said hello. She told me the women in her quarter had a doctor's appointment. I was in my room, waiting with my bag for anyone who looked guilty or shouldn't be in my room. Justin came along to say that a bus just took twenty women away. My stomach dropped and I went to make sure Rachel wasn't one of them. I went to her room and it was empty. Everyone who used to be in there is now gone. Their bags are gone, the beds were stripped. I asked around. The women saw Rachel being led off into another room. Those who went in that room haven't been seen since. They did hear a bus, though. Justin saw it drive away.

So Rachel is gone and I never said goodbye. I haven't heard anything from Ediz either. Or Katy. Or Sofia. Or anyone else who survived Madrid. Only Simon is still here and he's apocalyptic with anger. They won't let him talk to the embassy either.

Rachel's departure hasn't quite sunk in yet. She's pretty much been in my line of sight every moment for the last four months.

18 November

I have a doctor's appointment today. They gave me a slip of paper at breakfast with my name scribbled on it to meet at 11 o'clock. Everyone else in my room has a similar piece of paper. Maybe they'll take me to wherever they took Rachel. Either way I doubt I'll see this place again. No idea where I'll be sleeping either. They still won't tell me where Rachel is. I'll ask the doctor today. If I don't like the answer I'm going to punch him in the fucking face.

I can barely process what's going on. Most people in here look so bored you'd think they were zombies anyway. They just sit and stare at the ground. We've all seen dead people. We've all seen zombies attacking us and trying to kill us. Some have held on for longer than others. I seem to be the one who has travelled the farthest to escape these things. So far it hasn't been far enough.

19 November

I've arrived at some villa in the middle of nowhere. We're slaves now. I didn't take Simon's advice about the ID thing. I lined up, waiting to see a doctor. Instead, it was some guy in a shirt checking my paperwork. He asked me to go through the door on his right. I went down a corridor and two soldiers opened another door for me. That led to the car park that first brought me into the internment camp. There was a bus waiting with ten guys on board. They threw my backpack into the storage area under the bus and told me to get on board. I did. I asked around and no one knew where we were going. After waiting for another hour six guys more came on board, then along came four Sicilians with pistols strapped to their chest. They looked like bare knuckle cage fighters. I look anorexic.

One of them, in broken English, said: "We have found jobs for you. It will be better than this place."

Everyone glanced at each other. We were being abducted and we knew it. We also knew there was nothing we could do about it. Seventeen unarmed guys verses four brutish men with guns. Fully loaded that would've added up to forty eight bullets. That's three a piece for anyone who tried to run.

No one spoke up. No one picked a fight. No one said anything for the whole bus ride.

It took the best part of ninety minutes. We're far from the coast now, up a long and winding hill. The villa feels more like a farm with several buildings spread out. We were shown to long, empty rooms with mats on the ground like futons. We were told to dump our bags by our beds (I picked the second from the end, because the end was already taken by the guy in front of me). We were then given our jobs. I'm now a mechanic. Apparently my three hour's worth of experience in Algeria was enough to qualify me.

We were immediately put to work. I helped some of the guys dismantle a couple of vehicles and Frankenstein the barely working parts into something more serviceable. The garage is large, full of tractors, motorbikes, cars, and tools. The back room has large barrels with pipes running off it like they're making homebrew wine. Best guess? They're trying to make petrol. There were large rigs of batteries and solar panels on the roof. They're trying to convert all of the machines, eventually, to solar or battery powered, but it's not working as quickly as they'd like.

The rest of the guys from the bus were sent into the field to help with the late harvest.

I spent much of last night, once it was dark, talking to Jason, the guy at the end of the room. I imagine I'm the one he's going to be speaking to for the rest of our stay here. We're under no illusion that we're anything but slaves. There are lots of Sicilians walking around with pistols and rifles. On the drive up here it was very clear that we won't survive long in the heat and terrain, it's just rock and dry grass. Jason tells me that isn't his real name. He doesn't want to give his real name because he doesn't want to remember what's happening to him right now. He wants to block it all out. As such, just about everything he tells me is made up. He says he's seen stuff that none of us would even believe. I didn't press for details but he just kept repeating, "Stuff," with a heavy tone, as though I'm telepathic and understand what he's talking about. I've seen a hundred zombies swimming after me. That was pretty fucked up. I've seen them speaking English in Algeria when they recognised what language I spoke. I don't really care what stuff 'Jason' has seen.

There are bars on the windows and the doors are locked at night. My mattress is uncomfortable. We hear people walking around at all hours, talking to each other in Italian. I have no idea what they're saying. One guy amongst us speaks basic Italian and he said that so far they haven't said anything interesting, just, "I need to take a piss,"

and other nonsense like that.

I can't help but think of Rachel right now. Is she sitting up on a mattress like me, as a worker? I hope she's safe. I hope she also knows that I'm okay. I'm not, but ... you know. Take a teaspoon of cement and harden the fuck up, I guess.

I'm also pretty sure that none of this would have happened to me if Cristina was still with us. I've been thinking about her a lot.

20 November

When we came back from 'work' today we found that all of our IDs, passports, and official paperwork have been taken. Our clothes remain. We're officially kidnapped and held hostage. The Sicilians keep to the party line of: "You have jobs. You will work. When you are done you can go."

I wonder how much they paid for me. How easy was the bribe? "We want seventeen men who can't speak Sicilian. Is seventeen thousand euro too much?" That's all it takes. One little bribe and my future is taken out of my hands.

Right now my only chance of being freed is through Simon. He might be able to find out where I am.

21 November

It has occurred to me that I might be here for years. They had me working the fields today, still working on a late harvest. They don't want to use the tractors because they need diesel. We'll be doing this through manual labour. I want to go back to being a mechanic. I guess I wasn't good enough.

They have no reason to let me go. They have no reason to alert the police or the embassy as to my whereabouts. All I could think about today was strangling someone with my bare hands. This isn't how you treat another human being. Evan, one of my roommates, told one of the Sicilians that his family has money, they can pay to have him released. The Sicilian told him he has to work. Evan's family own a chain of florists in Scotland. They have millions of pounds. Not good enough, get back to work.

The thing that really pisses me off about this is that they're going

to get away with this. If these people are connected enough to get slaves working for them then they're not going to be bothered by the consequences five or ten years down the line. And I'm not important enough to have someone sent to jail over my human rights being trampled.

22 November

I don't know what's happening to me, but after lights out I balled my eyes out. I know I'm miserable, I know I'm a prisoner, I know I've failed Rachel, but last night my mind was completely blank and I was crying.

24 November

Enzo is a psychotic asshole. He spent four hours shouting at me today in Italian. I don't speak Italian. Not a word. I carried on working while he shouted at me. What is the point in shouting at someone if they can't understand you? I decided right then that if I ever get out of this place I'm going to find a way to get back at them. I'm going to file charges and prosecute them. I can figure out where I am on the map. There has to be a paper trail of bribes that will point the blame at Enzo. He won't get away with this. I will burn him and all the others working here. There are trucks in the garage with license plates. I've memorised them. I spend all day reciting those letters and numbers back to myself. There are trucks that come by every day. I've memorised those as well. Someone knows who the trucks are registered to. Even if it takes me twenty years of failed court attempts I will have my revenge. I will come back on a holiday, buy a rifle, and shoot Enzo in the face.

29 November

There's nothing to write about. We're woken up by an Italian shouting something at us which, according to Lucas, means: "Good morning, it's a beautiful day, it's time to live like kings." I get up, I shower, I have breakfast, I check with Enzo who says either, "Field,"

or, “There,” pointing to the garage. I work until someone shouts, “Mangiare.” We have half an hour to eat our fill, then we go back to work until the sun starts to set. When there’s no more light in the sky we go to dinner, eat pasta, bread, and sometimes we’re given coffee or canned fruit. Then we have time to wash our clothes and hang them out for the night. The rest of the time is ours. At some point the guards come along and tell us it’s light’s out. The batteries from the solar panels don’t last all night, but the lights in the main house stay on. I go to sleep. The only change to the day is when a truck comes up with goods and equipment, then I get to spend twenty minutes loading or unloading whatever is brought along.

This afternoon I was cleaning up after lunch, washing all of the dishes, and I just drifted off while staring at a steak knife. It was just lying on the side of the sink. I could imagine a dozen things I could do with it. I could go on a murderous rampage and gut Enzo. I could stop whoever it is from snoring, permanently.

I know why Simon from the BBC isn’t here. The authorities knew he would be a hassle. He would make sure that Enzo and everyone from the farm were crucified for running this operation. He’s probably still in quarantine, working on a story to release to the BBC once he gets out. Maybe he’ll be able to track me down.

There is no indication that we’re ever leaving.

2 December

Someone keeps snoring. It’s not what I need in the middle of the night before a long day of back breaking work.

12 December

I can’t believe we’re coming up to Christmas. I turned twenty four the other day and I completely forgot about it. I also just figured out it was nine months after my dad’s birthday. Yay.

There’s no news up here. No one speaks of the zombies. They could have all been exterminated by now and still we’re here, slaving away with no idea of what’s happening in the rest of the world. My parents must think that I’m dead. They knew I was in Tunis. They would know that NATO started attacking and that they haven’t

heard from me in weeks.

I'm never going to see Basil again, am I? He may not even remember me if I ever get back to England.

I barely think about Rachel. It's just ... if they're treating me like this, like nothing, then they must think of Rachel as nothing either. When they're done with me they might shoot me and bury me in a ditch. Wouldn't they do the same to her? Whenever I think of her all I imagine is that someone has been raping her for weeks. I wonder if by now she's stopped trying to fight them off and just accepts her fate? That's why I can't think about her, because if she gave up then I might give up.

We're moving around with shears and wheelbarrows, carrying things back to one of the buildings where all of this crap gets sorted. We keep some of the food to eat. Someone asked me to move my futon to another part of the room because he hates the two guys he's sleeping next to. He kept saying that if he had to wake up to them again he would have to break their face. I obliged, but I now understand why he hated them. They fart towards me, they burp, they're the slobs from hell. They stand on my mattress with their shoes on to chat to each other, they stand on my mattress to fix their beds. I've told them to stop it. The guy before me told them to stop it. They keep saying sorry but they don't change. Last night one of them was jerking off and getting into it. He didn't care if anyone else was bothered. I want to break their faces as well.

Another stupid thing is the conversations I've had to have with the other prisoners. No one is interesting here. No one has a ray of hope. We're all miserable fucks and none of us want to see each other again. I was trying to wash my jeans and get them clean while Shrieker was telling me about his travels during the outbreak. He flew from Rome to Syracuse and has all of these survival tips for when you encounter a zombie. I asked him flat out: "How many zombies have you encountered?"

"Twenty," he said. I told him that I was in the Madrid riots, which he hadn't heard of, and we escaped a zombie on the train tracks. We were also attacked on our way to Getafe and I saw someone die in front of me. I saw two zombies from the roof and they changed my world forever. I was there when someone got hit by a motorbike. I passed three dead people on the side of the road. I was chased by two zombies near Gibraltar. We ran from dozens in Algeria and hundreds in Tunis. The girl I can't stop dreaming about

was killed when we tried to run from them. They were swimming after us on our way to Sicily. So, really, shut the fuck up and stop shrieking when you laugh.

He left, but that allowed Dribbles to come up and ask me some genuine questions. He hadn't seen any. He, like Josh, just stayed in a hotel during the outbreak until they kicked him out and he spent his time wandering around until he was picked up by the police. He asked me how I escaped all of that. I don't know. I was with friends and we ran for most of it. Dribbles keeps stealing people's pillows and swapping them for his.

1 January

I only know the date because the Italians were celebrating New Year's last night. No one told the foreigners. We stood by the window looking at the main house with its lights on. The people inside were all cheering and drinking, counting down from ten. We stood by the window not saying a word.

We haven't had a day off since arriving. I think I've pulled a muscle in my right shoulder.

A while ago, Dumbass, one of the roommates, disappeared. He was working in the field during the day and he never came to lunch. No one really noticed until dinner time. The Sicilians went looking for him but no one was willing to use their car. It's a smart move, really. No one can catch up to him. I have no idea where he planned on going but it's given me the motivation to get out of here. He had to leave his backpack, though. I don't know if I could do that. It would mean leaving behind just about everything I have left in this world, except for what I'm wearing.

4 January

I've tried to keep my spirits up by reading over previous entries. I shouldn't have bothered, it's only left me more depressed than ever. I can't seem to stop crying at night. I think about Alana more than I should. I wake up so horribly miserable that it becomes the only thing I can think about during the day. I can't believe I'm still thinking of her almost a year after we broke up. But you know what?

If we had broken up two months earlier or remained together for two months more then I wouldn't be in Sicily right now. I took this trip to get away from her, to have something to remember later on in life. I wouldn't have been in Spain during the outbreak. There's a good chance that Rachel wouldn't have gone south towards Gibraltar. They might have gone north, towards France. Cristina certainly wouldn't have died in Algeria.

Of all the people I've ever met, Enzo is the one most deserving to die as painfully and horribly as possible. He shouts at everyone he sees and is an abusive fuck. Even the Italians hate him. He is so chronically abusive that even a Buddhist monk would tell him to shut the fuck up. I wish I was a ninja so I could pinch his throat and drop him to the ground. I wish the Doctor would turn up in his TARDIS and save us all. I wish England would get its act together and come save me.

I can't sit around and wait for someone to rescue me. I have to figure out how to do it myself. There are no fences here, only guns. On the outside is the threat of a mindless horde. I've reached my limit. I just need one night of decent sleep with no one snoring and I will be able to make my move.

6 January

Yesterday I escaped. I'm wearing two lots of clothing so that I have a spare set. I left my Hawaiian shirt behind because it's been nothing but trouble. I brought two pens and my diary. Nothing else. I got to work the fields yesterday and, like Dumbass, I snuck off and just kept moving. I'm going to keep walking north. I don't know what's north of here but that's where I'm going.

Clearly, I couldn't have started working in the fields with my backpack, that would have been too suspicious. I had to say goodbye to everything that was non-essential. It's terrifying not having a backpack. I've had it with me for almost every waking moment for months, to the point where I was fidgeting in the night just to be sure it was still there.

I don't know how I chose the right time to move. I had been sweating over it for a few hours. Do I go now? No. What about now? Maybe. As soon as that guy moves I'll go. Oh, he's back. Okay, when the next guy moves away, I'll go.

I was given the chance to run for it a dozen times before I actually worked up the courage. The whole time I scurried away I was sure I would hear the snap of a bullet just a second before it slammed into the back of my skull.

As soon as I was out of sight from the houses I ran. Convincing myself to stop and walk was hard. When I caught my breath I forced myself to run again, always thinking that they would notice I was gone the moment Enzo shouted at one of them to stop fucking up. I kept going until it got dark. I was starving. Still am, but at least I was able to find a tree to sleep against. I say 'sleep'. It was more dozing and waking up a hundred times before the sky started to brighten. Then I walked again. It's only now, next to a river and some fruit trees, that I dare believe that I'm far enough away from Enzo and the farm.

It's the first time on my own in months. It's the first time I can't hear a single other person out there. It's glorious. Everyone on the farm was snoring or farting. I just want to get back to England and curl up under a blanket in my own bed and stay there for a month, watching something like Archer. I want to enjoy the brisk English air again. I want my crisps and I want a burger and I want Yorkshire pudding covered in gravy. I want Monster Munch and Sugarpufts and Curly Wurlies.

I have no idea what the fuck I'm going to do when I eventually run into someone. I don't speak Italian. They might send me back to the internment camp. Enzo might send some of his guys to get replacements. They'll realise I was caught. They'll bring me along, kicking and screaming, force me to dig a ditch while the rest of the prisoners watch, before they do a song and dance about how no one is to ever escape. Then: *bam*. Back of the head. No more trouble for them.

There's a zombie staring at me.

I stopped walking and there it was, standing in the middle of nowhere. After ten minutes without it moving I had fallen into a false sense of security, so I scribbled in my diary without taking my eyes off the creature.

I shouted at it to leave. It didn't respond. I asked for its name.

After a moment of staring back at me it squinted and said: “English.”  
It had the Haitian’s voice.

He now knows where I am.

## Part 2.

There’s an empty town in sight. I’ve been watching it for half an hour now. There are no people moving about, no cars, no human sounds of any kind. No traffic noises or even a single radio playing to itself. There are birds in the air but no cats or dogs. It wouldn’t surprise me if a rolling mist had suffocated everything that once lived on the ground.

Two things are burning through my mind right now. The first is that there are beds down there and supplies. I doubt there’s a lot of food, but there will be backpacks, clothes, and water bottles. I need those to survive. The second is that the town is deserted for a reason and that reason will kill me. It might be infested with zombies or perhaps the army has forced everyone out and will shoot anything that moves. If I had a coin I would flip it to see if I should go down there anyway.

The zombies have been changing their tactics. They’ve started hiding like cockroaches, building their numbers by hiding in areas that no sane person would dare enter. Then they wait before blitzkrieging the population.

I can out-run one zombie. I might be able to out manoeuvre two. But there could be thousands of them down there, waiting for me. Thanks to that solitary zombie on the hillside, the Haitian knows I’m here.

If there’s a phone down there I can call Cristina’s family. I’ll pay whoever picks me up a thousand euro to drive over here and bring me back to a decent bed. In the meantime, I have to figure out if that town is actually empty.

I really don’t know what to do. I should go down there but it’s going to be a death trap. My throat is starting to feel like sandpaper. My stomach shudders from a lack of food. If I can’t get a drink soon I’m going to die.

What do I do?

Is it a whole town just for me or a whole town waiting for me?

Half an hour of waiting and nothing has moved.

Nothing that I can see has moved.  
Fuckity fuck fuck.

### Part 3.

Helicopters are coming. Military choppers, and lots of them. I'm hiding in the shrub land behind a tree, watching the town. I had just decided to go down there when I heard an engine from the far side of the hill.

Jesus Christ, they're fire bombing the town. I can feel the heat from here. There are a thousand houses down there and they've just carpeted the whole place in flames. People used to live there. People who went to work for twenty five years to pay the mortgage on those homes and these helicopters have just incinerated them in seconds.

The buildings are all exploding independently, popping and collapsing under the flames. I can hear the glass shattering and the smoke rising. They weren't taking any chances in killing everything that was down there. Don't you think that's maybe what the Haitian wants? He wants us destroying everything we've already built? And if there was just one zombie down there, one little dead person, would that justify the madness here? The flames are howling, roaring at a volume I wouldn't have believed possible.

There might have been people down there, hiding. Or they became deformed beyond even Satan's abilities. Ravenous wolves, ripping each other apart. There's not a smile on their faces when they do it. They're not even doing it to save their own lives. And here I am, standing over their homes, unable to feel even an ounce of pity at whoever was hiding down there, nor unable to feel joy that there might be fewer dead in this world.

The smoke's coming this way.

### Part 4.

For two hours I had to hurry around the mountain to get away from the smoke, but even now I can smell it and I'm coughing up lungfuls of soot. I can hear stumbling through the mountain, faint gasps and wheezes that convince me there are creatures or animals moving towards me. I keep turning around but there's no one there.

I spent a good long while watching the town burn. It's like the flames swallowed the last of my emotions, leaving me now as a vacant wasteland. I don't feel the urge to eat or drink, I just do it because I know I have to. I don't have any opinion on the people who used to inhabit that town. Either way, anyone who's alive right now will be dead one day and no one will remember their names. I'll be dead one day as well and it won't be long until everyone forgets me. In a hundred years I might be known to a few distant family members, but all they'll know of me is my name and that I walked through Africa during the zombie uprising. And so what? Everyone else will have their own story of survival. Mine will be just another within the muddle. In a hundred and fifty years there won't be any need for people to remember me. In two hundred and fifty years only the top twenty stories about this epidemic will survive. I can't tell you a single thing about what happened between 1800 and 1850, aside from the birth of the industrial revolution. I don't know any of the pioneers. These people actually did something and I don't even know their names. All I did on this trip was tag along with some friends and became another mouth to feed. The only name people will remember is the Haitian's. I don't even know what it is.

I've been watching the town burn while keeping a look out for anything stumbling through the dark. I'm getting tired. I don't know if I can keep on going like this. At times I think I'm just going to sit down and wait until something gets me.

7 January

The wind changed last night and I couldn't risk falling asleep. The smoke blew into me and I didn't want to choke to death. That was enough to move me. So, I started walking. Then I was thirsty, so that kept me going a little farther.

At dawn I saw some of the fleeing zombies. I reeled back from the stench long before I saw them. They were shuffling away from the town. Some had burns, some were still smouldering with smoke. Others had clothes burnt and falling apart. One of the zombies, a woman, has a backpack. She must have died while wearing it. I need to get it from her or I'm going to die out here.

Part 2.

I've lost them. God, I can barely breathe. What the hell happened to my energy levels that I can't even run anymore? My legs won't stop shaking and my handwriting is a mess.

They all turned against me. I was following the horde, maybe twenty of them, over this hill. They were all walking in the same direction, stumbling along, and I was trying to keep a safe distance while figuring out how to get to the woman with the backpack. She was towards the side of the group but was still surrounded. I needed that backpack.

As they descended the hill there was a zombie standing ground, facing them, like it had been there for weeks and had been forgotten about. Then it saw me. It cocked its head to one side and I swear it rasped, "Getafe."

So, holy fuck, the Haitian remembers me. I was stopped dead for a moment as I realised what it had said. I was on the roof in Getafe looking down at the woman staring at the swings who kept saying "Surrender," and now this creature in Sicily remembers me from then.

The twenty other zombies turned all at once, stared at me, and started plodding in my direction. My heart lurched as I realised I had just epically fucked up. As soon as I took a step back they all shot at me in full sprint. I only had a twenty metre lead on them with no energy left in me. I ran over the hill I had just walked across. I could hear them hissing quickly, like they were waiting to grab me before breaking into a full blown laugh. None of them needed to slow down or rest. I could feel my heart screaming in my chest. My vision clouded over and I was about to pass out.

Some of them tripped and stumbled. I kept running. Some snarled. I kept running. With every step I imagined face planting and breaking my neck, then being torn apart by these creatures. I can't make it this far only to die because I tripped on uneven ground like a half naked bimbo in a cheap '80s horror flick.

I stupidly looked over my shoulder and knew they were gaining on me. I had a stitch in my side and I hit that wall of exhaustion, but there was no way I was stopping. I came within sight of a narrow river. I had no idea how deep the water was or if it was going to lead me to more of them. I jumped. I kept my diary firmly above the freezing water. It's a little wet now but it's salvageable. I was able to

swim to the other side. The zombies jumped in after me and were mostly swept away. I headed back upstream hoping that my lead was now too far for them to bother.

I still can't breathe properly. I think I've cracked one of my lower ribs. I can't extend my chest out fully. That run almost killed me.

I can't get the look of that zombie out of my mind, the one that said, "Getafe." It looked at me dead in the eye.

And what the hell is wrong with me? Following twenty zombies just to get to a stupid backpack? After all this time I should know better.

### Part 3.

If I had to summarise the last six months into just five words they would be: and then things got worse.

I've fucked up my right knee.

Can I walk? Kinda. Can I run? Not for more than ten metres, and I wish I was exaggerating because I've tried to run. The top of my shin bone feels like it's being crushed into my kneecap. The whole area has swollen. The skin along the back of my knee feels numb, not the kind of numb where you don't notice it, no. It's the kind of freezing numb that you're aware of but prevents you from moving quickly, like your limbs have become icicles so you end up moving in slow motion. Going downhill seems to be a lot worse than going up.

It means I've spent the best part of six hours running, hobbling, walking, and now crying because I am in too much pain to move another mile. I have to keep moving or else they'll catch me, but I simply can't move anymore.

I'm a blubbering mess. I've been kidnapped and forced into slavery, I've been chased to near death, I've seen a whole town fire bombed, I don't speak the language, and I'm all alone. Rachel is somewhere. Ediz is somewhere. Cristina died in front of me and no one has made it back home. If I'm found dead no one is going to know who I am or where I'm from, aside from my diary, and that might easily blow into the wind and be lost forever. I'm going to be the unknown traveller, a random Brit on the Sicilian hillside. My parents will never know for certain what happened to me. How am I going to get off this fucking island?

Okay, Mark, you've had your moment. If you've broken your leg you're just going to have to keep moving. Just go as far as you can until you need to rest, take five minutes, then move again. You still have another leg and that's working fine. More or less.

8 January

I heard music today for the first time in months. The last I heard was some garbled crap in the interment camp. Some wanker blasted it on his phone like he was on the train, determined that everyone around him was going to listen to 'awesome' music whether they wanted to or not. Today was some Italian pop song in the background. It certainly had a corporate pop feel to it.

I met an elderly Italian couple. They live in a small cottage. I walked along a deserted road and saw the man, Carlo, picking apples from a tree in his front garden. I said hello, he said the same. He didn't seem aggressive so I paused and said, "Telefono?" I made the gesture as well and he showed me to the front door. He asked me to wait and he brought the phone to me. I wrote down Cristina's Sicilian family's number and Carlo was kind enough to call. They were home and they spoke some English. I nearly collapsed with relief. I probably sounded like an idiot as well.

Her brother broke down in tears so I spoke to Cristina's sister in law. She spoke to Carlo and asked him to help me out. We exchanged the phone a few times because she was our translator. She vouched for me being a good person and one of the heroes of this whole epidemic. In that moment I loved Cristina's family more than anyone on Earth. Even from beyond the grave Cristina was able to save my life. Carlo had a couple of bikes, which is a blessing because my knee is so swollen that I can barely stand up without shrieking in pain. We rode towards a coastal villa. It seems to be a refuge for foreigners. A lot of Europeans decided to move to Sicily for their retirement. A lot of them speak English. Carlo bid me a farewell and he walked back with his two bikes.

I met with Filippo, a middle aged man who married an English woman. She died last year. He asked me to help out around the place. I told him that I was a slave in a farm only last week and Filippo promised me that I am not a slave here. There are no gunmen, no harsh rules, but it is now a community. He said that he's been in

contact with the British government and he's trying to return the English to England.

I met with a few other people here. Filippo seems to be a man of his word. He was able to get a boat for the French guests here just three days ago. One of them called here to say that they landed and made it to Nice safely.

Filippo is a nice guy ... but I'm just waiting for the other shoe to drop. Kindness can't be as easy as this.

10 January

I've been typing up my diary online and emailing it to my parents as some kind of record. John, one of the guys from Sussex who arrived a week before me, said that he heard the Haitian speak on the radio. No one knows what he looks like, but they've heard his voice. This gist of his short speech was: "Your weapons are stoppable. Mine are not. Your only chance of coming back to life is by surrendering to me."

According to the news, the Haitian is now in command of several countries. He has a million zombies (what the fuck?) under his control and he has forced at least eight countries to surrender. Some of the zombies have begun showing signs of sentience. They have been given orders and actually follow them. They're still about as smart as the dumbest of dogs, but every so often one is seen showing a burst of sudden intelligence, to the point where they're now able to drive a truck or build a bomb. Then, when their objective is over, they're back to being as dumb as Rover. That's telling quite a few people that the Haitian, or at least his lieutenants like Boyer, are able to telepathically link into any zombie they want and get them to complete complicated tasks or target specific people in a crowd.

The folks here are a lot nicer to talk to than back at the farm. We get to sit on sofas and watch the TV, even though it's mostly in Italian. Filippo has a few movies in English which we watch. The Notebook seems to be on a constant repeat.

The bathroom is still an issue. There are too many of us and only two bathrooms. Thankfully we don't have another Lalla situation where someone is locking themselves inside, but one room is now for the men and the other is for the women, because some of the women didn't like being walked in on and have complained.

There's a girl here from Ruislip. Jessica. She gave me her details and told me to contact her if I find a job, because she wants one as well. She was studying in Sicily until the university closed down and her bank account was frozen. Everyone around here has a story of survival, though for some reason they all want to hear about me crossing the Mediterranean twice and escaping a slave farm. They all say they would stab anyone who forced them to work in a camp like that, but you know what? I had a month's worth of chances and I didn't do shit about it. I thought about it enough times, where I actively wanted to kill Enzo, but I never did it. On the bright side, I know his farm is a day's walk south from the firebombed town of 6 January. Retribution is coming, you asshole.

21 January

It's been okay here. No real complaints. We have access to the news. Most of the governments have militarised their people and have deputised a lot of locals. Come hell or high water they are forcing civilisation to continue, but the damage will still take decades to fix. The current problem is zombies kitted out as suicide bombers. Just as you would imagine, these creatures are walking into buildings and blowing themselves up. They are targeting government buildings, hospitals, and bridges. The Haitian has also ordered them to drive truck after truck into the Suez and Panama canals to barricade them.

I had a dream about Cristina. She told me she loved me. I woke up with tears in my eyes.

I still haven't heard from Rachel, Ediz, or Simon. I was able to send an email to Moroccan Mel but I haven't heard back yet. I sent an email to everyone I knew (bar one), relaying my story and hoping that they are well. One person replied, Steph from work. She said that when I get back to London I won't recognise the place. There are soldiers everywhere, barricades, and check points. The state of paranoia is extreme and the government is passing laws that, under any other time, would cause riots and assassinations. She didn't elaborate beyond the phrase, 'England first.' Not 'English first', no. 'England'. I guess the needs of the state outweigh the needs of the people and that, when I go back, no one will have any rights. I'm willing to bet that my emails have been blocked through various firewalls. That might explain why I haven't had many responses.

I'm confident that somewhere in England there are camps like the ones I've been stuck in, complete with slaves hired out for work. I'm going to help them get out. I will buy their freedom if I have to.

I've become close with this lady called Chloe. She lost her husband to a zombie. We stay up all night talking. She's from New Zealand and is leaving in four days. On the second night of our chats I asked why she was still talking to me. She said it was because I'm suffering from more stress than I realise and I'm barely coping. I thought I was coping just fine. She said that's why everyone is interested in me, because they've all had it easy and I've had the worst of it. I started blubbing about my life, about losing Cristina, having Rachel taken away from me, and for three hours she just sat there, listening, never once interrupting me. Then I found out that she lost her two children as well. Her husband attacked them. So for a while I felt like a jackass, having just blabbered on as though my problems were worse than hers. She was able to calm me down and told me that no one's problems are worse and that no one is here to compare. We've all been through hell. No one's hell trumps another's.

I've finished typing up my diary. I'm sending what I have to my parents. I asked them also to keep all of the contact details from the people I met in Madrid; Katy, Nadia, Sofia, the French trio, Michael, Derek, Louise, Ediz, Cristina (for what it's worth), and Rachel.

A boat is coming for the English tomorrow. It's taking us to Gibraltar of all places.

22 January (not quite, but I've tried to keep the wording exactly the same as when I first wrote it.)

Land ho!

We're finally on a boat! And not some dinky thing that will flip over with the slightest of waves, but a proper multi-deck ferry. British soldiers were on board when we got on. They were checking our stories and making sure we were who we said we were. They asked me to say, "Squirrel."

Why? Who knows.

I was delayed the longest, having lost my passport and documents to Enzo and his farm. They called my family and had them send pictures of me online so they could see who I was. They asked me a hundred questions about where I went to school, when did I

graduate, where did I work, and they double checked everything they could. I passed.

## Part 2.

And then things got worse.

There's a zombie on board. She must've climbed on in Sicily and we've only noticed her now. There's blood splatter on her top. This one is talking, saying, "Don't shoot me," in English. Her eyes are vacant, though. She's saying the words but she doesn't know she's saying them. The soldiers have her pushed against the bow of the ship, with all of their weapons drawn on her. They keep asking if she knows her name and where she's from. She looks Italian. In fact, she looks a lot like Cristina. Same height, same figure, same hair. She keeps mumbling, "I'm scared," but she can't even tell the soldiers her name. They're ordering her to climb overboard. She still says she's scared. They're going to force her off the boat, I know it. They're just going to leave her to die. This is when we need a human test. How the hell am I ever going to be able to sleep, knowing that these things can go anywhere and climb on board anything?

## Part 3.

The civilians were pushed to the back of the boat. We're being checked over again. The soldiers don't want to come anywhere near us in case we infect them. We were segregated, men and women, strip searched and checked for any scratch, bite or mark that would give them a reason to throw us overboard.

When we were allowed out again the zombie woman at the bow was gone. There wasn't any blood, but no one will tell us what really happened. Or, rather, no one asked what happened and the soldiers didn't volunteer to tell us.

24 January

Gueeeeeess what? I'm in Gibraltar for the first time in my life. Yeah. Imagine my excitement. I'm also under quarantine. We were strip

searched again and given a full medical exam. According to the metric system I'm sixty four kilos. This apocalypse has cost me thirty pounds.

We were given care packages. All of our clothes and possessions were seized and burned. Why? Because we're all covered in disease. They took my handwritten diary and burned it. For fuck's sake. I rewrote as much as I could from the last few days, word for word, from what I remember. My diary went from 248 pages down to 1 in the blink of an eye. I'm now relying on getting the rest of it from email, assuming that it hasn't been blocked or deleted. If that's gone then I'll have no record at all of where I was, who I spoke to, and what happened to me. I'll just be another nameless face in the crowd.

I'm now wearing freshly steamed faded green pants and a pale blue cotton shirt. I don't like the combination. I'm told I'll be here for a few weeks until they are able to clear a quarantine unit in England. All of our phone calls and emails are being screened.

I keep thinking about that zombie woman. I saw the look in her eyes. She was genuinely scared. Soon these things will pass for human and we won't know who is alive and who is dead.

We're located in the Gibraltar airport. I can almost see the parklands where we were camped five months ago. They've allowed a trickle of people to cross the border every couple of days. Apparently my name popped up as 'authorised' a while back but I had left by then. All I had to do was stay in La Linea de la Concepción and I would be home by now.

I asked about what happened on the day we high-tailed it to Morocco. A couple of zombies had managed to follow the road along the coast. They attacked our camp. Lots of people were turned into the Haitian's Bitch. Zombies charged at the Gibraltar border. So did the humans. No one is willing to say which side of living the casualties were on or how either side actually met their fate, but I'm told a thousand people died over the following few days. The dead were left for Spain to clear up. The Spaniards were super pissed off that Gibraltar opened fire on Spanish territory and killed a whole lotta people that Spain then had to ID and dispose of. Since then they've been a little testy with each other. Spain has even set up military barricades with guns pointing at Gibraltar. I'm looking at them right now.

Spain has a new president. He's made it a point that, above all else, Barcelona and Valencia will not secede. He's also given himself

emergency new powers. By the grace of God he will still be in power by the time I'm old and weary.

I've come to the realisation that learning another language is no longer necessary for my life. It will be years before they lift the borders around the countries and the hassle of getting through will be too much. Several airlines have collapsed and the planes are sitting unused in airports around the world. Cargo planes are still active. I imagine Boeing and Airbus will survive but as a mere shadow of what they used to be. I also imagine that solar power will be the new push for the future so that we don't get bogged down with a lack of oil. Still, that won't stop wars for oil.

I remember reading an initiative from Cambridge University just before I started this whole ordeal – that their science department were working on bio-steel and bio-concrete, where they can grow plants with certain properties that can be pulverised and hardened for building purposes. Anything that can make England self-sufficient will be a plus.

When you die, you will now be cremated. Organ transplants have stopped. They can't risk an infection. Alcohol imports have slowed. Tourism has stopped completely. Public health is the number one focus, or at least it's the number one distraction while the government targets its real number one focus, whatever that may be.

There's a TV in one of the rooms playing old Monty Python movies. Thank fuck, because I'm dying of boredom.

19 February

There's nothing to do here. No one to talk to. I went online to check symptoms for depression, survivor guilt, post-traumatic stress. I have it all. Nightmares, hyper-vigilance, anger, flashbacks, rethinking past situations and figuring out what I should have done differently, regretting every moment of my European trip, numbness, mood swings, crying, and enough guilt to make a Catholic proud. I want to punch so many people and shout at them and it's with the utmost inner strength that I contain myself. I'm just waiting around, getting older, slowly dying, and there's no one who can let me get on with my life.

They've killed Boyer in Algeria. There's already another lieutenant who has taken his place. Rebels have overthrown many

more governments around the world. I'd list the countries that have fallen, but it's too long and too pointless. Those rebels won't hold the country for long. There will be another uprising, either from the dead taking their revenge or the living with an opposing dogma.

In England soldiers have been going door to door searching for zombies, executing them and bringing them to a mass crematorium, then they close down the house the zombie was found in, pour shitloads of chemicals on every surface and dissolve the building into slush. They burn whatever remains. Finally they bulldoze what couldn't be burnt and scrub the earth clean.

Insurance companies have collapsed. They've just taken our money and have run off with it, leaving no one protected in the event of a fire, theft, damage, or government cleansing.

I've gone to several meetings about Enzo and the farm in Sicily. I've described the whole operation in great detail, given descriptions on the people working there, gave them the license plates, and every time I do, one of the guys from special services says they'll look into it. I asked if they know about the quarantine facilities in Sicily and if Simon Gillard from the BBC is still being held there. They write down my details, say they'll look into it, and leave. No one comes back with any information.

I've decided to get buff. I started with no idea of what to do or how to exercise. I was doing twenty push ups a day and checking out my biceps. According to the Internet that's not going to do anything, so now my routine is: on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays I do 3 sets of 12: push ups, pull ups (using the edge of a table), dips, and I bridge for 2 minutes 3 times. On Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays I do split-squats, regular squats, lunges, and calf raises. When I get back home I'm thinking about doing karate or jiu-jitsu. I might be black belt by the time I'm thirty.

15 March

I've been here for, what, six weeks now? I've kept my patience, I've played it cool, I've swallowed all of that anger and I have buried it so that, on the surface, I appear like a master of Zen. They originally told me that I would be quarantined for three weeks, but given the numerous countries I've visited (hot spots, they tell me), my situation is different. I am what they call a slow risk. Everyone else

I've been in contact with here in Gibraltar are now also in a slow risk category so they've bumped us all up to six weeks, all because of me. None of the other patients here know that. They all think it's some government bullshit. It is. But it's also because of me. No one new has come into our particular ward since I arrived.

Six weeks of mind-numbing boredom. I watch TV, I tune out, I draw when I can though I'm still not getting any better at it.

I somehow started lying a few days ago. We were in Group and my turn came up. I was bored and needed to vent, so I told them I saw my girlfriend die in a car crash. I never got to say goodbye or tell her thank you for saving my life. I remember the times she tried to teach me how to Salsa, regardless of how bad I was. I remember being mesmerised by her smile the first time I saw her. She still comes to me when I dream.

If we had left it there everything would have been fine, but this woman came to me saying that it's okay to grieve, that her son died not long ago so she knows what it's like to lose someone close to you, then she kept following me around offering herself as some kind of shoulder to lean on. Fuck off lady, I was lying through my teeth, and I only started lying because I just found out that you're all stuck here for the rest of eternity because of me. So fuck right off, bitch, and leave me alone.

25 March

They've changed it now to sixty days. People are talking to themselves, losing the will to live. No one has tried to commit suicide yet but if they raise the exit day again someone is bound to try.

I've been given a booklet about the new English austerity measures and what to expect. I might as well be saying ¡Viva Britannia! It's total pro-England propaganda bullshit. There is a list of rules we need to obey in order to ensure that the outbreak doesn't spread. There is a curfew at night from 10pm to 4am. Holidays through the UK need to be registered with the department of special services. Flights in and out of England are restricted. It doesn't say that they don't happen, only that they are restricted. We are encouraged to watch the news every day to keep tabs on the situation and to follow new protocols as they are released.

There's a whole section on what to look out for if you suspect

someone might be infected. What if someone in your family is sick? Leave them alone, call the department of special services, and a doctor will come and handle it. When you dial 999 there is now a fourth option: to report a sighting.

Dad is sixty four, had been retired for two years, and is back to work and hasn't complained once. He complained all the time about work, how it hurt his back and all he wanted to do was lie in a hammock and read a book. He doesn't complain about working. Not in any of the emails I've received. My mum even says that he is putting all of the young ones to shame with his work ethic.

I've become great at building a tower of cards. I have six decks to play with and I can get fourteen storeys high before they tumble.

I'm not really seeing any progress in my work out routine. Not sure what's happening there. Maybe it's due to a serious lack of protein, given that I haven't eaten meat since arriving. A lot of my diet has been pre-packaged edible cardboard crap.

30 March

I've been given papers to leave. There's a plane taking me back to England in a few hours. I can't seem to find any emotion within myself. I wonder if they'll let me keep my new diary.

Part 2.

So far so good. We're flying over Spain right now. Our destination is Gatwick airport. We're told that we will be screened again and we should expect delays and processing. There was a new video on the plane by the government, explaining what to expect when we return. It's all 'England First' bullshit. We have to work together to rebuild the country, they say. Times have changed and our perspective must change. They showed clips of soldiers helping farmers, helping little girls out of the back of trucks. They didn't show any zombies, internment camps where people are led away to be used as slave labour, or any of the bad shit. They told us about health warnings and symptoms to look out for, who to contact, and under no circumstance should we approach the sick.

I've been away for ten months. I need to see my friends again. I

haven't had anyone to talk to since Rachel. I have no idea how I'm going to tell her parents that I don't know where she is.

I need to find out what happened to Rachel and make sure she's okay. I was with her for so much of it that it kills me that all it took was a 'doctor's appointment' for us to be separated. It was just so easy. It wasn't either of us walking off and being stupid, it was a simple, "Please wait through that door."

31 March

I'm. In. England.

Holy shit, it actually happened. I was sitting quietly just after we landed, terrified that they would realise they had made a mistake in allowing me to return home, that everyone else would disembark first. I'd be just getting out of my seat when someone from special services would ask me to wait until everyone else had left. "Sure," I would say, but then I would realise that I was the only one staying behind. And that I wouldn't be leaving the plane while it was in England. But no! They let me leave the plane! And for the first time in almost a year I had a blast of that glorious biting weather as I trundled down the metal steps and touched the tarmac. It was bliss! Fresh air! Then in the blink of an eye I was inside another airport terminal again.

And guess what? No, really, you should guess, because it's hilarious.

Welcome to Quarantine, round two.

I'll be here for six more days, they tell me. There is still nothing to do. The news is heavily censored. There isn't anything that is anti-England or even questionable-England. There's no news of any other part of the world unless a journalist mentions that we are doing better than 'other parts of the world'. That's the quote they love to use, 'other parts of the world'. Not isolationist at all. And no shit, my life at any given time was better than someone else's in another part of the world. The news isn't telling us about any new laws that have been passed unless it is vital for the public to know.

Through the perspex windows I can see soldiers and heavily armed police. They have dogs sniffing people and sniffing luggage. Every piece of cargo that comes through here is being screened and checked by hand.

I have no idea what's going on in the rest of the world. Everything could be a nuclear wasteland for all I know. I'm allowed to read emails but not to respond to them. I've had only one email in the last two weeks and that's from my parents. They're looking forward to seeing me when I return. They say the new diet is actually working for them and they are a lot healthier now. They haven't felt this good, physically, since they were my age. I feel like shit, so I don't know what they're so happy about.

As soon as I'm out of this place I will send an email to BBC Simon, hoping that he's out of Sicily. I have to tell him all about Enzo and the farm.

I watched Eastenders for the first time in fifteen years. Apparently the show mentioned something zombie-related a couple of months ago and the viewers didn't like that. They want escapism, not realism, so they're back to who saw who in a shop talking to someone they shouldn't be speaking to about a rumour they shouldn't have heard about the best friend of the eavesdropper. These people must also be competing in some world record for the shortest duration you can be in someone's house before leaving in a bad mood. All of the characters seem be intent on beating this record because I saw three of them arrive and leave in a fuss within two minutes of knocking on the door. They come in, they accuse the first person they see (who is conveniently always in the lounge), they have a row that could be easily be ended with, "Stop coming to me with all of your petty shit and mind your own business," then someone leaves. Sometimes the tenant goes and the guests stays. Very odd.

2 April

There's been a delay in my getting processed out of here, since I'm still a slow risk / high risk patient. I've been quarantined for over two months, I'm not likely to burst into a zombie song and dance routine, am I? Still, I bury that anger, because I am a master of Zen.

I received another email from my parents. The office of special services contacted them and told them I won't be out of here at the previously specified time. They offer their sympathies and remind me to stay strong. I have no idea what I'll do for work. Maybe I'll be a mechanic. I know a little something about making diesel fuel and converting tractors so they can be solar powered.

England doesn't really seem to have a good idea of how to stop the undead. They might kill every last creature in the country, then all it takes is for one of them to swim across the Channel and it will catch everyone with their pants down again. And these things seem to now be using a populate-and-wait strategy. Build their numbers quietly then explode onto the streets and take on everyone.

Constant vigilance, that's what we need. Literally 24 hour vigilance. It's the only way.

They still haven't caught or killed the Haitian. One of the guys I see around here called this whole uprising 'the African disease.' Haiti's in the Caribbean. Sometimes there are just no words.

5 April

I received this email from Dad:

'We've heard some good news from your cousin Rebecca. She got a job as a geography teacher at a girl's prep school just outside of London. We passed on our congratulations and we told her that you are doing well.'

I don't have a cousin Rebecca. I can ask him in a few days when I see him but I'm sure he's talking about Rachel, that she escaped Sicily and is back in England.

7 April

I guess Clint mentioned to Alana that I was back in the country and under quarantine. She emailed me.

'I'm sorry how things turned out,' blah blah blah.

'I'm sorry you were caught overseas during this mess,' blah blah blah.

'Is there anything I can do?'

That had me thinking for a long, long time. 'Is there anything I can do?'

I spent hundreds of hours on that farm hating Enzo and everything else in sight, and I spent most of my time thinking of Alana. I wondered what she was up to. Was she single? Would I ever

Speak to her again? Would she ever find out what I've been through? That I saw people die? That I lied to those around me, saying that I had a girlfriend called Cristina? That I woke up several times during the night while backpacking through Europe, then fleeing Africa, Sicily, and Gibraltar, only to find Alana still lingering in my mind? That I was terrified of seeing her again in case she was single, because something breaks in me whenever I see her and I don't think I could turn her away?

Yeah.

Life has not been the same without you. You stirred something in me that no other person has ever come close to reaching. I miss you more than you will ever realise but I will never admit to that. I will lie and say I'm over you. I will lie because I didn't stir in you the same feelings I had in me.

I just realised we broke up a year ago yesterday.

'Is there anything I can do?'

Yeah. I want to know that you were torn up inside thinking about me, that you were a wreck while I was travelling, that you woke up night after night because you couldn't stop dreaming of me. Most of all, I want you to be single. I want us to meet. And I want you to smile when I ask you out again.

10 April

I have paperwork affecting my future. It's more of a brochure, really. Nothing about when I get out of here, more about what will happen to me when I do. Get this: upon my release from quarantine I have 48 hours to report to my nearest special services branch. Since I'll be living with my folks, the Bracknell office will be my port of call for the time being.

I'm required to join the army reserves in order to help England's recovery. There's a lot of rebuilding bullshit written in this thing. I guess there's a good deal of urgency in tearing down houses and rebuilding roads. There's a lot of money in it as well if the right company wins the contract. We tear them down, they rebuild them.

The army reserves, for fuck's sake. It's not permanent, just six days a week. I notice how there's sweet fuck all about any mention of pay. Will it be food stamps? Will it be in the form of care packages? I guess I'll be sleeping in a barracks for a while until they train me

not to run off. They've probably noticed my history of doing exactly that.

I'm also well aware of what happens to deserters who are caught. I live on an island, and a small one at that. What chance do I have of getting away?

Every soldier I've seen in the last year has said just two things: "I don't know," or, "I'm not allowed to say anything."

I'll never be allowed to quit or leave the country. I'm not special or qualified enough.

13 April

I've been given more papers. I'm a free man now. Tonight I will be able to sleep in my old bed in my parent's house, under my very own blanket. I haven't slept there since graduating uni.

The cold will keep me company and it will be a welcomed relief from the Spanish summer, the African summer, the Italian winter, and the Gibraltar spring. Mum and Dad are coming to pick me up. I'm just dawdling in the airport. I'm able to leave whenever I want, I just don't have any money for a bus or a taxi. It's irritating, being free and still stuck at an airport. When I get home I'm going to sit in the bathtub and listen to Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Oasis, and everything else that is awesomely British. I haven't heard proper music since Sicily.

Now I just have to wait the twenty minutes until my parents find a place to park so they can come and get me. If they ask me what I would like for dinner I'm going to say chips. How many do I want? All of them. All the chips. Is that too much? Not at all. I want so many chips that I will never see the plate. Even when I'm full and about to throw up from too many chips I still want to see a mountain of them on my plate.

I can't, though. Austerity measures. At most I will be allowed to have a scoop of chips. Enough for a snack. If my parents chip in (hehe) then I might be able to get a decent haul. I need malt vinegar and lots of salt.

There are too many soldiers for a vacant airport. There's mostly only cargo going through here. The only other humans are not passengers but quarantine release patients. The soldiers outnumber us two to one. They have a scowl on their faces. Come on fellas, give

me a break, I'm about to join the reserves and be one of you!

No one is smiling, no one is talking. They look at me as though they lost too many of their comrades because of high risk people like me, and now here I am about to waltz back into their country. At least no one has blamed me for a lot of blatant criminal activity, of which I have done my fair share.

I'm just going to sit here and wait. I won't risk spending too much time writing in my diary in case they become suspicious that I'm writing about them. I can't do that. I need to keep it all blasé and cool.

There's nothing like waiting in an airport to cheer me up.

## Part 2.

I'm home. No word from Clint about if I can pick up Basil. There's about twelve hours worth of check points and closed roads between here and his parents place and I'll only have one day off a week from the reserves. Add to that all the petrol rationing that's going on. I can't afford to even get my fucking cat back.

Mum squeezed me so tightly when she saw me that she nearly broke my ribs. Dad as well. He looks like an old man. They both read the emailed version of my diary and saw my photos. They don't think writing a book about my experiences is a good idea. Not that it's a bad idea, just ... it won't help the relief effort. I was off seeing the world while everyone here had creatures running through their back yards, attacking hospitals and biting babies in the maternity wards. It's not what people want to read about.

The car ride home was difficult. London is a mess. There were soldiers everywhere. Entire streets have been demolished and burned down. I passed a burnt out bus that was on the back of a giant tow truck. I'd never seen one that big before. That was from a riot yesterday.

There are billboards telling us all to be alert and proactive. There were no ads for foreign goods. In their place were pictures of soldiers helping a small girl cross the street. I've come back to a police state.

Mum made chips. My old room has been made up. I still have some old t-shirts in the closet. Good thing, I guess, since I don't have the money to buy a new wardrobe. I'm borrowing some clothes from Dad, who quietly showed off his stockpile of canned food and

bottled water in case they ever have to run from the undead. It isn't enough, but it's all they were able to get. They went over their inventory with me for an emergency escape to see if I could think of anything they might've forgotten. Dad is sure he can carry sixty pounds on his shoulders. He's tested it around the living room.

I asked about Rachel as soon as I got in the car. He said they would tell me everything as soon as I got home. I sat in the car, quietly thinking about that. Now that I know, I'm emailing this diary to everyone I can. Including you, Alana.

Rachel left a note for me but her mum refused to hand it over. She said it doesn't matter what her last words were, even if they were for my eyes only. She doesn't want to see me either. Flat out, 'No, and don't contact me again.'

Mum asked if I slept with Rachel. I told her I did not. I asked if she came back pregnant. Mum was sure that she was at least three months along upon her return and weighed only forty five kilos. Abortions are now illegal here.

Rachel ran a bath and drowned herself. She was cremated three days ago.

Go fuck yourself, England.



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Author photo by Nicola Bernardi.

# Thank you for reading!

Being an independent author has quite a few perks. One in particular is that I can spend all day in fluffy slippers if I want. Sometimes, though, I have to ask for help: if you could find it within you to write a review, even just a few words, you would really be helping me out a lot. Honest reviews is one of the hardest things to get as an independent author. It's also invaluable for being able to afford to write the next book.

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## *Kingston Raine and the Grim Reaper*

Kingston Raine's world is turned upside down in just one second as he goes from trying to rescue his girlfriend to waking up in Limbo ... utterly dead, and facing a baffled Grim Reaper who tells Kingston that he is completely fictional and didn't even exist until just a few moments ago.

Having never experienced this problem before, the Grim Reaper isn't sure about what to do with his fictional celebrity. Satan has a few suggestions, but none of them are at all appealing.

If that wasn't bad enough, Limbo is facing an uprising designed to kick the Grim Reaper out of the realm, and news of Kingston's death is exactly what the uprising needs to topple Limbo's ancient government.

Before the day is even over Kingston finds a way to escape reality, where he nearly loses his head to Macbeth, rescues Little John before Robin Hood can save the day, and does everything he can to get back to his own universe before Limbo's bounty hunters can catch up to him.

*Kingston Raine and the Bank of Limbo*

When one of Life's most despicable businessmen is found murdered in Limbo all suspicions point to Hell. When Satan assures Death that such a thing is impossible within either realm they settle on a truce by hiring an outside investigator: Kingston Raine.

As soon as Kingston and his friends take the job they realise that they are being spied upon by a secret organisation working within the Bank of Limbo, and that this group routinely assists the rich and corrupt in Life. What troubles Kingston is that the bank is not at all concerned about being run by blackmailers and murderers, instead they seem to be focussed on how Kingston and his friends can benefit them and their diabolical schemes.

Now he and his friends stand in immortal peril.

*Kingston Raine and the Arena of Chaos*

Spending an eternity in the afterlife can be pretty dull, so in order to prevent the population of Limbo from going mad Death has introduced an inter-realm battle royale in a tournament designed to reward ingenuity and integrity. But deep down The XIX Games are about cheating as much as possible without getting caught, and where winning is simply an after thought.

Kingston Raine and his friends sponsor a team in the hope of out-thinking, out-stealing, and out-cheating everyone around them. And while they certainly have a few tricks up their sleeves none of that will do them any good if they can't get their master builder to play along and actually build the golem that is supposed to win them fame and money.

## *Kingston Raine and the Starlight Muse*

Kingston Raine is at his wit's end as he tries to protect the most dangerous prisoner to have ever escaped from Hell: a Scottish muse driven mad by one of Satan's devils.

The muse has been chased across the realms by millions of bounty hunters, leaving Satan and Death to decide her fate in a political tug of war. Kingston and his friends do their best to track down the devil responsible for driving her insane while also keeping the muse far out of harm's way, but they soon realise just how supernaturally persuasive she can be, which becomes tricky when Kingston is expected to keep her in his sights at all times.