

ALONE

by Keren Green

Mae stared at the wreck. What was once a middle-class home, now lay in shambles. Garbage was scattered about, holes in the walls, wooden furniture broken up into pieces next to the fireplace, a dark plastic taped over all the windows, and the smell, the whole house smelled rotten. The white puff lingered in the air as Mae exhaled. She pulled her face warmer up over her nose as she wondered what it would have been like when people actually lived in these places. *Filled with the smell of cookies*, she thought. She had had a cookie once, when she was little. She checked her time keeper. *It won't be long before the others get here*. Mae hated being on duty alone. She hated being anywhere alone.

DING DONG.

Mae jumped as the sound reverberated through the house. She yanked her rifle up under her chin, the way Hank had taught her. Her legs trembled. Fear poured over her like hot wax. "I'm armed," she said as she approached the door. *Please, don't let it be one of them. Please. Not now*. Mae took a step closer to the door. *If Hank were here he'd yell at me to open the fucking door. Open the door, Mae. Open the fucking door!* Mae's hands clutched the doorknob and she yanked it open. Rifle under her chin, the way Hank taught her.

She scanned the front yard. Left, right, up and down the street, there was no sign of them. The little drone was nearly out of sight by the time she looked up. She pulled her face warmer down and lowered her rifle as she stared at it. She had heard of such things, but never seen one with her own eyes. *They sure do zip along, don't they?* That's when she saw it...a small box on the front step. Mae gasped, the rifle back up under her chin.

"Mae."

She spun around, rifle aimed.

Joe held his hands up. "Whoa, I came in the back. What are you doing?"

Mae lowered her rifle as tears burned the back of her eyes. She stepped aside to reveal the box.

"What is it?"

"I'm not sure. Hank would know," she said.

"Hank's not here."

"I know that," Mae said as she brushed away the single tear that had managed to sneak past her.

"Bring it in and close the fucking door," Joe said as he crossed to a chair.

Mae placed the box on the table between them. "I think we should open it," she said.

"No. We wait," Joe said. "The others will be here soon."

Mae sat opposite Joe, the box between them. She pulled her face warmer up over her nose. They sat for what felt like hours. She picked at the paper over the box.

"Stop playing with it," Joe said, breaking the silence.

"What if they don't come?"

He looked at her, the way he always did, like he had no respect for her. Hank never looked at her that way.

"They'll come," he answered.

“They won’t if they’re dead. Do you think they’re dead?”

“I think they’ll come,” he said.

“Hank said they’d send something.”

“No one has heard from Hank in three weeks.”

“I know,” she replied. “He’s not dead. He went to the wall. He said he’d let them know we were still out here. He said they would help get us out.”

“He said, he said, he said,” Joe snapped. “How the hell do you think Hank made it to the wall? Everyday there is less of us. Those things are out there...everywhere we turn. What do you think the wall could possibly send?”

“If we open it, maybe we’ll find out!”

He glared at her, the way he always did. “We wait for the others.”

The scream came first, high-pitched and blood curling, then the growls followed by gunfire. She thought she heard him yell for her to get down, but it may have been in her head. It sounded like a bomb blasted through the roof, but she knew it wasn't a bomb. Mae flung herself onto the floor as shattered glass and wood rained down over them. She covered her head with her arms and closed her eyes.

She didn’t dare move as she counted in her head to five-hundred, just like Hank had taught her. She opened her eyes. Paula’s mangled, half-eaten body lay covered in glass and wood. Mae glanced over to Joe. A shard of glass jutted from his neck. He gave her a subtle nod. She followed his gaze to the box.

Mae nodded, then took a deep breath and reached up to the table as slowly and carefully as she could. Her hand wrapped around the small box and she pulled it down, quietly. She glanced over to Joe. He nodded. At least it could have been a nod.

Mae ripped open the package. Inside were ten small devices, one for each of them. At least that's how many of them there had been when Hank left. Mae read the note: *They don't like the sound these make. You won't hear it, but those fuckers will. Come to the wall. – Hank.*

“He's alive.” She thought Joe may have even smiled before the gigantic, clawed arm smashed through what was left of the roof and grabbed him.

Mae didn't scream. She moved as quietly as she could, hands shaking, as she clipped a device onto her jacket and flipped the switch. A blue light appeared. She closed her eyes and counted to five-hundred, just as Hank had taught her. She counted again and again, as she laid there alone, covered in debris.

They're not coming, she thought after several hours. She pulled herself up, slipped her rifle over her shoulder then grabbed Joe's, just in case. *I can make it alone. Hank is waiting.* She opened the front door and walked out.