

Prologue

The two young men moved quickly under the cover of night, the summer air thick with humidity. Sweat trickled down their foreheads and spines as they scurried through the trees with only the single flashlight to guide them. A new moon made the darkness complete—a rare advantage for them.

A year separated them, but both ran at the same speed, the elder had longer strides while the younger kept up with a quicker gait. Armed, they each carried loaded rifles. The younger one pressed the button on his watch to activate the light; the green glow revealed thirty seconds left on the clock.

Twenty-nine...twenty-eight...

They were fugitives, but revenge was worth the risk. In less than thirty seconds it would be done.

Twenty...nineteen...eighteen...

Their truck was just a hundred yards away. Both were out of breath, but they pressed on.

Nine...eight...seven...

They finally cleared the trees as their feet left the grass and struck pavement. The older one reached into his back pocket and managed to grab his keys while maintaining speed.

Three...two...one...

The explosion was loud, and a ball of fire lit up the night sky behind them as they paused a split second to look. It was done, and there was nothing left to do except drive—and drive fast. They reached the truck and scrambled inside. The ignition mercifully fired up on the first try, and a moment later, they vanished on the highway.

Chapter I

Andy's eyes fluttered open as the first light of dawn entered her bedroom. Waking up naturally, without any noises or lights from electronic devices, was one of the few benefits of life after the virus. She sat up and looked over at the other side of the bed. It was empty, but the sheets were ruffled and still warm. She stood up slowly. Her feet ached and her back throbbed. She moved to the window and opened it, allowing the cool air to enter. Closing her eyes and placing her hands at the base of her spine, she took a deep breath and arched backward as she greeted the day with the same recurring thought: *My name is Andrea Christensen. I am one of the oldest people in the world.*

Andy Christensen grew up in the suburbs of Chicago. At thirteen, she and her mother were involved in a horrific car accident. The oncoming SUV slammed into their car on the driver's side and while Andy escaped with a few bruised ribs and minor scrapes, her mother was instantly killed.

Devastated, Andy stumbled through the remainder of the school year, walking the corridors like a zombie. Her father abandoned his medical practice and moved them to Bermuda. He had an old college friend who owned a house there and offered a place for them to stay for the entire summer. The tiny, secluded island was a place of refuge.

Andy's father spent most of his days fishing and reading in a beach chair before sunset, while Andy wandered the island seeking any adventure of interest to a thirteen-year-old. It was then when she met Morgan and Charlie Pemberton. The siblings were born and raised in England. They lived in Oxford—their father a history professor at the famous university, while their mother worked as a nurse. They had rented a house on the beach for the entire summer.

Just a few months younger than Andy, Morgan was tall and willowy with wavy, chestnut hair and pale skin. She was a soft-spoken girl who had studied ballet for ten years. "Not long after I learned to walk, I was already twirling around and doing pirouettes," Morgan remarked. Her brother Charlie was a genius in the very literal sense of the word. His mind was simply a wonder to observe. Words like "magnanimous," "exacerbate," and "contemptuous" wove through his sentences with remarkable ease. Three years younger than his sister, he was tall, wiry and pale with brown hair and light brown eyes.

The three became quickly inseparable. A born adventurer, Andy tried anything—from diving off rocks to swimming fearlessly with dolphins and sea turtles that came near shore. Charlie, being nearly as fearless, would follow along, but Morgan was more timid and would often sit on the shore and watch.

As these sun-soaked days passed, the sting of her mother's death slowly began to wane, and when Andy wasn't wandering off with her friends, she would join her father for a few peaceful moments fishing off the pier near their vacation house. One day her father caught a large grey snapper, and as Andy watched the smile spread across his face as he reeled the hapless fish in, she realized that it had been months since she'd seen him look so happy.

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The thirty-first day on the island, Andy woke up later than usual. Judging by the quiet in the house, she assumed her father was already out fishing and she was alone in the house. But as she headed downstairs to the kitchen, she saw Morgan and Charlie sitting at the kitchen table. They were eerily silent.

Still groggy from sleep, Andy rubbed her eyes before realizing her friends were crying. “What’s the matter?” Neither could manage an answer as Morgan let out a choking wail. Startled, Andy turned to Charlie. “What’s happened?!”

“They’re sick...they have that virus...the one everyone’s been talking about,” he gasped in desperate bursts.

“Who’s sick?!”

“Mum and dad...people are dying from it,” he whispered.

It had been all over the news the past few days: a virus that had accidentally been released from some lab on the East Coast of the United States. But listening with the ears of children, the details of the situation had been quickly forgotten once Andy and her friends stepped outside and into the ocean.

But now seeing the look on their faces, she became gripped with fear about her own father, and without a word, she bolted out the front door, her feet moving so quickly that they barely made contact with the ground.

The pier was about a hundred yards away from the house. Andy tried desperately to see if her father was at the end of it. Without a single cloud to shadow it, the sun, already strong and steady, forced her to squint. A rush of relief flowed through her when she saw him sitting at the pier’s edge, and she slowed her pace as she approached him.

He turned to her, his face incredibly pale despite all the hours he’d spent in the sun. “Honey...I’m not feeling so well...”

He could barely stand up, and Andy had to help him up to his feet.

Two days later, her father was dead.

The days and weeks that followed were terrifying. The once-tranquil island of Bermuda rapidly transformed into an isolated prison of chaos and fear. The virus that had been reported on the news was far more serious than anyone could have imagined...and far more deadly. It was an airborne contagion with an incubation period of ten to fourteen days. Infected people could be walking around for two weeks without showing any signs of being sick, all while spreading the virus to next-door neighbors or to strangers traveling from across the globe. Once the symptoms appeared, however, certain death occurred between two and four days.

And there was no vaccine.

Before the televisions went silent, the last news reports suggested that the release of the virus was accidental and had occurred at the Center for Disease Control in Georgia. The origin of the virus, however, remained a mystery. Within several weeks, over six billion people worldwide were dead.

Despite its virulence, there was one particular group who was completely immune to the virus: children. Anyone older than the pivotal age of thirteen or fourteen perished. This made Andy and Morgan amongst the oldest survivors on the island.

The majority of the ten thousand surviving children lingered in either Hamilton, the capital, or in the northeastern town of St. George. Andy's vacation home, where she now lived with Morgan and Charlie, was situated on the more remote southwestern side of the island. This physical distance from the cities and other survivors was a welcome separation, as thousands of corpses littered nearly every house, street, and building across the island.

Within days, the stench of rotting flesh had become unbearable. The mere sight of death itself had become maddening. In the beginning, they buried each body in the ground, but after a week, digging fresh graves became too exhausting and cremation was the only sane solution, although creating a human bonfire seemed to approach a new level of depravity. At first, they speculated about the lives of every person placed into the fire, but after a while, they stopped wondering. The emotional detachment was necessary; otherwise, it would have been too much to bear. Soon the smell of decay diminished.

Their parents received better treatment. Morgan and Charlie chose to bury their mother and father under a large, flowering tree on the edge of one of the island's many golf courses. For her father, Andy chose the ocean as his final resting place. After placing a daisy-chain of flowers around his neck, she placed his body in a small boat with her friends' help. Then she turned on the motor and let the boat head out to sea. She watched with tears as her father disappeared over the horizon.

Once all the grocery stores and markets were emptied, food became an issue. Initially, Andy and her friends had gathered enough boxes and cans of food to completely cover their kitchen floor, but this lasted only a few months. Out of necessity, they learned to fish and grow food. It turned out that Andy was a natural at fishing; her talent kept her and her friends alive. Growing vegetables, however, was much harder to master, but fortunately the soil beneath the same golf course where Morgan and Charlie's parents were buried proved to be both fertile and forgiving. By the time the canned vegetables ran out, their garden had yielded just enough to get by.

That first year was the most difficult. When not guarding their home and food from other hungry survivors, there were storms to contend with. Two hurricanes pummeled Bermuda in August and September, each gradually destroying the roof of their home. The flimsy plastic sheeting they used to cover any holes did little to keep sun and rain from entering uninvited. Then illness plagued them at some point—everything from the common cold to dysentery. On Christmas day, Andy vomited so much that she half-expected her insides to come out as Morgan and Charlie initially feared she might have the same virus that had killed their parents. But she soon recovered.

As other survivors throughout the island starved, vicious fights broke out every day over a couple of cans of food. Inevitably, the older survivors formed what could only be described as gangs. Controlled by older children, much of the mischief was carried out by the younger members who stole food and supplies from other gangs as well as hapless children. Fortunately, these gangs kept to their own neighborhoods and rarely roamed toward the west end of the

island. On the rare occasions when they strayed too close, Andy and her friends remained fortified inside their home until the threat moved on. They armed their home with a sufficient stock of guns and ammunition, which were found after extensive scavenging of neighboring homes, buildings, and the nearest police station. Andy and Charlie practiced their marksmanship by targeting sea gulls on the beach, and anything they killed usually became supper. At first, the power of a gun was intimidating, but their comfort with the weapons gradually increased. Morgan hated guns, but she forced herself to learn to use one just in case.

