

The Best Laid Plans

April Kimbel

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Rylan

The noise came into her ears again. Rylan opened her eyes slowly, growling as she realized it couldn't have been much more than 4 hours since she went to bed. Under the black curtain in her room, she could see the sunlight. If the sun was on that side of the house, it was anywhere between 6 and 9 am. She was figuring somewhere in the neighborhood of 7:30. Sighing softly she rolled out of bed and stumbled towards the window. Tripping over a shoe made her hiss, but she finally made it there. Peeling back the curtain, she whimpered at the light that started to blind her, and jerked back suddenly. blinking her eyes furiously, she put her right hand up to her eyes and, leaning against the wall on that side, pulled back the curtain a bit, letting the light hit her hand and seep thru to her dilated pupils. The noise came one more time, and Rylan realized what it was. It was an ambulance, but they almost never came into her neighborhood. Waiting long enough for her eyes to adjust a bit more, she finally opened them a little bit. Peering out, she saw that two houses down was the ambulance in question, with a crowd of people around it. She saw a little boy who lived three houses up running up towards his mother, who was one of the people in the crowd. Her eyes had adjusted at this point and she narrowed them as she watched the boy's mother turn around and scream at him. Thru the window she couldn't

hear what the woman said, but she could see her frantically pointing back at their house. The boy, who was obviously terrified slipped as he tried to turn back to the house, but clambered back to his feet and raced for the house. she looked back towards the ambulance only to see the crowd jump back a few steps in what looked like horror. Suddenly another ambulance came racing up her street, screeching to a halt next to the first. Rylan at this point wanted to know what was being said, so she threw the curtain back and lifted the window up. She heard the ambulance drivers from the newly arrived ambulance screaming at the people to get back, but one of them was on his walkie-talkie screaming for police back up. Rylan's breath caught in her throat. Sprinting away from the window, she raced out of the bedroom and to the TV in the living room. grabbing the remote she quickly turned it on and away from the movie channel to the news. Before she could even get there, she saw the emergency broadcast showing on the screen. A picture of the presidential seal was behind an empty podium, and she could hear the milling of the reporters waiting for the president to come on stage. After a few moments he came jogging up to the podium. "My fellow Americans. This is an emergency broadcast to inform you of the state of our country. A strange virus has broken out and is infecting people with amazing rampancy. We are urging all citizens to stay indoors and lock your doors. Keep your children and pets inside, and stay away from all windows and doors. Keep your TV's on, but at a low volume, turn off anything in your house that will make

noise. The virus is of an unknown origin, and it is unknown what its cause is, but the CDC is working on it. The people who are infected with this virus seem to be acting..." he trailed off as he looked to the side for a moment. The thing that caught Rylan's attention the most was his look of 'are you serious?' After some sign from his cabinet or adviser, or whoever was answering him, he sighed and looked back at the camera. "They seem to be acting much like zombies, and have an uncontrollable urge to bite and attack humans. Anyone bitten by someone infected will soon be infected themselves, and start to show the same signs. Avoid everyone right now, folks, and we're sure the Centers for Disease Control will soon have an answer. God bless America." Rylan didn't stay a second past the word zombies. Sprinting back into the bedroom, she rolled across her bed and straight for her cell phone. Grabbing it, she prayed that the cell towers weren't all full yet, and dialed her best friend. She got a busy signal the first time, from Kehai's phone, but the second time it started to ring.

"Hello?" Kehai's voice always sounded timid on the phone to Rylan.

"Listen to me very carefully. I want you to make sure all the doors are locked, close all the blinds, turn off the TV, your computer, and anything else you have on in the house. Get upstairs, move your bed against the door and stay there. Put your phone on vibrate and keep it in your hand. I'm coming."

Rylan could hear Kehai's blood pressure spiking, and could

hear her start to hyperventilate. “Wh... I don’t.... what is going on?” she whispered into the phone.

Rylan knew that her friend was afraid of zombies, Kehai couldn’t even watch the TV shows that Rylan did. She’d have to hide her face from the screen every time she saw the undead on TV. She and Kehai had joked about what they’d do if there was ever actually a zombie apocalypse, but Kehai had always thought it was just that, a joke. Now here Rylan was, telling her best and most loyal friend to lock herself in her upstairs bedroom and wait for her to come rescue her.

“Ke, there’s something going on, but it’s fine. I promise. It’ll be no sweat. I’m gonna get us some supplies, don’t open the door for anyone, and don’t make any noise. You can hide in the closet if it’ll make you feel better, but even if you hear the cops or something banging on your door, don’t you dare leave that room.” Rylan was trying to keep her voice calm, but even as she was talking to Kehai, she was trying to pull on a pair of jeans, and pack some clothes into a bag. “I’ll be there as quick as I can, I promise.”

“Is it bad?” Kehai whispered softly.

Rylan stopped and put down the pair of jeans. Taking a deep breath to steady herself, she held the phone close to her face. “Yes, it’s bad. But I will make it ok, I promise. Just do as I say, I’ll be there soon.”

Rylan heard Kehai whimper into the phone, and then heard her stumbled footsteps up the stairs. Feeling confident that

Ke would do as she asked, Rylan hung up on her, and dialed a second number. Again she got a busy signal, and growling, dialed the number again, putting the phone on speaker and dropping it long enough to pull her bra on and then her shirt. Again, on the second try, she got a ring.

“Hello?” came the groggy answer from the man she’d called.

“Luke, get the hell up. It’s happening.” she said breathlessly as she slammed another pair of jeans in her backpack.

“What the heck are you talking about Ry? It’s like 8 am, why the hell are you up?” he sounded grumpy, but this was life or death and Rylan was not about to take chances.

“Luke! I swear to God! Listen to me for once in your life! The president of the United States was just on TV announcing the beginning of the zombie apocalypse! Get the hell out of bed, get the guns together, and find out where the hell your daughter is!” She practically screamed into the phone.

“Have you gone insane, girl? Zombies are not real, did you wake up from a nightmare or something?” Luke’s voice betrayed how insane he thought his girlfriend was right now.

“Listen, you have got to listen to me. They are using the emergency broadcast system, just turn on the damn TV and you’ll see it.” Rylan was glad she wasn’t holding the phone right that second, or she would have squeezed it to pieces.

Rylan was still packing things into her backpack as she was yelling at Luke. She knew he was stubborn, but she hoped

he'd listen. He sighed loudly, but she heard him shifting around in his bed, then heard the background noise of the TV coming on. She raced across the bedroom to grab a few things out of her closet, noticing an extra pair of tennis shoes in the bottom of the closet. Grabbing those, she ran back across the room and shoved the last of those things into the bag, setting the shoes on the end of the bed.

She heard Luke grabbing for something in a drawer, then a second later the suddenly reassuring click of his pistol being loaded. "I'm up. I'm going to call Sarah and find out where her, Kurt and Corie are. I'll call you back when I know something."

"Don't bother, just wifi text me. I'm packing now, going to get Ke."

"I love you, be careful." He said as she heard him hanging up the phone.

Rylan didn't bother answering. She realized that she couldn't hear the ambulance any more. Grabbing her bag, the phone and the extra pair of shoes, she started to walk back out of the bedroom and back into the living room. As she walked past the window, on her way to her bedroom door, she realized that she'd left the window open. The thick black curtains were shuffling slightly in the breeze, but outside it was quiet. Taking a deep breath, she moved to where her left side was against the wall, and gently reached up to pull back the edge of the curtain.

Chaos was all that assaulted her eyes. A car had slammed

into the first ambulance so hard it had knocked it into the second one. Everyone who had been standing there was gone, and there was no sign of life. The house across the street had their door wide open, and there was something sinister about the mark on their garage door. Rylan heard the police siren, and it seemed to be coming closer. Just as she was getting ready to move away from the curtain, it pressed in, and she heard the screen creaking as it was pushed in. Looking down through the space she'd made between the wall and the curtain, she watched a head pushing slowly but forcefully into her screen.

Rylan had bought the house because it had beautiful windows and was in an awesome location, and she was suddenly regretting that fact. The window was only about a foot and a half off the ground, and the person, or thing, was crawling up through her window. She had enough time to realize that it was crawling because it was missing the bottom half of its body before the flimsy screen popped in and the head came pushing into her house. Biting her tongue fiercely to keep from screaming, she threw the curtain aside far enough to get both hands on the upper lip of the window. Closing her eyes and trying to keep from throwing up, she used her whole body weight to slam the window down on the neck of the thing. It was enough and the head severed cleanly from the body. The body went limp on the other side of the window and the head rolled with an awful squishing sound into her room.

Rylan threw herself away from the window, and from the

head rolling into her room. Taking the time to close her eyes and take an extremely long, deep breath, she tried to compose herself. However, the gnashing of teeth made her eyes snap open quickly. The head of one of her neighbors, the woman who just 10 minutes ago had been screaming at her child to get back home was laying on her floor, clacking it's teeth at her. The woman had been blessed with wonderful green eyes that Rylan had always been jealous of, but now they were dilated to the point that all Rylan could see was black. The veins in the woman's face were very pronounced and black under her skin, and those black, blood shot eyes were staring at Rylan as if she'd like nothing better than to get her body back and eat her.

It was everything Rylan had ever watched in the horror movies. She turned and promptly raced into the master bathroom, not even making it anywhere close to the toilet before she threw up violently. It wasn't just that she'd killed someone, it wasn't just the fact that even though that head should be bleeding red all over her hard wood floor it wasn't, it wasn't the smell, it was the fact that she was living out what every zombie movie she'd ever watched had said. It was the fact that she was looking forward to the worst life possible, running for the rest of it, never being able to be normal, never being able to settle.

Moving carefully on the now slick, vomit covered floor, Rylan took a few moments to splash her face with cold water and look at herself in the mirror. Her brown eyes were as wide as dinner plates, and her black hair was wild.

Reaching into the drawer next to her, she grabbed the ring of hair ties that she'd forgotten anyway, and removing one, put her hair back. The long black mess was uncooperative on the best days, and today was not one of those. Quickly grabbing a brush and putting some water on it, she brushed her hair until it was damp, then put it back in the tightest bun she could manage.

Grabbing the brush and the rest of the hair ties, she grabbed a towel, then darted back into the bedroom. The head had finally stopped gnashing its teeth, and was laying still, only looking at her. Rylan tried to avoid it's gaze, focusing instead on grabbing the bag, shoving the brush and hair ties into it, and picking it up from where she'd dropped it in her panic to get away from the window and the severed head. Grabbing the extra pair of shoes as well, she ran into the kitchen. Grabbing the trash can and quickly removing the half full bag, she tossed that on the floor and moved to the pantry.

Emptying the cabinets of all canned food and rice, which was not much, then grabbing the last two gallons of water she had in the kitchen didn't take but a few minutes, but it was too long. Rylan knew she had to get out as quickly as possible. She had to get to Kehai. Racing thru the house and into the garage, she tossed the trash can and her backpack, as well as the shoes into the backseat of her sedan, then noticing a shovel and a half full package of water bottles, she grabbed those too, tossing them into the back seat as well. Giving one final look over the garage, she

remembered something at the last second.

Racing back into the house, she ran to the spare bedroom and grabbed one frivolous thing, her laptop, then she grabbed a handful of pencils and pens, and a few blank notebooks out of a drawer. Tossing all of that into her laptop bag, she raced back through the house, grabbing one of the spare pillows off of the couch as she ran back to the garage. Tossing it all into the back of the car, she ran around, got in, took a deep breath and started the car. Reaching up, she hit the garage door opener and turned slightly so she could see out the back glass. The door opened slowly, and Rylan took the second to glance down and put the car in reverse. Looking back, she saw someone stumbling towards the back of her car from the end of her short driveway.

Gasping, she slammed her foot on the gas, knowing that the garage door was open far enough. The person didn't seem to realize that they were going to get run over, and sure enough did. Rylan ignored the sight of the black blood splashing up onto the back glass of her sedan and simply floored it, spinning the car around as she reached the end of the driveway. Her cellphone went off in her pocket as she slammed the car into drive.

Driving quickly, but not recklessly, she reached into her pocket and pulled out the phone. The text was from Luke, he'd found his daughter and was leaving the house with all the guns and ammo he had. Rylan slowed the car to a crawl as she turned onto a main street to send a message back.

Leaving house now, going to get Ke, text when you know where to meet. love you.

Putting the phone back into her pocket, she looked up to see the road crowded with cars, some trying to get past others, others crashed and abandoned. Rylan slammed on the brakes, then looked behind her quickly. The road back was still clear, so she slammed the car in reverse, making the tires squeal as she romped on the car. She turned the wheel and went straight instead, driving as quickly as she dared. There were stretches of road where there were no cars, then patches where the traffic seemed to pile up. It seemed to be centralized around gas stations and stores, the last places that Rylan wanted to be right now.

On a good, non-zombie day, Rylan could be at Kehai's house in 15 minutes. Today it took her twice as long. She kept having to detour past accidents, avoid getting plowed by other drivers in their frantic haste to get out of the city, and stop for crowds of people scrambling to get away from the zombies following them. Through all of these crowds people would beat on her car windows, begging to be let in, but Rylan knew better. All it took was one person to touch her, or letting in the wrong person and she'd either be dead or a zombie, and would lose all hope of rescuing Kehai. Rylan kept the car moving forward, daring to even run into a few stubborn people who would not move. She didn't want to hurt or kill anyone, she just wanted to get past. She couldn't help these people, she knew that. She reached the back of one of the crowds and took a second

to run over a few of the haggard looking bodies that were chasing the crowd, but never stopped moving.

Rylan finally reached Kehai's street, which was mostly empty thankfully. She slowed down, risking cracking the window slightly as she looked around. She didn't see anything moving, and continued slowly down the street towards the expansive apartment complex that Kehai lived in. Kehai had managed to snag one of the last town homes in this complex, which was something Rylan was suddenly thankful for. The town homes were nearest to the street, which meant she could leave the car on the street and jog quickly to the townhouse to get her friend. Rylan finally stopped the car, her eyes peeled for any sign of trouble as she reached into the backseat for the shovel. Turning the car off, she checked to make sure the button on her key chain would work by locking and unlocking the doors by hitting it. Satisfied that it was working, she took a second to roll up her window, then giving a final nervous glance around, opened the door and stepped out slowly. Her heart was pounding in her ears as she stood, open and exposed, looking all around, trying to calm herself. There were a lot of people here, but it was far away from the center of town where she lived, so hopefully the zombies hadn't gotten this far. Shutting the door to the car as quietly as she could, she locked it with the button, then put the keys in her pocket, and readied the shovel with both hands.