

I moaned as Trent kissed my neck. It had been too long, far too long.

We'd been together for a month and a half, ever since he broke into my house and took my heart. Yeah, I know – cheesy. And it was hardly a fairytale romance, what with the zombies and everything. Trent broke into my house thinking it would be a good, defensible place to lay his head for a few nights. He hadn't counted on me leaping out at him with a tennis racket. After that, I'd allowed him to stay for a week, my defenses had melted against his southern charm, and we had mind-blowing sex. There was a bit of unpleasantness when he wanted me to leave my house, and I didn't. But, after being briefly apart he came back for me, and I packed up my truck and followed him.

Trent's hand slithered up my shirt and cupped my breast. I gasped as he pinched my nipple.

"God, you feel good, darlin'," he crooned against my neck.

"Trent," I panted as his other hand tried to pry open my jeans, "should we be doing this? The zombies..."

"We'll hear 'em coming," he groaned.

I could feel my last sliver of resistance ebbing away with every kiss. And as he gave up on my jeans and pushed my shirt up to suckle one of my breasts, it left me completely. Zombies be damned.

As for the zombies, that all started almost two years ago. At first there were just rumors of people going nuts and trying to bite other people. Then, videos of dead people coming back to life were all over Youtube. The CDC started making warnings about looking out for anyone who was infected. Then the army started evacuating certain towns. The sick were taken away to God only knows where. The news stations started telling us to stay indoors until the infection was under control. Finally, everything just stopped. No more TV, no more radio – the world came to a halt and the only people making any noise were the dead ones.

By that point, I was alone. My mom and dad had caught the infection early and were two of the first to die. They actually died in a hospital, and were presumably put down there, too after they came back to life – the doctor who broke the news to me was understandably evasive.

After the final warnings, I holed up in my house. Apart from a few scuffles with some dead people and one live man, I managed to get by for a while. Then Trent turned up, and things seemed to be infinitely better.

Trent pulled my shirt off completely and smiled almost drunkenly. "You're so beautiful, Jess."

I blushed. I always did. I know I'm nothing special. I'm a little on the skinny side with knobby knees, a flat ass and smallish breasts that would make a thirteen-year-old girl flush with embarrassment. Trent said he liked my curves, but hell if I knew what curves he was talking about. Far as I could tell, I only had angles. I kind of thought I'd have a growth spurt in my late teens. But given that I had just turned twenty a couple of weeks ago, that seemed unlikely now. The only upside was that I didn't have to

worry about wearing a bra anywhere. Trent had used my last one to catch a rabbit for our supper. He was very handy like that.

He gave me a look of comic impatience as he pulled my socks off and I immediately started unbuttoning my jeans. He smirked as he pulled his own shirt off, and I tried not to swoon too much. Trent was big and ripped from years of working as a carpenter he told me. He was thirty-two. I was surprised when he told me. He looked a lot younger. I sometimes teased him and called him my old man, but not too often as he didn't seem overly pleased by the jokes.

I lay back, and he pulled my jeans off, swiftly followed by my panties. The lust in his eyes was almost dizzying. I could count my previous sexual partners on one hand, and none of them had been half so thrilled to see me naked.

Trent traced his fingers up my leg, and I seriously regretted how hairy they were. Finding the time or implements to shave was a nightmare. It was why Trent was sporting a closely cropped beard. He trimmed but didn't shave. I wish I could do the same with my legs and armpits. Not that Trent seemed to mind, but then maybe he was just horny for any woman at that moment - hairy or not.

His fingers danced along my thigh, and he stroked his knuckle up and down my slit.

"You're already wet," he murmured with barely restrained glee. "Wet for me."

"Yes," I hissed as his finger delved into my core.

I sometimes wondered whether Trent was with me because I was the only available female around - literally. Would he be with me if we had met an older more voluptuous woman on our travels? I doubted it, but I didn't like to dwell too much on depressing thoughts like them. I loved Trent. I was just happy to be with him. So happy at that moment in time.

He smiled and continued his pleasurable assault as I squirmed and gripped the sleeping bag.

"Please," I whimpered, "I need you."

"Far be it from me to deprive my baby of what she needs," he chuckled as he shucked out of his jeans.

His huge erection leaped out and seemed to strain towards me. I giggled, and Trent pulled a condom over his deliciously hard member.

With hooded eyes, he dragged me towards him, and I kneeled over his lap. I clutched at his shoulders as he aligned our sexes and pulled me down his stiff length. I shivered as his filled me almost impossibly full, and he groaned as he bottomed out in me.

Trent wrapped his arms around me, and we rocked together for a few moments. Me resting my head on his shoulder, panting, and him running his hands up and down my back before settling on my ass.

"You're so beautiful, Jess," he whispered in my ear. "How did I ever get so lucky?"

“I’m the one who’s lucky,” I murmured. And I meant it. Before Trent ‘broke’ into my life, I’d been stagnating. Locking myself away from anything and everything. He made me laugh; he made me happy, and he brought love back into my life. The thought of losing him terrified me.

Trent began bucking his hips into me, slowly and powerfully. Opportunities to be intimate were few and far between for us, and I was grateful for whatever moments we could snatch.

But, he didn’t rush. He thrust into me unhurriedly, savoring our time together, wanting to make it last as long as possible. Because, what else did we have? These tender moments, stolen caresses, snatched kisses – they were the moments that made life living. We’d both lost so much, and the world was such a hard place to live in, that these moments needed to last to see us through to the next.

Trent clutched one of my breasts while his other hand gripped my ass. “You feel so fucking good.” He started pushing inside me with more force. His thick length rubbed against my sweet spot and each time he filled me he grazed my swollen clit.

I burbled something in agreement. I could barely talk. The feel of his manhood inside me, the slight pain as he pinched my nipple and the massage of my ass were all conspiring to make me come. I let out a throaty moan and rolled my hips, pushing against him as he drove himself inside me.

He gritted his teeth and every vein in his neck pulsed with effort. “You’re so tight, darlin’. God, I can’t hold back.”

“Don’t,” I managed to breathe. “Come.”

“Oh, Jess,” he growled as he pushed himself inside me violently and exploded. My own orgasm cascaded through me, and I writhed and cried in his warm embrace.

We clung to each other as the aftershocks of release trickled through us. I felt as limp as a ragdoll and slumped against Trent’s hard body. He cupped my face and gently brushed the stray strands of hair off my face.

“Okay, darlin’?” he murmured.

I sighed. “More than okay.” At that moment in time, everything was A-ok with the world as far as I was concerned. I felt so content that I was ready to tell him how I felt. I could feel the words dancing on my tongue, impatiently begging to be spoken. I would have, too, if not for what happened next.

I screamed as an arm shot through the opening to the tent and gripped my wrist. I pulled back, and the grizzly head of a zombie was suddenly staring me in the face.

Trent roared and punched the creature in the head. It groaned and let go of me. Trent pushed me off his body, out of reach. The zombie grabbed the nearest limb, which happened to be Trent’s leg, and pulled him out the tent.

I scrambled through our belongings until I found Trent's huge knife and my baseball bat. I dove out the tent to see Trent wrestling with the zombie and two others slouching our way. I tossed the knife to Trent and took a swing at the one attacking him. I knocked the creature off him, and Trent unsheathed the knife and sank it into the zombie's head. I ran to the nearest zombie and dodged as it tried to reach for me. I beaned it with the bat. He tumbled to the ground, and I hit it again and again until I was sorry to say it didn't have much of a head left.

The moans and grunts behind me told me that Trent had ended the other one. I dropped the bat and bent over to clutch my knees. It was the only thing I could do to stop myself from heaving. Killing them had never been easy for me, and with practice I just seemed to get queasier.

I stiffened but then immediately relaxed as Trent touched my back. I looked up to see him staring around our makeshift campsite, just in case there were any more around. We'd set up a perimeter with a trip wire and a few pots and pans attached to it. We figured if any of them stumbled into our neck of the woods, they'd fall over and make noise to alert us. Apparently we were wrong.

Laughter erupted out of my mouth and for a second I had no idea it was actually coming from me until Trent frowned. Carefully, I pulled the condom off his deflating manhood. Trent let out a bark of laughter.

"I'm naked," I whispered through hiccups.

"You certainly are."

"So are you."

"Yep."

He pulled me to him and hugged me as I rode out my amusement. It was part hysterics and part mirth at the situation.

I could feel his arousal starting to tap at my stomach. I pulled back to give him a surprised, arched eyebrow.

"Darlin', I'm only human." He gave me a lusty look before it morphed into resignation. "But I guess we've had enough excitement for one night. Let's get dressed and we'll tie ropes to our waists and sleep in the trees."

** Trent **

The next day I checked every inch of the trip wires and couldn't find a problem. Had the zombies really hopped over them? I didn't like the idea that they were capable of rational thought. In my experience, they were like mindless cattle who shuffled everywhere senselessly following food. The idea that they might have the sense to step over the tripwire scared me.

Last night had been too close. I think my heart actually stopped beating for a moment when that thing grabbed hold of Jess. We'd had so little time together; it wasn't enough. I don't think I'd ever have enough.

I smiled at her as she skinned a rabbit. To think, a month ago she didn't have a clue how to do that. Although, she did proudly tell me that she managed to stay in Girl Scouts for over six years, so she was comfortable with camping. Course they probably didn't have a badge for bashing zombies.

We were currently hiding out in the forest for a few days. It wasn't out of choice. We were scavenging for supplies at a sporting goods store a couple of miles east when a murder of zombies headed our way. There were so many of them we didn't have a choice but to run. We had to leave behind Jess' truck and my bike. We always prepared for this by carrying a knapsack of basics wherever we went and Jess, bless her clever soul, managed to grab a tent in the scuffle.

I'm sad to admit the rest of our supplies had come from a campsite we passed on our way here. The owners of the campsite were long gone. There weren't any bodies there, but there was a heck of a lot of blood. It may be cutthroat, but we took whatever we could from there, and we were grateful for it.

We were planning on heading back to the truck in a couple of days. Hopefully by then the zombies would have thinned, and we could get to the vehicle and make a speedy getaway. I heard from another survivor a couple of months ago that there was a settlement out west. That's where we were heading. This camping expedition was just a small detour. Course, the forest wasn't quite as peaceful as I was hoping.

Since we started traveling together, we hadn't met another soul. Not a live one. I was ashamed to admit that it didn't bother me at all. It should, shouldn't I? But I was just enjoying the time alone I had with Jess. I'd always been an optimistic person, but until I met her, I hadn't really considered that I might have anything normal like a girlfriend again.

Jess made me happy. Happier than I had been in a long time. Until I met her, I thought of my dead fiancée, Mara all I time. I dreamed of Mara's kisses, her pretty round face, and heart shaped pouty lips. But since I met Jess, I didn't have the rosy tinted memories that I used to. I remember Mara with sadness, as I do all my dead friends and family, but I don't feel the same longing anymore. I feel guilty about that. But not half as guilty as I felt when I realized that I was happier now living in the zombie apocalypse with Jess than I ever had been with Mara. Mara had always been loving and sweet. But Jess was sparky and sassy. She was up for anything, whether it was camping in the woods or nailing squirrels with her BB gun. Mara was a great woman, and I'll never forget her, but I couldn't talk to her the way I do Jess.

My feelings for Jess made me feel like I was dishonoring Mara's memory, and for a day and a half I could barely bring myself to look at Jess. I was angry at myself, and angry at Jess. I know; I was acting like a total asshole. How could I blame Jess for making me love her?

Course, she does kind of make me feel like a dirty old man. I hadn't realized she was so damn young when we met. Would it have changed anything if I had? I doubt it. Maybe I might have been a little slower with her, but I was a goner since the moment she kissed me. And yes, she kissed me first. I remind her of that every time she teases me about seducing her.

The pots and pans clanged, and there was an oof as someone or rather something fell to the ground. We both jumped to our feet. We heard scrabbling and footsteps pounding nearer. Jess grabbed her BB gun, and I went for the shotgun and my knife. I didn't like using the shotgun, it made a lot of noise, but I wouldn't hesitate to use it if they were coming at us fast.

"Shit," I exclaimed and aimed the shotgun at a young man who ran into our campsite.

"No, no, don't shoot! I'm human, I'm human!" he panted and dropped to the ground, covering his head.

I didn't lower the gun. Out the corner of my eye, I saw Jess hopping from foot to foot. "Is he? Is he?" she asked, breathlessly.

He definitely didn't look like a zombie. We heard some more rattling and another oof as something else found the tripwire.

"Please," said the stranger, looking at me with pleading eyes. "They've been tracking me for miles."

I heard the slow footsteps making their way towards us. "Take off your shirt and pants," I ordered him.

He blinked at me in surprise. "But..."

"Prove to me you're not infected."

"But..."

"Wasting time, buddy."

Anger flickered across his face, but he did as I told him. He was a big guy, not as big as me, but he looked like the kind of guy who played football in high school. The slightly flabby stomach said he was just starting to let himself go. He was young, too. I guessed he was a couple of years older than Jess.

I was satisfied he was human and more than a little eager for another guy not to be half-naked in front of Jess. "Get dressed."

I passed Jess the shotgun and moved to the zombies, who were just entering our camp. I easily took them out with my knife.

"Thank you," said the man, although all of his thanks seemed directed at Jess.

"What are you doing out here?" I asked, trying not to sound too peeved.

Jess knit her brows together and gave me a loaded look. Clearly she didn't approve of my warm welcome. "I'm Jess, and this is Trent," she said.

I grunted as the man pulled his shirt back on. "I'm Eric; it's ah, it's really good to meet you." He let out an exhausted chuckle. He only said that to Jess. He didn't seem as glad to meet me as he did her.

"What are you doing all the way out here without supplies?" asked Jess as she eyed the blood on his shirt. I was thinking the same thing, although, for Jess, it was due to concern. I was suspicious.

"I was travelling with a few other survivors - a man and his two daughters. We were just outside the forest when we were attacked. We tried to fight them off but..." He looked away. "Only I survived. I've been trying to shake them for ages. I'm just glad I found you."

"Two little girls?" said Jess in a small, sorrowful voice.

Eric nodded and affected a sad look that just didn't quite hit the mark for me. Maybe he didn't give a shit about the dead man and his kids. But my leery mind didn't like the way he was pretending he did.

Jess, who felt compassion over every dead body we saw, or came at us trying to try and bite us, closed the few steps between us and took my hand. I squeezed hers tightly, also finding comfort in her touch. I noticed that Eric was watching us, and I felt a tingle of worry.

Jess offered him some food and drink, and he accepted. I wasn't altogether happy with his presence, but I wasn't sure what I could do about it at that moment.

We cooked the rabbit and opened up a couple of tins from our supplies. I watched as Eric greedily devoured half a tin of beans. As he talked, he looked at Jess, only flicking his eyes to me every couple of minutes.

"Where are you from?" asked Jess, trying to be friendly.

"I was a student over at UNL when all this happened," said Eric.

Jess brightened. "You were? I had an acceptance letter from there. I was planning on going there, too." Her grin faded. "You know, before all this happened."

I frowned. Jess had never told me this before.

Eric smiled. "Yeah? What were you planning on majoring in?"

"I was thinking of pre-law."

"No way! That's what I was doing!"

The two of them happily chatted for a few minutes. Just an hour together and they were already talking like old friends. In another life, I considered that they might have met and dated in college. Or perhaps, judging from Eric's eyes, he might have slipped something into her drink at a frat party. I believed the latter to be more likely. Either scenario made me uncomfortable.

I decided I didn't like Eric. In fact, I think I hated him. I told myself over and over that it was because he was a little odd and I didn't believe his story about how he came to be wandering in the forest alone. And that I thought he was creepy. But I couldn't deny the fact that he seemed to connect with Jess easier than I had, and that seriously bothered me. If the whole zombie apocalypse hadn't happened, Jess wouldn't look at me twice. My pride told me she'd have found me attractive. But she wouldn't be interested in dating a carpenter twelve years older than her. She had been destined to go to college and date preppy young men who wore khakis. The reality was a little different.

I inclined my head at Jess and after some scowls and shaking of her head, I managed to persuade her to follow me. She said 'excuse me' to Eric. I grunted at him. We walked a bit away from the camp, but not so far that I couldn't see him.

"We should ask him to leave," I said, abruptly.

Jess looked at me in shock. "It's not safe; we can't send him out there on his own."

"How do we know he's telling the truth?"

"But we have a responsibility..."

"We don't know a thing about him," I hissed.

"We don't know how many survivors there are out there. We need to stick together. Besides, I didn't know a thing about you when I let you stay at my house."

I ran my hand through my hair, amazed that such a slip of a woman could be so stubborn. But I recognized the signs. She wasn't going to budge. She jutted her bottom lip in that adorable, crazy way that made me want to bite it, and she folded her arms with such vigor that I had an urge to kiss her until she melted against me. Instead, I tried to be logical. "He could have killed his last group himself for all we know. I don't know how comfortable I'd feel with him awake and the two of us sleeping. He could rob us in the night, or worse."

I didn't want to add what the 'or worse' might be. It wasn't my imagination; Eric's gaze remained on Jess for just a little too long.

Jess pursed her lips but then surprised me by nodding. "You're right. We need to be careful. I know from experience that you have to be careful about who you trust..." Her eyes filled with sadness and I pulled her into my arms, partially to try and soothe her but also to alleviate my own guilt. Before I arrived in her town, Jess had been attacked by another survivor and had killed him in self-defense. My guilt was ridiculous - I know that - but I wish I'd been there to protect her.

She sniffled into my shoulder for a few moments before pulling back to look at me. "But I wouldn't feel right about sending him packing."

She gave me a searching, hopeful look and I was too embarrassed to admit that I'd be okay with it. I'd seen a lot of awful things while I was on the road and Jess was holed up in her house. The things zombies were doing to us weren't half as bad as what we were doing to each other.

"Fine," I groaned, reluctantly. "If he wants to, he can travel with us - for now. We'll see how it goes."

"Thank you." Jess beamed at me and pulled me down for a searing kiss. She giggled as she felt my growing erection pressing into her stomach. I really had a sense of bad timing when it came to my lust for Jess.

"You know," she said, shyly. "With Eric as lookout we'd have a lot more opportunities to... you know... fuck." She whispered the last word as quietly as possible, and I chuckled as a red flush dusted her cheeks.

"Make love, darlin'," I corrected, pleased at her one-track mind. She grinned at me, and I couldn't fail to feel the hardened nubs of her breasts pressing against my chest. I considered that I had perhaps unleashed a nymphomaniac into the world. Not that I was complaining.

I looked over Jess' shoulder to see Eric watching us guardedly. I tightened my arms around her and allowed my hands to slide down to her ass. My ass. Every part of her was mine and mine alone. Possessive asshole behavior? Maybe, but I really didn't like this guy. He needed to stay the hell away from Jess.

** Jess **

I understood where Trent was coming from, but I couldn't just let Eric wander around on his own.

Eric seemed like a decent guy. He was big, good-natured and down to earth. His spirit animal would be a St. Bernard. He reminded me so much of my cousin Chip that I had a horrible urge to ask if he wouldn't mind me calling him Chip. Chip died of cancer when I was ten. He was about Eric's age when he died. It was the first time I'd ever lost anyone – and that included pets. I was devastated at the time. Now, death just seemed to be a normal, everyday occurrence.

A part of me wondered if it would be different if Eric had turned out to be female. Would Trent have welcomed a new female friend with open arms? I tried to squash the petty, jealous part of me. There was no point in thinking like that. I did consider that maybe Trent was jealous of Eric, but I almost laughed out loud at the thought. Trent couldn't seriously worry about me being interested in Eric. Eric was nice in a kindly cousin kind of way, but the idea of him and me doing anything sexual was completely ridiculous. I love Trent. Okay, I hadn't actually said it, but he surely must have realized that I had deep feelings for him. Zombie apocalypse or not, I wouldn't just jump into bed with any man who wandered into my life. Trent was special.

Trent was concerned that some the zombies who attacked Eric could be making their way to us. And he agreed with me about wanting to bury the man and girls Eric had been traveling with. He wanted Eric to show us the way he came through the forest, but Eric said he couldn't remember the way. Talented

though Trent was, he wasn't what you'd call adept at following tracks. And in my branch of the Girl Scouts we mostly focused on making s'mores and volunteering to help old people.

But in spite of Trent's concerns, the rest of the day passed peacefully enough. Trent spent most of it moving the trip wire higher, so any zombies couldn't fail to walk into it unless they were doing the limbo. Or unless they were children... my mind tried to avoid going in that direction. Eric offered to help, but Trent told him no. He didn't trust Eric, and I couldn't really blame him. I liked Eric, but then I felt comfortable with Eric being around because Trent was there. It may sound girly and pathetic, but I knew Trent would protect me.

Eric was very chatty. So was Trent, usually. Normally I was the quiet and grumpy one, but Trent was too wary around Eric to be sociable. Eric told us about his family, and his life before all this happened. He spoke with such animation that it was kind of a refreshing change. I wasn't saying he was more interesting than Trent – who could read out of the dictionary and enthrall me – but it was nice to be with someone who could talk about life before the apocalypse without looking like they were about to cry. Something neither Trent nor I ever managed.

I didn't really have a lot to do. I'd checked our traps for rabbits several times, and they were disappointingly empty. Instead, I did a stock take of all our belongings. I gave Eric some of Trent's clothes. I figured he wouldn't want to wear the bloody ones anymore. I knew Trent wouldn't mind the clothes. He might not like Eric at that moment, but Trent wasn't precious about clothes. Weapons, however, was a different story. If I'd done something like hand over one of Trent's many knives, I never would have heard the end of it.

"Where were you headed? Before you were attacked, I mean," I said over dinner, which was an uninteresting mixture of pumpkin filling and sausage – the type that keeps forever and tastes as if it went out of date ten years ago.

Eric looked pleased by the distraction from the awful meal. "Florida."

"Why Florida?"

"Jerry – the guy I was traveling with – heard that there was some kind of hospital down there with a cure."

"A cure?"

"A cure for the illness." Eric grimaced as he tried some of our coffee. For anyone who could still remember Starbucks, our coffee was an attack on the senses.

Trent, who had been simmering in silence, pinned Eric with a look. "You mean there's a chance that the zombies could be cured?"

Eric shrugged. "I don't know. Jerry just heard a rumor. He didn't go into specifics. It was probably just what it was - a rumor."

I nodded. "If they had a cure, they'd be giving it out."

When the sickness hit, a lot of people got ill. They were feverish for a few days, hallucinating, vomiting and breaking out in hives. The hives were probably the worst - they just about covered the whole torso and were an angry shade of dark red. Most people died within about five days of getting sick. There didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason as to who got sick. My parents did, but I didn't. Two doors down from me, my neighbor lost all of her four children, but she was fine. And anyone who died of it came back as a zombie. But the thing is, those who didn't get sick when they died, they still came back as a zombie. The sickness didn't kill everyone, but we're all technically sick and we're all going to turn into one of those creatures one day.

The zombies hunger for flesh – but they are happy - if that's the right word - to go for both humans and any animals that crossed their paths. However, getting bitten or scratched didn't turn you into a zombie – it hurt a heck of a lot, but it wasn't necessarily fatal. You had to die to become a zombie, which made me wonder how there could be a cure for those already turned – they were dead. Maybe the cure would just be for those still alive. If there was a cure. The sickness happened so quickly; there didn't seem to be any time for a cure. Or any explanation as to where the sickness came from in the first place.

"All I know is Jerry heard that there was a cure at a hospital in Tallahassee. It was probably all crap. All the rumors going around are. About a year ago I went out west because I heard there was a settlement."

I looked at Trent, sharply. "Oh?"

"Yeah. There were some people holed up in a mall for a while, but it was attacked, and it's just a burnt out shell now. There's nothing there."

My heart sank. We had been heading in that direction before our impromptu camping trip. What did that mean for us now?

"It's getting late," said Trent, abruptly. "We should turn in. We'll take it in turns to be the lookout."

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I gave my shirt an experimental sniff and then decided to wash it again. I poured some more suds into the stream and had another go. I don't know what I missed more, washing machines or showers. Nah, it was still showers, definitely showers.

As much as I hated washing in streams, I wasn't sure when we'd next see some running water. I was washing all our clothes before we hit the road... if we were still hitting the road. We hadn't talked since we heard Eric's news the previous night. It rained all night, and Trent had grudgingly allowed Eric to share our tent. We took it in turns to be the lookout. Eric insisted on taking a turn, as a thank you for everything we were doing, but I was pretty sure Trent stayed awake all throughout Eric's turn. Trent looked pretty rough this morning. He was so tired he didn't even argue when I said I was going to the

stream, to wash a few things. Although, he did insist on me taking his enormous knife, and he knew I could run pretty fast when I wanted.

My heart thumped as I heard a noise behind me. I jumped to my feet and brandished my weapon. Except I was holding a wet shirt, and it just slapped noisily against Eric.

He chuckled as he wiped suds out of his eyes. "Easy, killer."

I forced myself to laugh, even though I was still feeling flustered by his sudden appearance. The man moved as quietly as a freaking cat.

"Hey, didn't hear you coming." I tried to shake off my irritation. It wasn't his fault he made me jump. "I'm just doing a bit of... laundry." I did laugh that time.

Eric nodded and watched me as I started trying to wash my shirt again. "So you and Trent..." he started.

I paused and looked at him, warily. "Yeah?" I was already prickly enough in my own mind about Trent. I didn't need anyone asking the questions out loud that I was already worrying about in my head.

"Is it serious?" he asked me.

"I'm not sure." It was to me anyway. Trent was the only man I'd ever fallen in love with, but I couldn't speak for him, though.

Eric knelt on the ground next to me. "Trent seems like a decent guy."

"He is."

He nodded, thoughtfully. Then it all happened so fast. I didn't even see his lips coming until they were almost on me. I slapped at him and pushed him away until he thankfully removed the offending lips to a safe distance.

"What the hell are you doing?" I yelled at him, jumping to my feet.

Eric frowned at me as he slowly stood up. He looked at me like I was a strange, new breed of wild animal. "I just thought that, you know, you let Trent..."

Anger burned inside me. "You think I'm open for business for all men?!"

"No! It's just that you and Trent don't really go together. I figured that you were with him because there were no better options. I mean, we have so much in common. And I haven't been with a woman in over a year. You and me, we could really..."

"I love Trent!" I hissed. "Where is Trent? You better not have done anything to him!" I was ready to kick Eric in the unmentionables for calling me easy. If he'd done something to the man I love, so help me God, I would kill him.

"Of course I didn't!" he snapped. He was glaring at me, but then his eyes widened in fright. I spun to see five zombies heading our way, in various shuffling speeds. I snatched up Trent's knife, thankful he insisted I bring it. "How many can you take?"

I cried out in pain and slumped to the ground as a sharp, hard pain shot through my left knee. He kicked me! That fucker kicked me!

"I'm sorry," he whimpered. "I don't want to die. And if it's you or me, it's not going to be me."

He ran off. He actually ran off and left me struggling to get to my feet and with five zombies descending on me. Shit. I really should have told Trent I loved him when I had the chance.

Trent

I stretched out and groaned, blinking awake. Fuck. I fell asleep! Shaking out the stiffness of my limbs after falling asleep sitting up, I tried to stand up. The last thing I remembered was that I was just going to close my eyes for a few moments before I went to find Jess.

It was my own fault. I'd barely slept a wink all night. I'd only managed about an hour while Jess was on lookout duty, and even then I'd been trying to stay awake. I didn't want Eric to wake up and overpower her and hurt her, or even wake up and flirt with her. Jess might be oblivious to his interest, but I could see it. I'd have to be on Mars not to see it.

I looked around our camp. Everything seemed normal and untouched except for the fact that Eric was no longer around. Crap. Maybe it was nothing, but I had a bad feeling.

I lunged for the shotgun and started running towards the stream. I ignored twinges in my back and shoulder – damn I was starting to get old.

"No, no, no, no, no!" My heart almost exploded as I found Jess tussling with a couple of zombies.

She was hurling a wet shirt around and snapping it at them like a wet towel. She let one of them get a little closer and then stabbed it in the head with my knife. Thank the lord I had enough sense to make her take it with her. I pulled my flip knife out my boot and swiftly disposed of the other one.

"Darlin'," I said, panting with relief.

Jess sagged, and I dropped the knife and shotgun to catch her before she fell to the ground. She wrapped her arms around me and nuzzled my neck. It was then I noticed the other three dead zombies; she must have taken them out before I arrived.

"Jeez, darlin'."

"Yeah," she hiccupped. "Who knew a wet t-shirt could be such a good weapon?"

"It would certainly bring me to my knees. Course, you'd have to be wearing it at the time."

She laughed at my tasteless joke, a sure sign that she was actually okay, and I kissed her temple. The more I stared at the dead bodies, the more I realized how close I came to losing her. I couldn't bear it, I...

"I love you," she whispered.

"What?" My heart went from running like a freight train to a standing stop.

"I love you, Trent," she repeated from somewhere in my shoulder. "I just, ah, wanted to let you know."

I gently cupped her face and tipped her head back to look at me. Her eyes looked huge and worried.

"Darlin', I love you so much."

She gave me a watery smile, and I brushed my lips over hers. I meant it, too. The world was going to hell and all I could think about at that moment was that I was incredibly lucky. In fact, considering the state of the world, I was probably the luckiest man in the whole world.

She whimpered against my mouth and panic set in. "You're not injured are you, darlin'?"

"Not by the zombies," she replied, bitterly. "You were right about Eric. When he saw the zombies approaching, he kicked me in the knee and ran off."

"That bastard!" I snarled. I knew it was a mistake letting him anywhere near us.

"And he tried to kiss me!"

"That fucker! I'm going to kill him."

Jess' eyes narrowed. "Why are you more annoyed at him trying to kiss me than leaving me to die?"

"Ah, well, I..." Heat rose to my cheeks.

She giggled as I flushed. "Take it easy, tiger. Look, I'm fine. A little tired and my knee damn well hurts, but fine. All this," she gestured to the zombies, "it's all business as usual, I guess." She sighed. "Eric's probably long gone by now."

"Are you disappointed about that?" I asked with concern. I was inwardly jumping for joy. I wondered if Eric had done the same thing to the man and his daughters as he did to Jess. Probably. No wonder his story didn't ring true to me. We were better off without Eric.

"A little," she said, finally. "He just reminded me of my cousin; having him around kind of felt like the old days." She sniffed. "But we can't go back."

I stroked her cheek. "No darlin', we can't. But we can move forward, and we'll make our own family."

Jess beamed at me but yelped as I scooped her up into my arms. "The clothes!" She pointed to the stream.

"We'll come back for them later," I said, purposefully striding back to our camp. "For now, I have an urge to let you rip all my clothes off and have your wicked way with my body."

"But, Eric..."

"Is long gone, and good riddance." Him running away was probably the best thing that could have happened. There was no way I wanted him anywhere near us. But I doubted that even after what he had done Jess would have been okay with sending him packing to survive on his own. Not having him around saved me a headache and us an argument.

"The zombies..."

"We have the trip wire." Nothing would cool my arousal at that moment. A beautiful woman just admitted she loved me - I was horny as hell.

She chuckled and kissed my neck. I groaned and started jogging back to camp.

"Impatient," she chided, playfully.

"You've no idea."

I wasn't sure what was going to happen next. I wasn't even sure where we were headed anymore. I believed Eric was telling the truth about the settlement in the West. There didn't seem any point in going there now. But it didn't matter. I had Jess. I loved her, and she loved me, and that was more than enough at that moment.