



ZOMBIE BLUES

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Book Cover by Lyla Spade

Chapter One

One of the many things Erica hated about being a loner was getting placed into a pre-existing group because of having nowhere else to go. Being an outsider amongst a tight group of friends always made her anxious. She was shy, so it made it even harder for her to join the conversation.

It'd been this way since her parents died two years ago, so she probably should have been used to it by now. Before that, she had her own friend group. She wasn't known as the weird, quiet girl. The one who people heard crying in the toilets during morning break.

She wanted to make friends, but there was always this invisible force stopping her when the chance came up. No matter how hard she tried, she froze up with her peers. She'd sit there in silence, being too anxious to say anything.

Even when being put in a group with two people who weren't already friends. She'd watch them bond over things like music or the project, while she'd still be sitting there hesitantly. She'd think of something funny to say in her head but couldn't bring herself to say it out loud. What if they didn't laugh? Wouldn't that make things worse?

At first, people had been kind, but as popularity became more important, those who gave her leeway left her behind. Thirteen-year-olds wanted connections, people they could laugh with. They didn't want to have to explain the tagalong in their group as the one who doesn't really talk.

"Erica," her PE teacher called, "you can join Laura's group."

She looked over at Laura, who was in the group closest to the back door, before looking back towards the ground and jogging over. None of the girls made eye contact or even acknowledged her. Instead, they formed a large circle to complete their game. Erica knew she'd have to be bold to get a place in the circle or risk being stuck standing awkwardly outside the group. This wasn't her first rodeo.

It was ironic, both being an outcast and being placed in a group with the most popular girls in school. It was possibly the worst

placement, but it was one where she could imagine what her life would have been like if she had a better social standing.

Laura Hastings, Tilly Black, Lyla Summons and Everly Van Wilder—she knew all of their names. While never being blatantly mean to her, she assumed they all thought she was a little weird. They certainly didn't look overjoyed to have her join their group, even for the 20 minutes they had for gym class.

Their gym teacher, Mrs Wently, passed a ball to Everly who pretended to bounce it hard in Laura's direction. Laura flinched and all four girls started laughing. Erica joined in.

"Staaaap," Laura said to her, before getting herself in the catching position for a real throw.

"Is everybody ready?" Mrs Wently yelled out from halfway across the hall in a rushed tone. "Winning team-."

The gym door flying open interrupted the teacher and a group of students ran inside screaming, slamming the door behind them.

"What on earth is going on?" Mr Wently asked angrily, moving towards the students.

"There's a-," the student started before flying backwards as the door burst open.

Through the doors walked two female students. Blood stained the front of their school uniforms and their faces. Before anyone could say anything, one of them jumped on the students on the floor, biting into her neck viciously.

“Zombies!!!” Someone screeched near the front of the room, and with that, four more blood-covered students burst into the room.

Everyone took off running.

There were three exits in the hall and most students ran to the one in the far right, however being closest to the other, Erica sprinted after the popular girls who had already started running towards the exit.

This led them outside, which let them see how dangerous their cruisy Friday had become.

“Agggghh!” yelled an older student as he flew past them, almost knocking the slender Tilly over. He was heading towards the quad, and Erica wondered if it was a good idea to follow him. Instead, she stopped right behind the four girls, who seemed unsure where to run to.

All around them, students were running and screaming. Some screaming in fear, while others were screaming because of being torn into on the concrete pavement. There were two being

attacked in their immediate vicinity, which made Erica want to throw up.

A bloodied student groaned nearby as he noticed them. Pushing himself up haggardly from a teenage girl he was attacking, he moved towards them.

“This way!” Laura yelled, grabbing Tilly’s hand. She dashed down the pathway to their left, leading to a small grey gym shed. Erica followed as closely as she could, keeping pace. She glanced behind her, but the one who noticed them was no longer following.

As they got closer, another two students ran past them at a crossroad, splitting Erica up from the rest of the group. For a moment, she wondered if she should follow the two students instead. The four girls seemed too far ahead.

“Oh crap,” yelled Tilly, tripping over ahead.

The group slowed down to help her up, giving Erica her sign to follow. She sprinted as fast as she could to catch up to the girls. She must have taken off a little too fast, as her calves immediately ached.

The girls reached the shed and Erica could see Laura twisting the keys hanging in the lock and flinging open the door, holding

it open for her friends to run in. The three of them rushed inside, leaving Laura to secure the door.

It was at that point Erica realised Laura didn't know she was following them, as the pretty brunette was about to duck in herself. Luckily she looked up last minute and ushered for Erica to hurry.

As Erica jumped through the doorway, she felt the door shut quickly behind her and the keys being thrown to the floor. Erica spun around and turned the interior lock on the door, which Laura must have forgotten in her rush. She turned back to the four girls who were now huddled together in the corner of the small shed, heads down.

Outside sounded like a war zone, and Erica was terrified, but she was equally relieved. At least she wasn't alone.

Chapter Two

“What the hell was that?” Tilly sobbed frantically, tears falling down her olive cheeks.

“Zombies.” Everly told her matter-of-factly. “You saw what they were doing.”

Everly looked scared, but was noticeably calmer than the other girls.

“That can’t be real.” Lyla interrupted. “Maybe it’s the seniors playing a prank?”

“What kind of prank rips people open?” Tilly stated in a whining tone.

Erica stood awkwardly near the door as she listened to the girls desperately try to understand what was happening. Erica didn’t know either, but she was certain that whatever was happening out there was not a prank.

“We’ve got to call the police. Does anyone have their phone?”

Laura said to the girls.

“No,” sighed Lyla angrily. “Stupid Mrs Wently and her stupid phone in bag rule.”

“I have my phone,” Erica spoke up, frightening everyone except Laura. Tilly was the most surprised. Jumping so far she banged into the rack of sports gear behind her.

“What the actual f-,” Tilly yelled, hysterical. It must have been the first time she had looked up.

“Jesus, Tilly. Be quiet!” Laura scolded her.

“Where on earth did you come from?!” Tilly responded anxiously, giving Erica a judgmental look.

“She was behind us when we got to the shed,” Laura told her, before turning back to Erica. “You have your phone? Can you call the police?”

Erica nodded. She had only pretended to put her phone away when Mrs Wently asked. It made her feel more secure, having it on her, and the teachers turned a blind eye after what had happened with her parents.

Erica dialled 911, hoping she could get through quickly. She could see Tilly and Everly were looking at her strangely, confused why she was in the shed with them. Almost as if even survival

didn't warrant her to hang out with them. She turned to face the door, so she wouldn't have to look at them.

All operators are currently with other calls. Please hold the line.

A recorded message played.

"It's busy. I'll wait," Erica told them meekly, avoiding eye contact but turning her head to face them.

Erica turned back around to face the door. The way the girls were looking at her and talking amongst themselves quietly made her more anxious. Were they talking about her, or the events outside? She began wondering if she had made the right idea following them. She didn't want to panic, but she could feel it become harder to breathe.

She focused on inhaling and exhaling as calmly as she could. Big deep breaths in, calm breath out.

Whack.

Erica jumped as someone or something outside slammed onto the door, causing all five of them to scream. The phone flew out of Erica's hand, falling onto the ground behind her with a crack.

"Help!!!!" A male voice yelled from the other side of the door, tugging frantically at the door's handle.

“Don’t you dare!” Everly yelled behind her, yanking Erica backwards roughly. Presumably thinking she was about to open the door. It made Erica’s shoulder ache.

“Ow!!” The boy on the other side yelled as something else slammed into the door. “Oh my god! Oh my god no! Ahhhh! Get off agghhhh!”

The door rattled against the weight of the two outside, before a third and fourth body slammed into it as well. The boy’s screams made the banging more alarming and ever quietening gurgles.

All five of them pushed back toward the far end of the shed, eager to put as much distance as they could between them and the vicious attack. Erica felt guilty and horrified. If she had left the door unlocked, perhaps he would have been safe inside with them. If he had closed the door in time, that is.

She shuddered to think of one of those things ripping into her.

After 5 minutes of gurgling and thumping against the door, it got much more quiet. She could tell they were still outside, though. The gentle mulching sounds gave them away.

Erica looked over at the four other girls, who were all holding each other. Laura shot her a look of kindness, before stroking the

hair of Tilly, who was quietly sobbing. It was in this quiet that the automated message on the phone played once again.

All operators are currently with other calls. Please hold the line.

Something outside slammed into the door. The thumping noise of it throwing its body against the door got louder.

Lyla lunged towards the phone, picking it up and then slamming it onto the concrete floor. It was too late, though. Whatever was outside had definitely heard it. Erica was shocked, but the phone went silent.

With the attack on the shed continuing, Erica scrambled nearer to the girls out of fear. Another body seemed to slam into the wall near the door, and then another. The noise of the one creature trying to get in must have attracted others.

They were trying to get inside for sure, throwing themselves against the walls and scratching at the cracks. Erica was grateful there were no windows in the shed. She didn't want to see what was out there. She could hear Tilly trying to silent her sobs, with one of the other girls shushing her.

Erica's breathing was beyond her control and she felt herself inhaling as deeply as she could to get air into her lungs, but it felt pointless. She was panicking.

Erica noticed the girl next to her grabbing her hand. She looked up and saw it was Laura.

Stay calm, she mouthed to her.

Erica nodded at her, grateful for her kindness. She leaned back on whatever was soft behind her and worked to calm herself down. She tried her best to ignore the creatures trying to get in, despite how loud the noise was.

Fresh air. Tall Trees. Small dogs. She thought to herself as she breathed slowly, in and out.

A scream sounded from outside, which seemed to attract the things trying to get in. There was a round of growls, and then the things appeared to take off towards the scream, leaving them once again in relative silence.

Erica felt Laura let go of her hand, so Erica reached out to grab her phone. She picked it up and sure enough; it was broken. Erica tried pushing the power button, but it was useless. The phone was ruined.

She looked in Lyla's direction, but she was busy whispering to Everly. Annoyed, Erica wanted to say something, but she didn't. Would it really have been that hard to simply hang up on the call?

Her broken phone made her want to cry. It was the one her parents gave her four Christmases ago, and now it was ruined.

Lyla didn't even seem to care. She shuffled a little further from the group, leaning back against the cold metal shelf behind her. Maybe being alone wouldn't have been as bad as she thought.

Chapter Three

The five of them had been holed up in the shed for about two hours now. The four friends gathered closely and engaged in a quiet conversation, while Erica stood on the outskirts of the group, sulking in silence. It had been around twenty minutes since they had heard any screaming or footsteps outside.

“Do you think they’re gone?” Laura asked quietly, but loud enough for Erica to hear.

“Just because we can’t hear them doesn’t mean they’re not there.” Tilly replied quickly.

The slender blonde was on edge, but much calmer than she had been earlier. She was no longer crying, which Erica was glad, as it made her want to cry as well. The difference was that Tilly had friends to comfort her and Erica did not. So there was no point in crying herself.

“Yeah, but maybe they have moved on.” Everly said. “Think about it. If their food source has moved on, why would they hang around?”

“Jesus, Everly,” Laura gasped a little too loudly. “Food source?”

“Well, that’s what we are to them. They were eating people, Laura.” Everly said insistently.

Laura looked stressed at the realisation, but hesitantly nodded her head in agreement.

Erica looked over at the girls, none of whom were looking in her direction. She had spent the last two hours feeling both terrified and left out. Just her luck that she’d still be a social outcast in the zombie apocalypse. Noticing a pause in the conversation, she willed herself to speak up. She had been trying to convince herself to do so for the past ten minutes.

“Should we check outside?” she mumbled, her voice breaking a little.

“What?” Lyla turned to face her.

“Should we check?” Erica repeated. Her mouth was dry, which made it harder for her to articulate.

The girls looked at each other, conflicted.

“What if we open the door and one of them gets in?” Tilly posed to the group.

“I think we would be able to hear them if they were close by,”
Everly responded.

Another pause of silence followed this.

“Let’s vote.” Laura said cautiously, “hands up, who wants to
open the door?”

Laura, Everly and Erica all slowly raised their hands.

“Two vs two,” Lyla said quietly.

“No, Erica voted to open the door as well,” Laura replied.

Lyla didn’t look in Erica’s direction, but nodded her head slowly.

“So...” Laura paused, “we check outside.”

The five of them made no movements. Erica could feel the
apprehension, and for once, she didn’t feel like the most anxious
person in the room.

“Who’s going to do it?” Lyla asked.

The four girls looked around at each other, then switched their
gaze to Erica almost all at once. It was the most attention they
had given her all semester.

Erica gulped, immediately knowing they all wanted it to be her.

“You were the one who suggested it,” Everly told her.

“Yeah... um, okay. I’ll do it.” Erica replied, and the four friends
breathed a sigh of relief.

“I’ll stand next to you,” Laura told her assuringly. “If you see one, then we can close the door quickly.”

Erica nodded and pushed herself up. She walked over to the door and pressed her ear against it. There didn’t seem to be any noise coming from outside.

Laura crept up beside her and give her a nervous look of encouragement.

“You got this,” she whispered. She had an apprehensive smile on her face.

Erica grabbed the door handle and pulled it downwards slowly.
Pop.

The sound of the lock popping up was much louder than she expected, which made her pause. After a few deep breaths, she gently pulled open the door. It was bright outside, so she only opened it wide enough for her to peer through without fully exposing herself.

The concrete pavement they had run down earlier slowly came into view as her eyes adjusted to the sunlight, now covered with the blood of someone less lucky than them. No zombies in sight though, so she pushed the door open further, enough to stick her head outside.

Fortunately, there was no one outside. Just concrete, blood and the trees planted on either side of the path leading back to the gymnasium.

“There’s no one,” she whispered to Laura, without taking her eyes off the outside view.

Erica fully opened the door, letting the others get a glimpse of the emptiness outside.

“Where’d the body go?” Laura whispered, motioning to where they heard the earlier student banging for help.

Erica looked around, noticing the lack of dead bodies anywhere.

“Maybe he turned into one of them,” Everly said, squeezing through the two of them to step outside. “That’s what happens in movies.”

Erica watched as the short blonde stepped into the surroundings. She moved quietly to either side of the shed to look for danger, but came back to advise they were definitely alone.

“Let’s go,” she motioned to the others.

“Go where?” Laura asked her.

Everly walked back inside, closing the door behind them. She motioned for them to stand around in a circle.

“We’ve just got to go through the quad and then my car is in the carpark. We can drive to my house. I know we’d be safe there.” Everly insisted.

“Oh, that’s right, you have the high gates.” Lyla replied.

“Exactly. Even a normal person couldn’t climb them.” Everly stated. “And then we can call our parents, cause this idiot broke our only phone.”

“Hey, I’m trying my best.” Lyla rebutted. “I didn’t mean to.”

“Its fine, Lyla.” Laura told her, kindly.

Erica’s annoyance resurfaced; Lyla didn’t apologise at all for breaking her phone. No one asked her how she felt about it.

“Do you think they’re just in the school, or everywhere?” Laura continued.

Nobody seemed to know the answer. Erica didn’t want to think about them being everywhere, but she pondered they could be. She hoped her uncle was safe.

“Lets just make sure we bring the keys, and then if we run into some, we can come back.” Everly said, picking the keys off the ground and stuffing them in her pocket.

Everyone nodded and started walking towards the shed door.

“Oh Erica, what are you going to do?” Everly said suddenly, spinning around.

“Um,” Erica didn’t know how to reply. She had thought the plan to go to Everly’s included her. Her stomach dropped as she realised Everly hadn’t intended to take her with them. As awkward as she felt, she didn’t actually want to be left alone at school with those monsters running around.

“Won’t she come with us?” Laura asked, a hint of annoyance toward Everly in her voice.

“She can but, what if we’re stuck there for a long time? Wouldn’t you want to be with your family?” Everly replied bluntly.

“Isn’t her family dead?” Tilly said, gasping as the words slipped out of her mouth. She shot a sympathetic look to Erica, “sorry.”

Erica grimaced. She didn’t know what to say.

A loser in life and a loser in the apocalypse. She thought.

“You have to live with someone.” Everly said.

“My uncle,” Erica responded quietly. “Yeah, I should probably go back to my house.”

Erica felt uncomfortable. She didn’t want the girls to leave her here, but after how things have gone so far, she didn’t exactly want to be stuck in a house with them either. She didn’t want to beg them to let her join them just to have them say no.

“Exactly, see I told you Laura. She doesn’t want to be stuck with us. It’d be weird.” Everly spat.

“Isn’t that dangerous, though? If she goes off on her own.”
Laura retorted.

“Yeah, that could be kind of dangerous,” Lyla added, shooting Erica a look of pity. Perhaps she felt guilty about her phone after all.

“Can’t we drop her off on the way?” Laura asked Everly.

“Where do you live?” Everly looked less than enthusiastic.

“Near the chemist on the main road,” Erica said softly.

Everly thought for a second, “okay, yeah, I can drop you off. If there are more of those things out there, I won’t be able to stop for long, though. It’ll be a stop and drop, just a few seconds.”

Erica nodded her head eagerly, relieved that she would not have to make it the six blocks on her own. It did sting a bit that Everly had planned to leave her in the shed.

Erica wondered if her uncle had tried calling her. He’d probably be worried that he couldn’t get through. Not that he could get to her quickly, anyway. He was away on a work trip, but she knew he’d be coming for her. They had been close even before the death of her parents, and when they died he had stepped up and taken care of her, and for that she was so grateful. He was the only family she had left.

“Let’s go,” Everly said, leading the way out of the shed and into the sunlight.

Chapter Four

Erica took up the rear of the group. Not that she had much of a choice. The four friends stuck together like glue, moving slowly towards the edge of the quad before taking off in a sprint down the small hill to its base. Laura and Everly led the way.

Erica was nervous about running across such an open space, but she'd much rather this than be left alone in the shed. At least she wasn't doing it alone. Her uncle would have a much better chance of finding her at home, rather than in a random building on the far edge of the school.

The grass was wet and she could hear it squish beneath their feet as they ran. It felt louder than their increasingly heavy breaths.

They were a quarter way across the quad by the time Erica had the courage to look up. She scanned the area in front and to the side of them for attackers, luckily seeing no one. It seemed

Everly had also had the same idea, as Erica caught her looking around as well. Both were relieved.

“We’re safe. Let’s walk,” Everly said from the front of the group. The five of them changed to a walking pace.

“Best to save our energy,” Everly said, motioning to the far end of the quad.

Because of the quad being elevated, it meant they couldn’t yet see the car park below the far edge. Their route was admittedly not the best way to get to the car park, as they’d have to go down a steep section of grass, which would undoubtedly be slippery.

Still, it was better than going down the intended path to the car park—a concrete path of steps that was surrounded by trees on the far right of the quad. They wouldn’t see anyone who was lurking around there until it was too late.

“Do you think they’re out there as well?” Lyla asked.

“Maybe,” Everly responded.

“Let’s just keep going,” Laura spoke before adding, “make sure you have your keys ready, Ev.”

“In my hand, don’t worry.” Everly said, raising her hand and dangling her keys.

The sound of the keys jangling stood out for Erica, and she wondered if making noise was a good idea. She was too shy to

say anything, though. Erica glanced around to confirm they were still in the clear.

The girls, no longer running, speed walked over to the edge of the quad. As they did, the car park quickly came into view. The four friends crouched down, causing Erica to do the same. Together they viewed the large swath of concrete filled with cars.

Erica noticed the blood scattered around the cars immediately, but couldn't see any people around. The car park seemed to be empty of life.

"I don't see anyone," Laura whispered.

"Me neither," Everly added.

"What if they're hiding?" Tilly asked, presumably said what they were all thinking.

"I don't think they'd hide. They'd be searching for people," Everly replied.

"Maybe they're a lay-and-wait kind of killer." Lyla responded, looking terrified.

"I don't think they are. In the movies, zombies don't have brains. That's why they eat brains." Tilly told her.

"But if they're eating brains, then they have brains." Lyla rebutted, not taking her eyes off the car park.

“But not working ones. They’re just eating them.” Tilly replied, raising her voice a little.

“Then why would not having brains in the first place make them want to eat-”

“Guys, this is not helping!” Everly snapped at them in a whispered tone. “Besides, they weren’t even eating brains. I saw them. They were biting *everything*.”

The four girls sat in silence for a period, in which Erica assumed they were wondering if it was safe to go down the hill or not.

“What do you think, Erica? You’re quiet, you watch people, right? Do you think they’d be hiding?” Laura asked her.

“Uh, I don’t think they’re really that smart. I think they’re hungry.” She said, her voice breaking a little at first. “I think they’d be looking for food, but not hiding and hoping it comes across them.”

“That makes sense, right?” Laura said to the other girls.

The three other girls nodded, leaving Erica feeling happy with her contribution for once. It took her so much effort to speak in front of them because of nerves, even without the added fear of having her chest ripped open.

“Let’s go then.” Everly said. “Slowly, until I unlock the car, and then we all run inside.”

Everly took off first, quickly reaching the edge of the quad and starting the slope downwards. Her three friends followed her closely, being careful not to slip down the incline.

Erica was careful to keep up pace, not wanting to be left behind. If she got separated from them, she wouldn’t know which car to look for. She planned to stay closest to Laura, as unlike the others, she seemed to remember Erica existed most of the time.

It didn’t take them long to get to the bottom of the hill and move on to the concrete surface. It was here unexpectedly that Laura grabbed Erica’s hand.

“So we don’t lose you,” Laura whispered to her.

A wave of relief washed over Erica. It’s not that Laura had ever seemed cruel, but she never seemed remotely interested in her. She felt more confident she’d make it to the car. Then all she had to do was get dropped off at her house and get inside.

Oh shit. Erica thought to herself. How was she going to get inside when the keys were in her schoolbag.

She heard a double click and felt Laura pulling her forward. Laura pointed ahead at a Honda Jazz that the other three were already sprinting towards. Everly who was ahead of them, was

ripping over the front door as she turned towards the front of the car and froze.

A bloodied man came sprinting towards her driver's side door, slamming into the other side of it and sending Everly flying. Everly screamed as the man, who had stumbled himself, got up and ran towards the fallen Everly.

Laura went to run towards Everly, then changed her mind as the man lunged for the fallen teen. Laura suddenly pulled Erica down behind a nearby jeep, causing her to stumble and almost fall on top of Laura. The girls watched in horror from the car as Lyla went to help Everly, before being knocked over herself in the struggle.

The man bit into Everly's shoulder, causing her to let out a bloodcurdling scream. Tilly pulled Lyla up and away from the tussle, watching in horror as Everly struggled with her attacker. Lyla tried to pull Everly away, but every time she reached for her, the man went to grab her.

A single howl echoed through the far end of the car park, followed soon by more howls.

Erica watched as the two girls looked behind them, a direction Laura and Erica couldn't see from the side of the jeep, before

bolting in the opposite direction. Erica looked at Laura, panicked, wondering if they too should run.

Luckily they had stayed put, as they heard the footsteps first, then saw three students in blood stained shirts sprint after the girls.

Too scared to run, Laura motioned to underneath the car and started sliding underneath it. Erica immediately followed her, shuffling under the high set jeep. She turned her head to Laura, frightened, and Laura did the be-silent symbol before grasping her hand.

Chapter Five

The two of them stayed as still as possible under the jeep as Everly's screams echoed in the background. It lasted only a couple of minutes, and then it was replaced by rough mulching sounds. Erica was horrified, but was grateful Everly had stopped screaming. She couldn't imagine how painful it'd be to have someone rip you open with their teeth.

Tears were steadily falling down Erica's face, causing her eyes to burn, but she didn't dare wipe them. She stayed still, gripping Laura's hand until they heard the zombie get up and move away. After a few minutes had passed, Erica turned to look at Laura, who was silently sobbing.

"The keys," she whispered to Laura.

Laura shook her head without looking at her.

"I know we'd have to see her, but-"

“No,” Laura said firmly, before turning her head. “She’ll turn.”

Erica turned away from Laura, looked upward at the car, and nodded her head. Laura was right. Everly was going to become one of them, but they didn’t know how long that would take.

Erica felt terrible for Laura, having to hear her friend killed like that. She didn’t know what to say though, so instead they both continued to lie there silently, staring up at the base of the car.

Eventually, they heard footsteps approaching, and the two girls looked at each other in fear. They shuffled closer towards each other, hoping they couldn’t be seen.

“Oh my god,” a voice said softly outside, followed by loud weeping.

“Lyla,” Laura gasped, before shuffling out from under the car.

Erica took note and did the same, scraping the underside of the leg on the way out. As she got up to face the voice, she saw Laura running over to them, hugging the frightened Lyla and Tilly. Laura gasped as she accidentally caught sight of Everly on the ground, breaking into loud sobs.

“We have to go before they come back,” Lyla said, grabbing the keys off the ground that lay beside a deceased Everly.

Erica unintentionally looked down at Everly as well, and the massive amount of blood around the teenager surprised her. No

wonder she had died quickly. He must have ripped something important. Horrified, she spun her attention upwards towards the car, trying to push the sight out of her mind. She had to focus on survival. On getting out of the car park in one piece.

Lyla yanked open the car's back door and ushered the two crying girls inside, while looking around cautiously. Tilly and Laura were holding each other, both in shock over what was left of Everly. Lyla jumped as Erica ran towards them.

"Bloody hell, Erica, you've got to stop doing that." She muttered. "Get in the passenger side, quick."

Lyla jumped in the front seat and waited for Erica to jump in beside her, then locked the doors, turning to Laura.

"We were so worried about you, Laura. It's bad out there. We aren't going to get anywhere without a car." Lyla told her.

Laura sat in the back seat crying, not saying much. Tilly was sobbing uncontrollably.

"You got to pull it together, guys. This is life and death." Lyla snapped at them.

Erica shuddered, then looked around to see if she could see anyone coming. The parking lot remained empty, fortunately.

"Where do you live again?" Lyla asked her.

"Near the chemist on the main road." Erica answered.

“Like right near the chemist?” Lyla said firmly.

“Um, the street after the chemist.” Erica responded, a bit taken aback by her bluntness.

“The first street after the chemist?” Lyla confirmed.

Erica nodded her head.

“I’m sorry. I just want to make sure I don’t drop you off to get murdered.” Lyla said, the sound of anxiety coming strongly through her voice. “Is it a dead-end street?”

“Yes, but it’s a cul-de-sac.” Erica answered, quickly catching on that Lyla was worried about getting back out. The alternative, she suspected, was Lyla dropping her off on the main road.

“I don’t have my keys,” Erica told her.

“I can’t help you with that.” Lyla said firmly, before adding, “Do you want me to drop you off there or not?”

Erica thought for a moment. She wouldn’t be able to get in the front door, but she knew the laundry window at the back would be open. She’d be able to fit through it, but it’d be risky if anything was chasing her.

“Did you go to the road? Are there much of them out there?” Erica asked her.

“I just need a yes or no,” Lyla said, looking ahead and behind to the end of the car park to see if there was any movement.

“Yes,” Erica said impulsively.

Lyla sighed, before shooting Erica a look of sympathy. Erica could see that the teen seemed stressed, but was trying to hold it together for the others. *Someone had to hold it together.*

“We ran out on the road, then hid in some bushes. There are others out there.” She said ominously, before turning the key in the ignition and driving the car forward.

It was only a couple of seconds before they noticed a zombie running towards them from the exit they were heading towards, causing Lyla to speed up the car to evade it. She smashed into it at an angle accidentally, causing the car to jump as she ran over the body. Tilly shrieked, but then went back to crying.

The car sped through the car park before Lyla turned violently onto the road. With Lyla focused on the driving, Erica got a good idea of what they’d be dealing with. The streets were mostly empty, at least of regular people, but there were bloodied people every so often that would take up chase with the car. Each time she saw one notice them she felt sick, worried they would catch up.

Erica hoped there wouldn’t be any near the chemist. She didn’t want to lead them right to her house. Frightened, she wondered if she’d have more luck if Lyla dropped her off on the main road.

She'd make less noise, and hopefully wouldn't draw as many. However, if there were any down her street to intercept her, she'd be in trouble.

No, outside her house was the best option.

From the limited things she had seen so far, she could tell that the attackers could run almost like a normal person, but there seemed to be some sort of balance issue that slowed them down. Meaning she'd have that edge on them at least. Watching how Everly had been overpowered, she determined they were stronger, though. As long as she kept her distance and could open the gate quickly, she should be able to get into her backyard safely.

It didn't take them long to get to the main road. Unfortunately, there was a lot more going on there than in the quiet streets around her school. People were being chased down the road, and people who had turned were attacking moving cars, trying to get to the people who were locked inside.

"That chemist, right?" Lyla shouted, pointing ahead as she swerved onto the footpath to get around some cars on the road.

"Yes," Erica said, placing her hands on the seatbelt buckle, ready to undo it.

Lyla drove past the chemist and did a tight turn onto the street.

“Which one?” She barked.

“Green house, right near the end.” Erica responded, pointing to a house on the right. Erica looked around to see if any attackers were ahead, but they seemed to be in the clear. Luckily, they must have been more attracted to the main roads than the quieter streets.

Lyla drove quickly to get there, then slammed on the brakes, just missing her house.

“Good luck,” she yelled after Erica as she leapt out of the car, slamming the door behind her.

Erica sprinted towards the side gate of the property. She reached over the fence and quickly unfastened the lock, yanking the gate open and closing it behind her.

She turned towards the backyard and started running for the laundry window. As she did, she heard something run into the back gate. She looked back in horror as she saw an older woman snarling at her from behind the gate.

Fortunately, the lady didn't seem tall enough to get over the chest-height fence, but she worried her slamming into it would get it open eventually. Erica turned her focus back on getting to the laundry window. As she got closer to it, she sighed with relief,

seeing it was open. She pulled it open as far as she could before jumping and pulling her torso inside.

Scared at the prospect of the lady getting through the gates, she didn't even bother to land gracefully. Instead, heaving herself through the window headfirst. She landed with a thump on the cold tiles, but quickly got up and pulled the window closed, locking it.

Running out of the laundry, she went through the house, locking all the windows and checking the doors were locked. She could no longer hear the lady banging on the gate, but that didn't mean she wouldn't try to get in some other way.

With everything locked up, an exhausted Erica rushed over to the house phone. They weren't common anymore, but luckily her uncle had kept one. Some numbers were written on the corkboard next to it, so Erica dialled his mobile and waited for him to answer.

It only took three rings.

“Erica?!” Her uncle answered, sounding relieved.

“Yes, where are you?” She panted. “Something crazy is happening here.”

Erica burst into tears. She was grateful to be home where she seemed relatively safe, but it also didn't feel very safe at all. She felt alone and scared.

"I saw the news reports. I'm on my way." Her uncle replied, trying to soothe her nerves. "Are you safe? Have you locked all the windows?"

"Yes," she sobbed. "What is going on? What is the news saying?"

"They don't have much information, just that there's-," her uncle went silent.

"What's wrong?" Erica asked, concerned.

"Crap," he whispered, "I... I've got to go, but I'm on my way. Don't leave the house, okay?"

Background noise increased and she could hear his breathing become louder.

"Okay. Please get here quickly." She pleaded, still crying a little.

"I will. I promise," he said, sounding slightly winded. "I've got to go," he whispered, then ended the call.

His demeanour had unnerved Erica. He sounded like he had started running. She hoped what was happening here wasn't going on there too. If it was, how would he ever reach her?

Erica hoped he could get back. She needed him to. She didn't want to be left alone with everything that was going on outside. Erica wished so strongly that she had actually held onto some friends these last few years. At least then she'd be hiding in place with others instead of being alone in the house.

She knew she had to be positive, though. Positivity would get her through this. At least that was what the therapist she had seen last week had told her.

Be positive, stay calm.

Erica trudged over to her bedroom and got herself comfortable under the blankets after locking herself in. Her blinds were still closed from the morning and she didn't dare open them. She knew her uncle would take some time to get here, so in the meantime she'd have to keep herself busy to stay sane. Her adrenalin was still spiking from her journey here, so she closed her eyes and laid under the covers, trying to calm down.

She was going to survive this, even if she had to do it alone.