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Jennifer was sitting on the porch, studying. “Hey, Carolyn! Good to see you outside for a change.”

“Is there any food?”

Jennifer laughed. “Driven out by hunger? I might have known. Yeah, I think some of the dead ones got a grocery dump last week.”

“Which ones?”

“Third house down.”

“Thanks. Want me to get you anything?”

“Nah, I’m good. But”—Jennifer looked up and down the street furtively—“you might want to swing by my room tonight.”

“Why, what’s up?”

“Michael brought this back from his last trip.” She held up a little baggie with green leaves in it.

“What is it?”

“It’s called marijuana. Supposedly if you smoke it, it makes you feel good. We’re going to try it tonight.”

Carolyn considered. “Can’t. I’ve got a test tomorrow.” The last time she missed a question, Father gave her ten lashes.

“Oh, OK. Next time?”

“Love to.” Carolyn paused. “You might ask Margaret, though. I think she could use a little fun.” Margaret was no longer screaming herself awake every night, which was a relief, but she’d developed a nervous giggle that was at least as bad.

Jennifer made a sour face. “I’ll ask.” She didn’t sound happy about it.

“What’s the problem? You two used to be buddies.”

“Margaret *stinks*, Carolyn. And she and I haven’t hung out in ages. You really need to get out of your room more.”

“Oh.” Come to think of it, Margaret actually *had* smelled pretty bad the last couple of times Carolyn had seen her. “Well . . . it’s not really her fault.”

“No. It’s not. But she still stinks.”

Carolyn’s stomach rumbled, audible to both of them. “I’ve got to go get something to eat,” she said apologetically. “I’ll catch up with you later.”

She hurried off down the street. The houses of Garrison Oaks belonged to Father now, as did the things that lived in them. Most of the homes had dead ones inside as camouflage. These were what remained of the children’s actual parents, and some other neighbors who hadn’t been vaporized on Adoption Day. Carolyn wasn’t entirely sure how they had been transformed into dead ones, but she had a guess.

For a year or so Father had been murdering Margaret two or three times a week. He did this in various ways. The first time he snuck up behind her with an ax at dinner, startling everyone, not least Margaret herself. After that it was gunshots, poison, hanging, whatever. Sometimes it was a surprise, sometimes not. Another time Father pierced her heart with a stiletto, but only after telling her what he would do, setting the knife before her on a silver tray, and letting her contemplate it for three full days and nights. Carolyn would have supposed that the ax would be the worse of the two, but Margaret seemed to take that one in stride. After a day or so of looking at the knife, though, she started to do that giggle of hers. *And after that, she never really stopped.* Carolyn sighed. *Poor Margaret.*

But Margaret wasn't really the point. When she was dead she'd usually spend a day or two in the forgotten lands practicing whatever lesson was next in her catalog. Then Father would resurrect her. By this point Carolyn had seen enough of the resurrections to gather that they were a two-stage process.

First, Father—or, lately, Jennifer—would heal whatever wound had done it for her in the first place. Then he would call her back into her body. Once, though, he'd taken a break in the middle of all this to go use the bathroom. That time Margaret's healed body had gotten up and wandered around the room, picking up random objects and saying "Oh no" over and over again. She seemed to be not all there.

Carolyn suspected that was where the dead ones came from. They had been *reanimated* but not *resurrected*. They looked fairly normal, at least from a distance. They wandered the green lawns and grocery stores convincingly enough, but in every way that really mattered they were still in the forgotten lands. They could interact with one another and even with Americans—they exchanged casseroles, filled the cars up with gas, ordered pizza, painted the house. They did these things automatically. It was useful and, she supposed, easier than hiring a lawn service. They could also follow orders if it was something they knew how to do already, which could be handy as well. But they could not take instruction, could not learn new things.

Perhaps most important, they served as a security system. Every so often a stranger would stumble into Garrison Oaks and go about knocking on doors—salesmen, lost FedEx drivers, missionaries. For the most part these outsiders noticed nothing terribly out of the ordinary. Once, though, a burglar actually made it into one of the houses. After he saw what was inside he couldn't be allowed to return to the outside world. When he tried to sneak out the window, the dead ones were waiting for him. They fell upon him and tore him to bits. Father did to him whatever he'd done to the others and the erstwhile burglar took his place in one of the houses as someone's cousin Ed. Or whomever.

Carolyn and the other librarians could come and go as they pleased, though. Hungry, she opened the door of the house Jennifer had pointed at and went in. There were three of them inside: a little girl of about eight, a teenage boy, and an adult woman.

"Make me some food," she said to the woman.

Lately she had been focusing on mythical languages. The English felt strange on her tongue. Evidently it sounded as bad as it felt. She had to repeat herself twice before what was left of the woman understood her. Then it nodded and began pulling things from here and there—a can of fish, white stuff from a jar, some sort of green goo that smelled like vinegar.

Carolyn sat down at the table next to the little girl. It was drawing a family: mother, father, two daughters, a dog. The family stood in a park. Something that might have been the sun but wasn't blazed down on them, huge in both the sky and what passed for the little girl's memory. It was far too hot, far too close. As Carolyn watched, the little girl took a yellow crayon and added some flames to the father's back. The red O of his mouth, she suddenly realized, was a scream.

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