

Trust Me

*Dedicated to S. J.*

1.

It was on this day when I got everything I wanted.

For once, my cell phone didn't flash with light from a text message, or have the house phone cry out, indicating someone was calling. The house, every finely kept and cleaned corner- was silent.

See, most of the time I would get message after message, whether it was on Facebook, or a text- even a call. Not because they wanted awkward, blogging Kori- because they wanted Kori Rachel Glowman of the Glowman Estate at the end of Birch Street in Winslow Woods. It was a life I had to accept. That even on the rare occasion someone saw through me, I was still the rich, odd girl in the big house.

The silence was so blissful to me. Human voices- in my head they were just a nuisance. The only things that came out of them were words that would hurt you- or make no sense, or just be so irrelevant you didn't know how to respond. I never knew how to respond to people anyway. They were like labyrinths, all twisted inside, and you don't know where to turn or where to open up to and you just end of making a fool of yourself.

Maybe that's why I spent most of my time online or reading a book.

It was better that way. When people were right in my face, I could put headphones in and play some music. Instead of going out partying I could sit by a fire and read through one of my many classics I kept up on my bookshelf. And if my emotions were overwhelmed, I could hop online, blog about it, write about it- whatever I wanted. Life was more beautiful in a story anyway.

I had my computer on my lap and I refreshed my browser, biting my lip in anticipation and curiosity. It had just clocked to five on a Saturday, which meant my mother should be home within the minute. She would come rolling in from inside her Benz, announce dinner, and let me alone until then. Her words to get me to go outside or hang out with friends were useless. I liked the quiet life.

While the browser loaded, I glanced out my window to steal a look. Not that there was really any point, anyway. To my left and right were trees, trees, and more trees. But before that was a freshly cut lawn, the color of sickly looking acid all those sci-fi movies seemed to have. There was a grand big fountain and circular driveway, but I couldn't see that from my spacious, light and bright room. It was bigger than I needed. All I needed was a fridge, bed, wifi, books, and I was good.

But my parents who adopted me before I even knew my own name were millionaires who decided to get the biggest house in Winslow Woods. Winslow Woods was your normal upper middle class town filled with JAPS, sports players, and occasional pothead- but nothing like a Glowan. Our street continued on for a while, with nice looking buildings but nothing like the Glowan Estate you would hit as you reached the end of the road. That happened often, actually. Somebody takes a wrong turn. Hits our place. Then spends five minutes or so gazing at the sore thumb before being shooed by Martha the maid. Or, if I felt like humoring myself, blasting TARDIS noises would suffice.

I look back to my computer screen, and instantly shrivel up my nose in disgust. Instead of my blog, all I saw was 'Not connected to the internet' and a big X where it should say how much connection I have. I instantly

lean up from the pile of pillows behind me, and smash the refresh button a few times. Nothing.

“Christ!” I hiss under my breath, pushing the computer off of my lap and reaching for my slender phone.

I hit the bottom button and it springs to life straight away. It tells me it’s searching for a connection, but I make haste. I head to the app I have for blogging, and it spreads across the scene. Uneasily tapping my fingers on the edge of my bed, I wait for it to show up. But there’s nothing. Just the dull shade of blue the background would have, but nothing more and it refused to load further. Not only that, but it was three past five, and my mother was never late from whatever political town meetings she attended.

Having enough of this, I slide through my contacts and select my mother. I bring my phone to my ear, biting my lower lip again as I waited for her to pick up. It vibrated a moment, and I waited for the ringing to commence. But it never did. The line eventually dropped off, and a sound that equaled to a dying whale escaped from my lips.

I know what my mother would say right now. ‘Why don’t you go get some fresh air?’ However, it was a Saturday and I couldn’t see the point. This was my day to relax after a tiring week of grueling private school, and besides, I was just beginning my senior year and bringing my stress down was the best thing I could do.

So, hearing her voice echo in my head, I put one leg over the side of my bed, then the other, and landed down. My hair was already in a braid, and I had a pair of jean shorts on as well as a tank- so all I needed was a pair of shoes. I selected a gray pair of converse that was pocket money of mine,

and I tied the laces as I snuck my phone into my pocket. I probably would only be outside for ten minutes, not even. Martha was probably out minding the lawn and I would find her.

I went down a spiral staircase, edged along three halls, and passed our exquisite, stain glass and wood dining room until I made it to the front door. It was huge, and clear, so I could see right out into the front yard. Yep, there was the acid green grass and fountain. Not to mention the circular driveway that looped around then went down to the street. I pushed open the doors, smelling flowers from our garden that was a little ways ahead. Martha would probably be over there. I could ask her what was going on.

I didn't make it five steps out the door before realizing something was off. No, it wasn't the fact that I was outdoors. It was so silent outside. Normally right now, there would be life, clipping the bushes.... Landscapers... That's what it was! My mother had written down in our kitchen that the landscapers were scheduled to come today at 4:30. But it was five past five now... and nobody was here.

Just beautiful loneliness.

"Martha?" I then yell out, but half-heartedly because I hadn't made up my mind if this was wonderful or freaky.

When I didn't get a reply, I started walking down our driveway, where eventually I would hit the other houses. Closer together. Nothing like ours, but still, nice houses. Not a bird chirped. The only thing I could hear were my footsteps that scooted along the pavement as I looked around and about.

"Martha?" I yell much louder this time. "Mom?" But a gentle breeze is my only reply.

“Anyone? The landscapers aren’t here!” I call, slapping my hands to my sides. I pause. Obviously, nobody was here. Mom must be running late, clearly, and she must have canceled the landscapers today... But where the hell was Martha?

Some ways ahead, I could see the beginning of the houses on our road. A few had parked cars in the driveway, but nobody was out and about. At least, not that I could tell from here. My walking slowed down, not sure if I wanted to reach the end or not. To stall, I pull out my phone and check the time. Ten after five. Still no connection, no bars, no service. No blogging.

I finally reached the end of our driveway, and looked out ahead of me. A few trees swayed in the breeze, but the road was dead quiet. When I heard a hum, I brightened and hoped it would be my mother, but that faded when I realized it was just a bush swaying and rubbing its leaves. I was ready to turn around, sigh and pray for Internet connection, but something caught my eye. A blur of orange and green, and then suddenly a basketball is flying at my face and I jump to the side just in time before it smashed into the left side of my face. I hear a crunch, which I thought to be odd because it missed me. I instantly sprang to my feet, locking eyes with a boy who appeared to have thrown it.

“What the hell do you-“ I begin to hiss, but he jumps forward, grabs my hand, and jerks me forward.

“Move!” He says in this medium, soothing kind of voice that causes my eyelids to drop and almost give in, but then I pull free and stop.

“No! What are you even...” But I stop. Because coming from behind me I hear a moan, and cant help but turn around.

It's Martha. At least, I think it was Martha. But it wasn't really her. What I saw instead was her, shape, outfit, and all, but her eyes were all yellowed and green was dribbling from her mouth. In one hand was the basketball the boy threw, and on it was some of her green slime. But at her arm, there were red punctures where it looked like she had been bitten by something but it didn't bother her. It certainly was Martha, as she had our one of a kind uniform for her, and in a hand she held our bush cutters... but... What in the world had come of her?

I whirl back around to the boy. He's looking at me in some sort of desperation, like it's the end of the world and he was my savior, and the way he held out his hand made me almost believe it. But there was something familiar about him, but I couldn't put my tongue on it. He looked my age, maybe a year older, as he was my height but fitter and broader. His eyes were a gentle, muddy shade of green that almost looked like they could be brown, and he had brown and chestnut soft looking locks on his head that swayed slightly with the wind. His shirt was a dark green, almost the color of his eyes, and I realize he was the swiftly moving shape I saw before I saved my face.

"Please, don't go near her." He takes a step closer, changing his glance from me to the Martha-thing. "Come on, take my hand."

"Why would I listen to you?" I grit my teeth, frustration growing in my stomach like a spreading fire. "You just threw a basketball at my face."

"Not yours, sorry." He shrugged. "Hers. Now please, step forward..."

I'm about to turn around and face whatever had become of Martha, but suddenly I feel something clawing at my leg and I looked down to see



she had gotten back up and had wrapped her arms around me, clinging on as she threw open her mouth. Almost like she was about to attempt to eat my leg. And that was when the first wave of fear hit me that in fact, she was.

I was rooted to the spot for only a second, terror raising before the boy suddenly leaped forward and threw a kick at her head. Martha's head flew back with a sickening crunch, and I had to put a hand to my mouth to prevent myself from puking as she fell over, lifeless. And there was the boy, breathing heavily as he looked back up to me.

“Will you come with me now?” He asked urgently, wiping sweat off his brow.

“Gladly.” I whimpered, eyes widening. I grab his hand, getting pulled forward straight away in the direction of the trees. “But... What happened to Martha, what is going on-“

“Where are your parents?” He asked, ignoring my questions.

“At work, but they should have been home... Christ, why do you ask? Again, what in the hell is going on?” My tone had an edge to it now, as I was growing impatient and part of me wanted to know things and the other wanted to cry.

“Should have been home. Look. I don't have time to explain, but they are most likely just like your freaky maid lady back there.” He ran a hand through his hair, and then put it on my shoulder. “Now come on, move!”

I opened my mouth to speak, but it was useless. The boy, whoever he was, had gone back to dragging me along in the direction of the trees. Even though I had no idea what was going on, I wasn't sure I wanted to go to the trees. They would be more difficult to maneuver in, and who knows what

would pop out from a corner. Not another Martha creature, I hoped. I was choking back words I wanted to say, but when we hit the woods and started weaving through them I wasn't sure I could waste the breath anyway.

We're maybe one hundred yards in when a light mumbling sound causes me to skid to a halt. Hearing it as well, the boy let go of my hand and slowly came to a stop. I looked over my shoulder, not exactly knowing where it came from because it seemed like it came from everywhere and was static, like cicadas in season. But I couldn't make out what it was through the trees.

It appeared like the trees were almost moving at that point. Like the brown and greenish blobs were slowly drifting all over. But that was when I realized it. It wasn't the trees. There was what looked like a slow moving mob walked past the first row of houses on Birch Street.

It was hard to make them out from where we were, but I could tell they resembled pretty much what Martha was. Like... humans, but not. They were yellowed at the face, and green globs of who knows what dribbled from their faces. But among the fray were varying looking ones, human things that looked like they were rotten and some almost skeletal. Some carried briefcases, others had grocery bags and a few with random objects varying from road signs to tires. They were not human. Hell, they looked like Zombies. Zombies. Oh...

Well, shit.

"Run." The mysterious boy whispered into my ear. "When I say go, we run. They'll hear us. Doesn't matter. Go and don't stop."

All I can do is nod because I hardly have the strength to breathe. They were just ahead, crossing the road now in clusters. Like they didn't exactly know what they were looking for, but they wanted to find it. If these things were Zombies, then, well- they would probably want us. At least, that's what all those apocalypse books would say. In every one they would want to eat the kids. Eat their brains. I could hear them now, "Brains! We want your brains!" But I was sure that voice was inside of my head, and I think I'm about to go crazy when the boy suddenly hisses "Run!"

"You are not getting my brains!" I scowl as I take off in the opposite direction.

It's hard to be quiet when you're running through dense woods. My feet land on all sorts of things like crunchy autumn leaves and sticks. I charged so fast I thought I would leave the brown haired boy behind, but he stayed strong beside me, every so often glancing to his right where I was to make sure I didn't fall victim to the bastards.

I get the feeling this wont happen because the buzzing which I suspect was the zombie creatures moaning was gone, and all I hear is me and the boy's furious steps to put as much distance between us as possible. I then got an idea of how fast we were going because it sounded like there were four or five sets of my footsteps. Then it hit me. My lungs burned, we had been running for longer than I thought because out in the distance I could see the beginning of a road. So I steal a glance over my shoulder, and the surprise of what I see causes me to look longer than I thought I would and I catapult head over heels when I trip over a root.

There, in front of me, having followed us the whole way, are three very athletic looking zombie things that had run with us the entire time.

They had gym shoes on their yellowed feet and running shorts. One, a girl, had a sports bra on and the two men were shirtless. They looked like they had been on a run. And then... became zombified. And then, right here, right now, I realize that I will die.

Close to death, at least, until a large branch cracks over the head of the nearest zombie. I whirl around, jumping to my feet in time to see the boy, again coming to my rescue, and furiously hacking away at the three things with a large stick. I freeze for a moment, in fear, but a small part of me then thinks back. Back to my blogging. We always made fun of things like zombie apocalypses and would do foolish things like ‘grab the nearest object to your right. That is now your weapon in the zombie apocalypse.’ But this is real life and suddenly I’m doing just that, picking up a solid looking stone on the ground and chucking it hard as I can at the nearest zombie.

It didn’t do any damage, but I did grab its attention. It was the girl, and she ran at me furiously. I duck to the side just in time, and feel cracks at my ankles because hell, this is the first athletic thing I’ve done all day. A branch lays two feet from me, and I lunge for it right away. But in the process I slip, the runner girl lunging at me, mouth agape.

A paper cut makes me want to throw up, but somehow I find the will to drive the branch up into her gut no matter the circumstance. It doesn’t puncture her, at least not deeply, but it does knock her over onto her back. I don’t wait a single second. The stick is sharp and thick enough, so I ram it onto her throat, looking away and squeaking in the process.

I want to run so far away, away from the thing I just killed with yellow, bubbly blood now falling from her neck. But I find the will to stick around, and charge towards the one remaining thing that the boy was dealing

with. I lift up my stick, knocking it into the side of the thing's head. When it falls, the boy finished it off with his stick in the same style I did.

“Right. Well, not much farther now. Come on.” He tells me, and for the third time today pulls me along and saves my life.

I'm not sure of where we're going, but we were yards from the road now and wherever it is can't be far. I'm not sure if I could run on farther, anyway. My shoes aren't meant for running, and it wasn't exactly my best sport. We dash along until we hit the pavement, and I look both ways. Left, there's nothing but trees and road and it leads to downtown Winslow Woods. To my right is a bridge leading over a ravine. I suspect we would go to the left, but I'm surprised when the boy pulls me right.

It's much easier running on a road, but my legs and lungs still burn from our trek in the woods. When we reach the bridge though, he pulls me down towards the ravine. I have to shift my weight back to prevent myself from falling down the incline head first, but we stop at one of the middle bars and lean back against it, faces facing where we came from.

He sits down against it, pulling me down with him. Both of us are heaving hard, and the break feels good. But I'm not entirely sure what he's trying to do, because the zombie creatures would probably still be coming this way. And then everything hits me like the basketball in Martha's face and my eyes are wide, a cold sweat forming. I turn to the boy, who's cracking his knuckles and pulling off what looks like a small bag on his back. That's when it all spills out.

“Alright, who are you, and what the hell is going on?” I ask, choking back tears from fear and confusion.

“Figured you would say that.” He says softly, clearly trying to keep his voice on a low. “I’m Artie. I live on your street. And you’re Kori.”

“Yeah...” I look down. While he did apparently live nearby, I went to a private school nobody else on Birch Street went to, and when did I ever leave the house otherwise? “But what’s going on, what in the hell are those things?”

“I’ll explain everything later.” Artie tells me, putting a finger to his lips. “But I need you to stay quiet. They’re going to come here, okay? But I don’t think they smell any better than we do. They’re pretty dumb. Just keep quiet, and don’t move. We’ll be ok.”

I nod, leaning back against the pillar. Artie scoots closer, I guess to make our shape appear smaller than it is. He rests his little bag on his lap, and I still can’t tell what’s in it because it’s just a tight, thick black thing that couldn’t hold anything bigger than a gallon of water. I still have so many questions to ask, and the only thing holding me back is that the low buzzing moan can be heard now, and it’s growing by the second. It gets louder and louder, but I can’t see anything from under the bridge and so far down.

I so badly want to cry. It’s hard enough fighting off one of those things, that if they see us- its over. I know how many I saw earlier, around two hundred, and we’d be overtaken in seconds. But I guess this freezes me in fear, because I’m not even breathing. Artie’s hand is lingering on my stomach, and I would guess that if I squeaked or said something it would shoot to my mouth in seconds.

They were much louder now, and I could hear more than the moaning. I could hear footsteps, brushing along the ground like kids do when they just

woke up and are lazy. I pray Artie's right in the sense they can't smell us. After all, they just were like people. I did see Martha. Or what I thought was Martha. They were just... zombified. Were my parents like that? Is that why they never came home?

The thought is too much to bear, so I shut my eyes and squeeze my limbs tighter against my body. Then I'm suddenly back on the topic of Artie. He was so damn familiar but I don't know where it was from. He said he lived on my street, but I could see that's not where I knew him from. Maybe when we got away from the horde, he could tell me a few things. Because for now, he was just a stranger who did a girl a good deed.

They're going over the bridge now, I can hear it well enough. The dragging is just over my head and passing by, but they haven't noticed us. I pray it stays that way. I'm not sure how much time passes during this, but eventually I can hear what seems like the end because there are only a few remaining footsteps and the moaning is becoming less and less. But we don't move an inch despite of this.

Eventually, about ten minutes later of light breathing and staying as frozen as possible, Artie gets up. He reaches a hand out and I take it, and I realize it's not even been an hour but I'm already used to his touch. His skin has this softness to it, like a little kid but with the grooves of the eighteen year old he probably is. I waste no time, but still warily look around. "All right. Please tell me what's going on."

"I'm pretty much wondering the same thing. But, I probably know more than you do." He shrugs, slinging the bag back over his shoulder. "Come on."

I follow him, expecting an answer or for him to show me something. Instead, he takes a seat right beside the water, his sneakers just where the muddy water is lapping at the dirt and stones. I take a seat beside him, picking up the muck and dropping it, giving my hand something to do and something to think about. It's just us, him looking out and me distracting myself for about a minute until finally he speaks up.

“It was maybe ten. I went downtown, you know, with friends. Just to get some smoothies and play some basketball, normal stuff. But people were freaking out and the police were all over because apparently last night a bunch of people dug up all the graves at cemetery in Brimwood last night. I didn't buy it, but we saw the pictures and there it was.” He sighed, recollecting himself. “Maybe an hour later there were a few random people having breakdowns because people they know got all weird, their eyes got red and they turned all green and stuff. They all had bite marks. But before people knew what was going on, everyone got that way. The infected just kind of kept attacking. People freaked out.”

He takes a moment to pause, but it feels like an eternity. Like something in a movie. Nothing that would happen here, or anywhere. But he finally clears his throat and carries on.

“Anyway, one of those things came to the court where my friends and I were chilling. They laughed. Called it a zombie. And... they got too close. It bit one. Then another. It all happened so fast. I had stayed back. Before my damn eyes, they turned, just like that. It's a god damn zombie apocalypse. I ran like hell, but more than half of the people were all crazy like that. I came home, ran in, and then ran into you. Here we are.”



If this was yesterday when things were normal, I wouldn't have believed Artie for a second. But after what just happened to us, it seems like nothing out of the blue. My eyes wander to his bag, the small little black thing, and then I look back up at his eyes. They had this sadness in them. Like he was replaying everything he just said in his mind right now.

“Just like that?” I ask.

“Just like that.” He tells me.

I sigh, flicking a stone into the water. “So what now?”

“We try to live I guess.” He shrugs, twiddling his thumbs. “Find food and shelter, see if there's any place else where people are ok. Any ideas?”

“Still in shock, Artie.” I close my eyes, focusing on the slow moving current in the water. I wait a second, and then I let my wavering thought slip from my lips. “Why'd you save me? You know... since they were coming. You could have gotten a head start.”

His eyes flicker for a second. Almost like my question surprised him, and there was something embedded in the back of his mind. His thumbs stopped, and he bit his lip. Waiting. The entire question felt an hour long, but this wait for a reply felt even longer.

“I couldn't even think that.” He blinks. “I wasn't going to let a pretty girl get killed by her crazy maid.”

I get a chill when his lips form the word ‘pretty’. People called me awkward, strange, and most often rich. Never pretty. I was pretty plain looking anyway. I had medium length light brown hair and hazel eyes, a pretty general look. The only thing I had that stood out was a small, blue

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