

NIGHT AFTER MORNING

Night After Morning

By: Mark Asato

A dark night approaches this vast vacant land. Not a sound can be heard for miles; nothing is moving for miles. Travis is walking along the side of a deserted road in the country, with nothing but a backpack and machete. His clothes are worn and dust covered. He has a look of thirst and exhaustion on his face, but is determined to get somewhere.

For miles, he's kept the same steady pace. He thinks to himself, *at least the sun is not out, and I can now make progress to get back to Kelly and John.* Kelly, his girlfriend of almost 4 years is the reason why he keeps pressing on. She has always been there for him through the bad and the good times. She is now the only one who loves him; his parents were murdered during a robbery. She may not know it now but she is the most important thing in Travis' life.

None of that matters now. He's alone.

Travis found something with great importance, a dead corpse that still had a good amount of clean air left in the lungs. He stored the air in his air tank and will wait to share it with his friends. Admittedly, the thought has crossed his mind to use the clean air for himself, and to lie to his friends. What his friends will never know is that Travis killed this person for clean air. Travis gets tired and stops and sits far off the road. He takes cover in an old pickup truck. *Dodge, I used to have one of these,* Travis thought to himself as he ran his hand along the hood of the truck. He sits and reflects on what just happened. He never remembers as he's killing the person, it always comes back to him well after the confrontation. Travis closes his eyes and he can re-envision the entire fight, or murder.

Travis heard a noise coming from an abandoned gas station, so he decided to check it out. As he got closer, he heard a man's voice saying something about finding food. Travis wasn't interested in the food, his clean air supply was running out, and he knew what he had to do. Travis proceeded to pull out his machete from his backpack and quietly snuck into the gas station. He saw the man bending over a canned food item and eating it. Travis saw a glass bottle to his left, so he knocked it off the shelf and it smashed on the ground, shocking the man on the ground. He looked up and saw Travis standing with a

machete in hand. He told Travis to leave, and that this was his food. Travis told him he didn't want his cat food, instead said he wanted his clean air. The man told him he didn't have any clean air.

Travis proceeded to run at the man, swinging his machete wildly. He struck the man in the arm; the blade sliced clean through the man's arm as if it were butter. Just the sound of flesh being torn was enough to get Travis' senses flowing. The man screamed in pain, and repeated to Travis that he didn't have any clean air. Travis pointed his machete at the man's chest. The man looked down; then, terrified, looked back at Travis and said no, he couldn't do that. Travis told the man he didn't have a choice, that he was getting the air one way or another. The man put his arm up in the air, as Travis raised his machete and Travis then sliced and stabbed the man repeatedly, until he didn't hear any more screaming. The man's body fell lifelessly to the floor.

Travis, now standing over the man with his machete dripping in blood, bent over the man to his chest. He took off his backpack and took out his air tank and syringe attached to it and stuck it, into the man's lungs. And he slowly extracted the clean air into his tank, and Travis had a slight smirk on his face. Once he was finished, he put the tank back in the bag, wiped the blood off his blade, and vacated the gas station.

His eyes open and he takes a deep breath.

Travis reaches inside his backpack and takes out the air tank. He puts the mask up to his face, and takes one deep breath in and lets it out slowly. Thinks to himself, *man I love that clean air smell.* Then he puts the air tank back in his backpack and stands up. He proceeds to put his backpack on and starts walking again into the darkness of the night.

Some time down the road, he realizes that he is almost back. He can see the old falling down house in the middle of nowhere. Inside the house, John is standing and looking out a small hole that's in the wall, and can make out a figure approaching the house. He tells Kelly this and she stands up immediately and goes toward John. "Let me look," she says to John. John steps out of the way, and

Kelly moves closer to the hole. She too can make out a figure that is now getting closer toward them. “I bet it's Travis. I know it is.” Kelly says. John gently pushes her aside and looks harder through the hole, grasping his pistol.

“Stop right there or you will die!” John shouts out to the figure, which now stops. “Identify yourself!”

There is a gap of silence, then “It’s Travis, John. I’m back.” Travis then starts to move closer to the door.

“Show me your arm!” John yells out. Travis rolls up the sleeve of his shirt and shows a distinct cross tattoo that he and John both got in college. John opens the door and lets Travis in. After Travis walks in, John sticks his head out of the door frame and looks around quickly and closes the door.

“Were you,”

Travis interrupts John, “. . . followed? No, made sure of that.” Travis then walks over to Kelly, who is eager to see him, alive. They hug and kiss and Travis puts his stuff down on the table.

“What did you find out there? Anything good?” Kelly asks. “I found this.” Travis reaches from his backpack and pulls out the air tank and shows the two that it is now about halfway filled with clean air.

“Where did you find this Travis?” Kelly asks, while grabbing the tank and inhaling a deep breath. She then passes it to John.

“You know from a person.” John gets a weird look on his face.

“Trav, how did you get this?”

Travis, ignoring the question, puts the tank back inside his backpack.

“Yeah Travis, how did you get this? Most of the bodies have been harvested already.” Kelly says to Travis while stepping back from him.

“I had to do what I had to do.” Travis walks and puts the backpack down beside the wall.

“What the fuck does that mean?” John asks angrily. John picks up Travis’ knife that was still on the table. “There’s blood all over your machete man. That was not there before you left, I remember because you cleaned it.”

Travis looks back at both of them, “Well, I ran into this guy, while looking for water. And he confronted me, and long story short, I won.”

Kelly has a disgusted look on her face, “Travis you know you can’t just go killing people for air. That is wrong and you promised you would never do that.”

Travis goes and lies on the bed in the corner of the room. “Things change, times change. I did this for you.” Travis closes his eyes. “Get some sleep; we are moving out in the morning, north.”

Kelly walks and sleeps beside Travis, and John walks to the opposite corner and sleeps on his mat. Kelly looks over to John, and John stares back. Kelly winks at him, and then turns over to face Travis.

John smirks and closes his eyes.

As the night grew on nothing happened. Nothing made a sound. Morning soon came and the three awoke from a good, but still restless night, not knowing who or what is outside in the vast wasteland. Travis was awake first; just sitting up and staring out the hole in the wall near his bed. He looks out and does not see a thing for miles. He notices something moving in the distance, but cannot make out what exactly it is. Travis picks up his knife from under his makeshift pillow and makes sure that it’s sharp.

Travis is beginning to get the overwhelming feeling in his body. The sensation is becoming to overwhelm his thoughts and the thrill is rising.

He tells the others to go hide in the basement of the abandoned house, and that he will wait and see if the person comes closer. Kelly and John take their stuff and run down into the basement.

Travis has his knife in hand, waiting in anticipation for the right moment. He can see the person getting closer to their “home,” and grins. His grip tightens on the knife; the knife that carves his masterpieces. The man finally reaches the house and breaks through the front door. He starts walking around and inspecting the area. Then out of the back room, Travis walks out slowly, hiding the knife behind his back. Kelly can see a little bit through the cracks in the floor of what is going on above her. “This place has been claimed already, I suggest you leave.” Travis says to the man.

“I only want water. I don’t want any trouble man.”

Travis moves around and shuts the door calmly. “Seems like trouble followed you when you came through that door I’m afraid.” Travis says with a big grin on his face.

“I said I all want is water, I don’t want any trouble.” The man is trying to move toward the door, but Travis is standing in the way of it.

“You already said that, but I can’t just let you walk away, you have fresh clean air that I need.” The man looks confused at Travis. “Oh you know what I mean.” Then Travis shows the knife behind his back and points at the man’s chest.

“No. No you can’t. We have rules.” The man now trembling and backing into a corner, with Travis pressing toward him.

Travis smiles, “You’re not going to enjoy this, but I am.” The man screams as Travis raises his knife and slices the man’s throat. The screaming stops instantly, as the only sound is the blood squirting onto the floor.

Kelly gasps and puts her hands up to her mouth in shock. John runs upstairs to Travis. “Dude what the fuck?!” Travis is leaning over the man and cutting into his chest and looks back slowly to see John standing by the stairwell. He didn’t even hear what John said; in fact he can’t hear anything. He has blocked out all sounds to fully enjoy this experience. He would have liked it to have lasted longer, but knew that he didn’t have the time to.

John walks closer to Travis, "Dude, what the hell is wrong with you?"

Travis stands up and walks past John toward his backpack. "What do you mean?" Travis answers as he walks back to the dead body on the floor. He puts the syringe into the lungs, and extracts the air. The meter rises as the air goes into the tank. John walks away, as Kelly now walked up the stairs and goes over to Travis.

"You didn't have to do that Trav." Travis, not acknowledging the question, gets up and puts the tank back in his backpack. "Travis, I know you hear me. Something's changed about you."

Travis walks past her again to move the dead body, "Things needed to be changed to adjust to what happened, Kelly. We cannot be vulnerable in this world, and we need clean air. And I will do whatever that may be to get the clean air."

Kelly angrily responds, "You didn't have to kill that man, Travis. . . You didn't need to kill him." Kelly then walks back downstairs to get her stuff; Travis picks up the dead body and continues to move it outside.

Night falls again and no words are spoken between the three friends. There is a silence in the house that is unnerving. Travis is in the corner by himself, using the air tank. He walks over to Kelly and hands her the air tank. Kelly takes it and gives a small smile back to him. Travis returns to the corner and lies on his bed. John turns and looks at Kelly, she nods and John nods back. They blow out the candle in the room and go to sleep. During the night, Travis hears a sound in the house. He gets up quick, but doesn't see or hear anything in the room. So he decides to go back to sleep and worry about it in the morning.

The sun rises and shines through the window onto Travis. He gets up and stretches, and turns to view the room and does not see anyone in the house. He gets up quickly and takes his knife with him and searches the house. The house makes small noises from the wind hitting the broken shutters on the windows. The sound of silence causes Travis' mind to wonder into places that he should not go. He

realizes that he cannot find Kelly or John anywhere in the house; he runs in the basement and sees no one; he runs into the kitchen and the bathroom and comes up empty. Travis runs out the door and looks around, covering his eyes to block the sun to see well. The glare is strong, but Travis fights through the pain, but does not see anyone walking anywhere. He walks back inside the house and notices that his backpack has been dumped on the floor. He goes over to it and goes through his stuff, and notices that the map and air tank are missing.

Anger overcomes him and smashes a window out. He knows that John talked Kelly into going with him north. Travis picks up his stuff and heads out into the world. Travis is carrying his knife freely in the open and is on a set mission to get Kelly back, and to get John back as well.

Some miles down the road, John and Kelly are walking together. "I don't know if we should have left him behind." Kelly says to John.

"He'll be fine, I know he will be."

Kelly stops then turns toward John and says, "What if he finds us?"

John looks into Kelly's eyes and says "I'll be here." There is a silence between them and then they hug and continue walking. Night falls once again on this deserted landscape.

Travis comes upon a lonely van on the side of the road. As he gets closer, two men approach from the car and block his path. "Hand over the bag." One man says. The other pulls out a small knife. Travis smirks and pulls his knife from his belt and sees the astounded look on the two men's faces.

"Come on, you scared?" Travis incites the two men, and the one steps forward to attack. Travis dodges the man's stab and slices his arm clean off. The man falls to the ground grasping his arm, as blood pours out of his forearm. The other man is scared, and steps away from Travis. "Where are you going? Thought you wanted my bag!" The man turns and starts to run. Travis arcs his knife back and throws it with all his strength and watches as it hits the man square in the back and falls to the ground, like a rock in water. Travis jogs over to him, and the man is screaming in pain. Travis rolls the man over

onto his back and faces Travis. He looks into the man's eyes and can see the fear in him; he takes the blood soaked knife, looks at it and stabs the man in the heart, repeatedly.

Travis is now covered in blood and takes the knife out of the man's chest, and turns back to the other man, still grabbing his arm. "Why?" That's all the man can say as Travis slowly stabs in the man in the throat, until it goes through his throat and exits out the back of his head. He watches the man's life leave his eyes and pulls out the knife. With the blood soaked shirt, Travis wipes his knife off and sticks it into his belt and continues walking. Nothing is going to get in his way of getting Kelly back. As for John, Travis doesn't know what to think of John. His loyal and best friend, running off with his girlfriend does not help him in any way. Travis can only think about what they could be doing together, at this very moment. Touching her, kissing her, making her feel good; all of which is making Travis more and more pissed off. This is driving him to do some very unforgiving things; some will unfortunately come between friends.

Morning comes and Kelly awakes to John already looking at the map, figuring out where they need to head. Kelly walks over to John and sees what he has to say. "If we take highway 27 up to this crossroads here," as John points on the map, "we should be able to take this to a town called Rosdale." John stands up and takes Kelly by the hand.

"John, what are we going to do once we reach Rosdale?" Kelly asks John puts the map in his backpack.

"They have clean air and water there. It's like a little paradise in the desert. Not many people have heard of this place."

They start walking, Kelly is thinking about what the possibilities are about this town. Not many have heard of this town John says, how does he know this? People have to have heard about it; otherwise he wouldn't know about it. As they walk along the road, time seems to slow down and seems

to almost stop. The sun overhead is gleaming down and unleashing an unforgiving heat. John spots a flipped over truck and tells Kelly to wait while he goes and checks it out.

Kelly thinks about where Travis is, how he is doing, or if he's still alive. Even though she liked Travis, over the past few months she grew closer to John, since Travis would go on his "adventures" for days in search of whatever he could find. She grew tired of his games, waiting and worrying about what could happen to him. Or if he would ever return; if it wasn't hard enough to find food, staying alive is harder than expected. Not knowing what or who is out in this world, trying to get by and willing to do anything to get anywhere. All this thinking reminds her about she saw Travis do to that poor defenseless man back at their "home." She could not get over the fact that he would go as far as killing someone who was not attacking them. She's known Travis a long time and not once has he ever displayed that type of anger. Anger, it wasn't even anger; it was though he enjoyed it.

Just then John calls out to her saying that it's safe. She runs over to the truck and they both take a break from the sun and from the long walk they have come. John knows that sooner or later Travis will catch up to them and find them. He wants to stay at least two steps ahead of him, in case he makes significant progress while they are resting. Something tells him that Travis is not going to stop until he finds them.

Hope is high that Rosdale is a real place and has all the resources they need. If not, he is not sure if he could live with the disappointment. He can sense that Kelly has grown closer to him over the past few months. He reminisces about the old times, when they were dating.

All the joyful moments in his life, until they all vanished right before his eyes. John tells Kelly that they should get moving so they won't be stuck out in the outside and in an unsafe place. The two get up and once again start their long walk to Rosdale, the place of hope and life. A paradise where life prospers and is one of the few hidden gems in this so called world they are now in.

Meanwhile, Travis not stopping his pursuit has gained ground on them and spots something in the distance. He cannot quite make out what it is, but is eager to find out what it is. As he gets closer, he recognizes a piece of clothing dangling in the wind on rock off the road. Travis knows this piece of clothing; it is from Kelly's tank top that he bought her for her birthday last year. It is her favorite color, blue, as it matched her light blue eyes that could make anyone gaze into mindlessly. This brings a tear to his eye—it runs down his dry face and drips off his chin and hits the ground. It is probably the closest thing to water this ground has felt in a long time. Travis wipes the next tear away, and picks up the torn shirt piece and clinches it in his hand. He looks up in the sky and says, "I will get you back, Kelly. No need to be afraid." He then puts the piece of torn shirt in his pocket and keeps walking onward.

His journey will not end until he finds what is most important to him in this world; it is what keeps him going and gives him strength, when he's at his weakest state. Taking away a man's women from him is a death sentence. A never ending struggle, Travis thinks to himself, a struggle that will never go away until he gets what is his. Travis begins his long and heart filled walk across the most vacant land in this world. The journey could not be any lonelier, than to travel to Rosdale.

Even before the war broke out Rosdale had not been close to civilization. Deep in the country of Nevada, a small desert town was the heart of Nevada, except of course Las Vegas. These were the two most popular places to visit; one being that Rosdale overlooked a great desert, and had an excellent viewpoint on the town's edge. Being upon a mountain cliff has its advantages and disadvantages; one being that it was difficult to communicate once in the town, due to its lack of cell towers in the area. Outside of Rosdale lies an empty desert, 40 miles in every direction; Rosdale was the ideal town for someone looking to get away from the world, yet still be active in life. The town was filled with tourists on the weekends, but throughout the week, the small town was empty, except for the townspeople.

Travis' vision was long lost as the heat from the sun was getting to him. It was time to take a break for a few minutes and catch up on some sleep that he had lost over the past couple of days. He

knows where they are heading, and that he *will* get his girlfriend back, and take his revenge on the person he once called his best friend. John and Travis have been through a lot together and for him to do something like this is unusual. Travis thinks to himself, there was the summer after college, when he and Kelly took a “break.” He remembers vaguely that she and John spent quite a bit of time together. He had been at his house alone, in the dark, wondering why they were even on a break. A break, he thought to himself, what does that even mean? It’s saying we need some space, but I’m not officially breaking up with you. Travis was on his laptop at the time and saw on Facebook that Kelly was spending more time with John and with the pictures to prove it. Travis thought to himself that he didn’t want to see the pictures, but they were right there for anyone to view them. He knew that deep down inside it might have the chance of tearing him apart. But he decided to take the chance and clicked on the album link. Travis hunched over his laptop, like a caveman over his first fire, browsed through the pictures and didn’t find anything to crazy. On the last page of the album, there was one picture of them kissing on a bench by the beach. Travis’ heart sunk so fast, he felt like he was going to throw up all over his laptop. Of course it had to be on the last page, he thought, why get my hopes up that they weren’t doing anything. Travis then looked at the picture once more and really stared at it, and then he calmly closed his laptop and stood up and walked away from his laptop. He suddenly sprinted to his laptop and smashed it with such great force on the ground; it shattered into a lot of pieces that scattered throughout the room. He then broke into tears and fell to the ground, crying with his hands covering his face. Travis came back to reality and clinched his fist in anger, John is going to get what’s coming to him, Travis thought to himself. He stood up, feeling energized and began walking again in the blistering heat. It seemed like the heat was giving him more strength to keep pushing onward.

John and Kelly are walking slowly in the immense heat of the sun, barely being able to keep on walking. “I think we should stop and rest for awhile.” John says to Kelly; she nods and they keep walking for a little bit more down the road. They see a bridge that has some shade underneath it. John points

toward the bridge and Kelly nods. As they approach the bridge, John tells Kelly to wait while he goes and makes sure that it's clear and safe.

Kelly waits patiently, but her face says all that she is feeling. The sweat has dried on her face from the heat of the sun. Her hair is as rough as sand paper, and no longer that soft and beautiful hair she once had. She squints to see if John is calling her or not. He looks harder and can see John waving his hands and motioning her to come over. She begins her slow walk over to the bridge, where they can finally escape the sun. She finally gets to where the shade takes over the ground and the sun vanishes from her face.

The relief of not having the sun is possibly one of the greatest feelings they have had in the past few days. "I need to rest John." Kelly tells John as she lies down against one of the columns holding the bridge up.

Their peace is soon interrupted, as John spots people coming to the bridge in the distance. "Kelly!" John yells. Kelly wakes up in an instant and gets up quickly. John is standing just on the edge of where the shade turns back into the sun light.

Kelly joins him and says, "Do you think they are coming here?" John looks with more effort and notices they have something shining with them.

"Yes. Yes I do." John says to Kelly, but keeping his eyes set on the people coming toward them. "Take this," John hands Kelly the torn map, "Go on the other side of the bridge and don't make a sound."

Kelly hesitates to move.

"Kelly, if something happens, you go to Rosdale without me. Ya' understand?" Kelly doesn't answer. "Kelly, tell me you will go without me if something happens." John grabs her on the shoulder.

"I will go without you if something happens." Kelly says with a shake in her voice. Kelly kisses John.

“Go!” John yells. Kelly runs to the back of the bridge and hides on the other side of it.

The people that John saw now can see him standing on the edge of the bridge. “Hey boy! Get out here now!” One of the men yells out to John. John hesitant on moving, but walks out to meet the three men. One of them is a big guy, probably about 250 to 300 pounds, another is shorter and has a bandana covering his face and is about 5’9”, and the last one is about the same height and has a clean, bright, machete in his hand.

“What do you want?” John asks in an angry tone.

“Whoa, don’t you take that tone with me boy. Hey,” The man turns to the fat one and says, “I think this guy wants to cause some trouble.”

They both laugh, while the other one in the middle of them doesn’t say a word.

“What’s the handicapped one?” John says as he points to the one in the middle.

“He’s not handicapped asshole. He just don’t talk.”

“Wow, quite the trio we have here; a douche who can’t speak well, a mute wannabe bad guy, and a giant dumb fat guy.” John laughs.

The three don’t laugh at all and just stare at him. “So what do you three want? There’s got to be something.”

The big one looks at the leader of the group. “Give us whatever you got.”

John looks back toward the bridge. Kelly is peaking out and can only see part of John standing out in the open with the other men. Nervously she takes a fast look to see what’s happening. “I don’t have anything for you.”

The three laugh. “We figure you’d say somethin’ like that.” The leader shows off his machete to John.

“You gonna cut ‘em up Billy?” The fat one says to the leader.

“Shut it Ray!” Ray looks at the ground in disappointment.

“We can do this the easier way or the harder way. It’s your choice.”

John just smiles and sees that the one man has a loose grip on his knife.

“Well,”

Then John reaches and snatches the machete out of the man’s hand. “I’m not going to give you shit!” John waves the machete toward the three.

“Hey! Give me my machete back, yadick!” The leader yells at John.

“Oh you want this back?” John then throws it at the silent man and it goes right into his chest and he falls to the ground.

“What’dya do that for!?!”

John doesn’t answer.

The small one turns to the fat one. “Carry ‘em, let’s get out of here!”

The fat man picks up the injured one and begins to walk away from John. John turns to look back at the bridge. He waves over to Kelly, who can see him, and she starts to come out. She then sees one of the guys coming back to John and tries to warn him by yelling to him. Her throat is so dry that a little noise comes out and she grabs her throat. John is still looking at Kelly trying to figure out what she’s doing. Kelly can see the man come behind John and raise his knife and slice right through John’s wrist. John falls to the ground, as the man runs away. Kelly begins to run to check on John.

She gets over to him and he is screaming in pain and holding his wrist. Blood is squirting out everywhere, and Kelly is in shock. She doesn’t move for an instance, but tears his shirt and wraps it around his wrist. John still in pain, but not yelling anymore mumbles out a thank you to Kelly. She hugs him and when she lets go, a blood stain is left on her shirt.

John whispers sorry to her, but she just waves it off.

“What happened?” Kelly asks.

“I don’t know. We better get moving.” John stands up still grabbing his arm.

“Are you serious? After this just happened?”

“Yes, Kelly. We need to get to Rosedale as soon as possible.”

Kelly doesn't respond; John begins walking and Kelly is still standing there. John looks back and says, “You coming?” Kelly pauses, and then jogs up to John and they return to their journey.

Walking and walking, is all Travis can think about. The road has now become a part of him. He feels safe, comfortable on this road. The road to Rosedale is staying on this road until you can't go any further. The thought of getting Kelly back, and taking his revenge on John is thrilling Travis on the inside. A smirk takes over his face, as he pictures himself killing John. Best friend, yeah best friend who steals his girl from him, Travis thinks to himself. The pain is mixing with his evil side and creating something that no one should ever know about. Just then, a familiar smell catches Travis' nose. It stops him dead in his tracks. He takes another deep breath and confirms it, fresh blood. Travis is focused on this and begins wondering aimlessly trying to figure out where the smell is coming from. Travis then stops and sees a body on the side of the road. His heart rate beats faster and faster as he gets closer to the body. He can see the person is still moving, which excites him even more.

Travis finally gets to the wounded man, and slowly examines him. He can see that he has a knife wound in his chest and that is what the blood is coming out of. The man is not making any noises, which probably means he's had this wound for a little bit of time. Travis puts his bag down on the ground and removes his machete. Travis smiles down on his helpless victim; the man has a look of fear in his eyes. Travis is feeding off of this, but wishes the man would say something. So, he takes his machete and slowly pushes into the wound the man already has. The man squirms around, but still not making a single sound.

Travis' face turns from happiness to pissed. “Why aren't you screaming? You are in pain aren't you?” Travis yells at the man, but gets no response back. “Fine then, take the fun away.” Travis then raises his blade and with a fluid motion slices right through the man's head, ending his body squirming.

The man's head bounces off the ground and rolls off the side into a ditch, leaving a blood trail to follow the exact path. Travis still feeling the rush through his body closes his eyes and takes a deep breath out. He kneels next the headless corpse lying so elegantly on the road, as if it was placed there purposely. He proceeds to remove his air tank from his backpack and begin the process of removing the clean air. Travis extends the metal needle out from the tank and violently pierces into the lungs of the corpse. With his other hand he pulls the lever in the back of the tank and sees the meter filling up. He pushes the lever back into the tank, and removes the needle from the lungs. He places the tank back into his backpack and puts on over his back. He stands up slowly and looks around.

It is once again quiet in the land. He wonders how much further until he reaches Kelly and John. The anticipation is growing and is causing him to lose control of his feelings. The sensation is beginning to eat away at his conscience. Causing him to lose his sense of reality and personality.

Travis is becoming reckless. The beast within is taking over. Killing is becoming his drive, his want, his desire.

Further down the road, Kelly and John spot something in the distance. "What's that?!" Kelly points ahead of them.

John squints and can make out an object, but cannot tell what exactly it is. "I'm not sure" John says, "come on, let's find out." John takes Kelly by the hand and they press forward to the object. As they become closer to the object, John can now make out what they saw. "A sign" John says out loud to Kelly. John stops, "Rosdale 1 mile" the sign reads.

John and Kelly look at each other and hug. John begins to tear up because this is one of the happiest moments of the past few years he has had. Then John kisses Kelly and they laugh and smile at each other. "I told you this place is real!" John yells out.

John and Kelly excitedly start walking toward the direction of the town. Finally a break, a place with food, water, and most importantly, clean air. The sense of worrying has left both of them and have

been replaced by confidence. The last mile to the town feels like it is only a few feet away from them. Their walk pace has gone up since their goal is now in sight and in reach. The fear of Travis has left them also; they knew if they reached this safe haven that Travis couldn't do anything as long as there were others there.

The pair can now make out the edge of the town in the distance. They stop and take a moment to let this entire situation sink in. The thought of not worrying about where they were going to find food or water is gone. Clean air must be huge there so that problem is gone. They keep walking and know that they are saved and will be able to live their lives as they once did in the past.

They reach the town and what they had thought to be an oasis, is actually a ghost town. As they look down the main road through the center of the town, all they can see is deserted buildings, and burned down rubble. The feeling of being let down doesn't even begin to describe the feeling of their disappointment. The shock of it all is bad enough but once that wears off and the disappointment sets in, that's when people resort to bad decisions. They walk further into the town and don't hear a sound. No sign of life as they pass through the vacant town.

But suddenly, they hear a sound of a person inside on the buildings.

John and Kelly immediately head in the direction of the sound. They enter an abandoned bar and see smashed bottles, tables overturned in the main part of the space. They hear the sound again, this time more clearly. It sounds like a man, but very faint coming from one of the back rooms. They see a doorway and John cautiously enters and looks into the room and sees a man lying on the floor in a blanket.

"Hello?" John says nervously in the direction of the man.

"Who's there? What do you want!?"

The man answers weakly. "We don't want anything. What happened here? Thought this place was one of the last places inhabited." John says.

The man leans up against the wall very slowly and in pain, as John sees a large wound in the man's stomach. "Greed happened."

John and Kelly both go into the room and sit by the man. "What do you mean?" Kelly says to the man.

The man coughs heavily, "this place was safe for about four weeks, until reality set in." Kelly replies quickly, "What happened?"

"Well if you stop interrupting me, I might be able to tell you." The man says to Kelly, and then coughs heavily and blood flies out on to his hand. He wipes it off on his dirty and bloody shirt. "About a week ago, people began to get nervous when the clean air and water supply was getting low." The man coughs more. "They began to steal from the supply building and soon enough this led to killing other people for air and water." The man coughs again and more blood leaves his mouth.

John looks at the man's wound and the man catches him. "You should have seen this when I got it. Was a lot worse about four days ago and I finally got the bleeding under control. But I'm afraid that I don't have much longer, if you know what I mean."

John and Kelly nod.

"Do you know the reason for the war? I mean I've heard stories but I never knew what exactly happened." John asked.

The man looks at him and Kelly. "I used to be in the government, when there was a government in our world. I was in the homeland security department, but that's all I can say about me. Back in 2012 as you know, was the great famine worldwide. Countries fighting over control of the food market, prices in gas and food sky-rocketed to over twenty dollars for any item." The man coughed again and takes a break to catch his breath.

"I thought that had to do something with the war in the Middle East."

John states to the man.

The man shakes his head, "No. That was just a cover that the Russians funded." John looks at the man with a weird look on his face. "Yes, the Russians wanted the U.S. to focus all of our attention on this matter and think that it was for the control of the oil and the terrorism. But all of this was a cover so that the Russians could begin missile testing. They had discovered two types of missiles during this time period. One was some sort of electromagnetic device that could wipe an entire countries' power out in an instant with a bang."

The man coughs and wipes the blood from his mouth, Kelly hands him the last of their water. He takes it and drinks it. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Kelly says.

"You might have seen this with that earthquake in that one country way south of here. That was just the aftershock from a missile they launched on a small island some miles off the coast from there."

Then John interrupts him, "What was the other missile?"

The man pauses, "You've heard of a nuclear bomb right?" Kelly and John both nod in agreement. "Well, this was about twenty times worse and the affects were sickening. Once the missile exploded, anything in a hundred mile radius would be destroyed. And for people in that zone felt the most painful experience that anyone could feel. Your skin would literally melt off, you would bleed from everywhere and all of this was when you were still alive. That's of course if you survived the blast itself."

John and Kelly were in shock. "How did the war start then?" John asked.

The man adjusted himself against the wall. "Russia launched thirteen successful missiles all over the world. Then they sat back and watched the world turn into chaos, as no one knew who launched the missiles or why. Countries began attacking other countries. Alliances were waved off immediately because no country could be trusted. Russia then decided to launch their prized missile that would wipe

the U.S. clear off the map. But they miscalculated a simple error and the missile went into the air, but came right back down and blew up in Russia.”

“Wow that’s some story.” Kelly says.

“That’s no story missy. That’s fact.” The man responds angrily. He then apologizes and grabs his wound.

“How did you get that wound?”

John asks; the man is about to respond when knife comes flying into the room and hits the man in the head. The man slides down the wall, leaving a blood trail on the wall behind him. John and Kelly scream in shock and look to where the knife came from. Then walking slowly into the room is Travis.

“Surprised to see me?”

John and Kelly are speechless.

“Travis, I--”

Travis cuts John off, “Shut the fuck up John! I’ll deal with you in a minute.” Travis walks over to the man and puts his one hand on the knife and his other on the man’s head. He grips the knife tightly and pulls his knife out of the man’s head. Travis licks the blood on his knife and closes his eyes and exhales slowly. “I love the taste of a fresh kill, don’t you?”

Kelly and John have a disgusted look on their faces. “We were going to tell you dude, but”

“But what John? But what?” Travis says angrily. Kelly begins to get up. “Stay the fuck down Kelly.” Travis says as he points the knife at her. “I’ve waited so long for this moment, John.” Travis looks at John and notices that he’s missing one of his wrists. “Looks like someone beat me to the punch. Well, at least some justice was served.” John gets up and says,

“Fuck you Travis! The reason we left was because Kelly doesn’t want to be with you anymore. You’ve changed man. And quite frankly, we don’t know who you are anymore. So if you want to kill me, well do it then.” Travis just stares at John.

Kelly screams, “No!! John don’t!!” John still inches away from Travis’ face and not backing down. Travis grins and puts his one hand on the shoulder of John. “What are you doing?” John confused asks. “This.” Travis slowly pushes the knife into John’s chest. John gasps and looks down and sees the knife in his chest. Travis pulls John closer and forces the knife to go through John’s back. Kelly is crying on the ground behind them. John is bleeding from his mouth and trying to say something.

“What? I can’t hear you John, you’re gonna have to speak up!” Travis then jerks the knife up to John’s ribs and pushes him off his knife and John hits the floor. Blood is everywhere and spilling out of John. John is gasping for air, as Travis looks directly into John’s eyes. “I’m going to watch the life leave your eyes John. That way you will remember I killed you.” John continues to gasp for another few seconds, and then he takes his last breath and closes his eyes.

Travis sees Kelly crying and walks over to her. Travis’ mind is still in he enjoys the most. “You’re sick. How could you?” Kelly says in between her tears.

“He deserved it.” Travis responds. “I came after you. I know you didn’t want to go with John, but you had to. He forced you, I know he did.”

Kelly gives Travis a look of confusion, “You really don’t get it do you Travis? I don’t want to be with you. You changed and not for the better. I can’t be around someone like, you.” Travis leans away from Kelly, then stands up.

“I changed?” Travis says in a confused tone. “I still love you Kelly, even though you went with John, and did God knows what with him.”

“Well, I don’t love you, and what if I did do things with John? What are you going to do about it?” Travis stands there for a second, and then walks over to Kelly with an angry look on his face.

He reaches out to grab Kelly, but she punches him in the face.

Travis backs off and his nose begins to bleed. It drips down his face and hits the ground. Travis wipes some of the blood from his nose with his hand and looks at it, then looks at Kelly. He walks over

again and Kelly tries to fight him off but fails this time. Travis punches her in the face and Kelly falls to the ground.

Travis picks her up and grabs her from behind. He has one hand grabbing her hair and keeping her from getting away. He grabs his knife, as Kelly screams out, "No Travis!! Please! Don't do this!"

Travis ignores her outcries and brings the knife to her throat and pauses. "I'm going to miss you Kelly." Kelly screams again telling him to not do this, but it's too late. Travis slowly drags the knife across her neck and blood begins to pour out of her throat. Kelly grabs her throat, but Travis holds her head back which opens up the wound even more. Blood is spilling out all over Kelly and Travis and is creating a pool underneath her. Travis continues to hold her head back until he notices Kelly's hands fall to her side and she stops moving.

He releases his hand and Kelly's lifeless body drops on the floor like dead weight. Travis puts his knife in his belt and looks over the area. Three bodies. Two friends. One stranger. Three people he killed for his enjoyment. The aftermath of a friendship and relationship that has taken a horrible end. Travis breathes in the smell of blood in the room and exhales slowly, savoring the wonderful smell. He then begins to head out of the room but stops and takes one last look of the place. He sees Kelly's body lying there surrounded by blood, and just shakes his head. He walks out and is now on the road again.

Nightfall is coming soon across this vast vacant land. Travis begins walking down the road heading to somewhere new, somewhere fresh. His mind wonders, thinking again about the kill. The passion that he loves the most is gone. But his desire will always be there. Darkness can bring the worst out of anyone. The night holds the key to a person's deepest secrets. And for Travis, this is only the beginning.