

## It only gets worse

The light was blinding. Impossible to ignore. *'Turn your head'* he thought.

He turned his head. And suddenly the light was gone. *'Ah... that's better'*

'JEREMY, GET UP!'

Jeremy opened his eyes. 'Doesn't that old woman have anything better to do?' Jeremy said to himself. He sat up; half blinded by the bright sunshine that seeped through the window. As he crept out of bed, he picked up his clothes, stumbled down the hall and into the shower.

'ARE YOU UP?' His mother called.

'YES!'

After his shower, Jeremy went out into the kitchen to make himself breakfast.

'Are you kidding? As if you have time for breakfast,' his mother scoffed.

'So you just expect me to starve?' Jeremy responded.

'Go to Africa, then you'll know starvation,' his mother replied savagely.

'Piss off,' Jeremy mumbled.

'pardon?'

'Nothing'

They drove to school in silence.

His mum tried to start up little conversations, but Jeremy just wasn't up for it. When they finally reached school, Jeremy went to leave as his mother said 'Love you'

*'whatever'* he thought.

Jeremy's day only got worse. His first class was English in which he received his results from his exam he had sat the other day. 24%, it read. Jeremy sat in his seat not speaking. He looked over to see one of his classmates, Jessica, complaining how she only got a ninety out of a hundred.

*'Shut up, be grateful you idiot'* he said loudly in his head.

As they all went over the exam as a class and Jeremy saw everyone saying things like 'So that's what I did wrong' and 'I'll get it next time' he started to wonder why he was different. Why wasn't he striving to be bigger and better like everyone else was. It seemed like they all knew what they're passion was, and they were determined to reach that. *'But not me'* Jeremy thought. *'I don't have anything I won't to do, I don't like any activities, I'm not very social. Nothing interests me.'*

The more he thought, the worse he felt. *'So don't think'* he thought happily. Jeremy tried to go to sleep. Promptly afterword's he started feeling better. Until his teacher said 'Jeremy. Up. Outside. If you don't want to work, get out.'

*'God dammit, just when I started feeling better'*.

Jeremy got up and walked outside. Sometime later he was told to come back in. *'I couldn't even let the teacher know I'm just not up for it or anything. Just told to go outside and come back. Sure, gained a lot from that'* Jeremy raged to himself.

His day didn't get much better. After English he had Maths. Which he hated with a passion. He didn't even look at the mark on his paper he just stuffed it into his bag, planning on

burning it when he got home. He didn't even bother to listen because he knew he wouldn't understand anything anyway. *'Why bother'*

As he stared out the window, the questions of why wasn't he like everyone else, started to come back. He tried to go to sleep, it didn't help. He tried to think about something else. It didn't help. He even started listening to the teacher to just rid himself of the thoughts. It didn't help.

He sat alone at lunch. *'Always have, always will'*.

Next up was DT. Jeremy actually didn't mind DT. He had put in some effort into his project, which he was meant to hand in today and wasn't feeling too bad about it either. As he walked into class he felt around in his bag, feeling for the boat he had made. It wasn't there. *'Don't tell me I've forgotten it'*.

Jeremy had forgotten his boat.

When his teacher asked where it was, he just had to mumble he'd left it home and he was really sorry and everything else that went along with his usual speel. *'Just my luck I'd forget it today of all days.'*

Jeremy was in a sour mood on his way home on the bus. He hated taking the bus. It was full of annoying and douchbaggy type kids with ugly mullets that they think looked cool. *'Is there no decent person in this world'* Jeremy monologued sadly. He would normally get a ride home with his mom but today she was working late. *'Because why wouldn't she?'* Jeremy hated the bus.

After the 20 minutes of suffering Jeremy had to endure on the bus, he finally made it home. Jeremy walked through his house into his room where he threw his school bag into the corner and fell onto his bed. *'What a FANTASTIC day!'*

Jeremy went to sleep. It was his way of passing the time and not feel anything at all.

When Jeremy woke it was dark out. He got up and went out into the kitchen, hunting for a meal. He decided on 2-minute noodles. *'Gotta love that processed flavour of beef'* he thought as he sat down to eat. Jeremy noticed the time, 10:30. Jeremy also noticed who was absent from his home. *'She must be working extra late'*

He reassured himself.

Jeremy went back to sleep.

It was morning. And yet nothing had come to wake Jeremy. He opened his eyes to see the time, 8:15. *'What the hell? Did Mum go to work early or something?'*

Jeremy went out into the kitchen to see if a note had been left. Nothing. *'Great, now I have to get the bus to school'*. Jeremy dreaded the idea of it, but he had no other choice. He packed his bag and ran out the door.

8:25 and still no sign of the bus. *'Maybe it's just running late'* Jeremy considered.

8:30. Nothing. *'Awfully quiet, isn't it?'*

The silence was deafening. No birds. No cars... and no people.

Jeremy eventually gave up on the bus and thought he would just ride to school. He went back into his house, grabbed his bike, and took off. It was 9:15 when Jeremy finally made it to school, *'Jeez I'm late'*.

Jeremy walked into the front office to sign in and yet ... it was empty. *'Forget it, if the teacher asks, it's because no one was here'*.

And with that Jeremy left the office and strolled over to his first class. Science. *'Exams are over, so I probably didn't miss much'* Jeremy thought to himself. He opened the door to his class and found it empty.

The silence had gotten louder.

Jeremy investigated a different classes window. Empty.

He started to look through every window he could find but... they were all vacant.

Jeremy started getting scared. And lonely

He spent the next twenty minutes looking for any sign of life something to reassure him that he wasn't alone. He searched any classroom he could find. But he found nothing. The classes were all empty. And so was the car park. Devoid of anything. No cars no bikes and especially, no people.

Jeremy was really getting scared. He checked what day it was to make sure he didn't come in on a weekend.

Thursday.

*'Where ... are they?'* Jeremy thought.

Then it came to him. If people were to be anywhere, it would be the beach.

As Jeremy left the school on his bike and started going down the street, he was almost overwhelmed with loneliness as, for the entire trip, there was not a car in sight.

*'They couldn't have just vanished, could they?'*

His question was answered as soon as he saw the beach. But he didn't want to admit it. So, he parked his bike and slowly walked out over the sand.

And saw for himself

that he was truly alone.

Jeremy broke down.

The tears he wept were like lonesome dots compared the massive expanse of ocean that was beside him. And that's how he felt.

Alone.

Jeremy thought that all he wanted to do was sink into the ground and never resurface. He wanted to escape, to flee from anything and everything. He didn't want this.

Jeremy stayed lying on the ground, letting time tick away.

He considered not moving from the spot he was lying down in until he died, but something within him said *'no ... move!'*

At first it was quiet like a dying fire, but the more he fed it with his thoughts the louder it got.

Until ... Jeremy rose.

He was also hungry.

It was getting dark as he stopped his bike outside the supermarket before remembering that it was just him. So, he pedalled right through the doors. And sure enough... no one stopped him. Once inside he got off his bike and started patrolling the aisles. He had never

really noticed how *much* food there was. He went over to the frozen meat section, deciding on what he wanted for dinner.

The lights went out.

Jeremy stood in the dark, allowing his eyes to adjust. Thoughts were flying around his head questioning how and why he was where he was. But he managed to push all these thoughts aside and fumble his way down to the front entrance and went to leave but walked right into the front doors. He reached for the doorknob and was surprised when he didn't feel anything.

*'Automatic'* Jeremy realised. He stepped back and tried to wave to the doors. Nothing happened. Assuming it was a blackout, Jeremy pried the doors open and left on his bike returning to his house.

On his ride back Jeremy couldn't help but notice the streetlights weren't turning on. At first, he thought it was a blackout and was about to continue his ride assuming the power would come back on later but then realised that if it was a blackout, who would fix the power?

Jeremy sat for a couple of minutes shaken up and worried about his dilemma. *'Would the power come back on? 'If it didn't could he fix it'? 'Could he even survive without power?'*

These thoughts flew around Jeremy's head like a swarm of angry insects, constantly biting and stinging him with new worries and concerns.

Finally, Jeremy thought enough was enough and he would just head home and think about his power situation in the morning.

He reached his building went inside and went to use the elevator before remembering his issue.

*'I should have stayed with dad at his house'* Jeremy thought suddenly, surprising himself. He hadn't talked about his dad with anyone since the divorce. He started to feel down about his parents' situation. That then led to Jeremy feeling sorry for himself in his situation. Jeremy stood in front of the broken elevator for about ten minutes trying to regain his composure.

He suddenly noticed how dark it was around him. With no power to turn the lights on, Jeremy had to use his phones lights to direct him towards the stairs and up to his floor. As he walked up the stairs and onto his floor, he couldn't help but feel uneasy as he traversed the dark and empty corridors. He felt as though there was something around each corner about to jump out at him.

*'Don't be silly, I'm the only one there is. There is nothing else here'* Jeremy calmed himself at this thought and managed to find his way to his door. He opened the lock and entered his apartment. Once inside he felt a wave of tiredness hit him. He checked the time, 9:30pm his phone said.

*'Food can wait, I need sleep'* Jeremy said to himself making his way into his room where he threw himself onto the bed and went to sleep.

Something woke Jeremy.

He didn't know what it was, but he knew something had.

He checked his phone. 3:00am.

Jeremy put his phone down meaning to go back to sleep when he heard something. It was so quiet that Jeremy wasn't sure if it was real. He heard it again.

Jeremy grabbed his phone and got up. He left his room headed into the main area and listened.

He heard what sounded like a kind of shuffling from outside in the hallway. Jeremy felt fear that was almost immediately replaced with hope of someone else.

He tuned his phone light on, opened the door and left his apartment into the dark hallways. Something was off.

Everything around him seemed to have deteriorated. The walls, roof and ceiling all looked run down and old.

He thought it was just the darkness playing tricks with his eyes and continued onward. Then heard the shuffling again around a corner.

Jeremy's unease was back. And this time it stayed because Jeremy knew for certain.

He wasn't alone.

Jeremy continued onward searching for the source of the shuffling.

He turned a corner shining the light down the hallway.

Someone was at the end of the corridor.

Jeremy was filled with happiness and started running down to greet the person

Jeremy got closer.

And closer.

Before realising that the someone at the end wasn't someone, but something.

It turned.

Terror filled inside Jeremy as he turned around and ran.

He knew it was chasing him.

He could hear its heavy breathing.

Could feel its intense footsteps.

Jeremy pumped all his energy into his legs, willing them to go faster and to get away from that thing.

The hallways turned into a winding maze of corridors.

It was getting closer.

Jeremy could tell he wasn't fast enough.

It was almost upon him.

He cried out for help.

Jeremy woke in sweat, screaming.

Jeremy needed to keep himself occupied. *'Keep my mind from wandering'*. He would say these sorts of things and yet Jeremy had no clue what to do. He knew he couldn't stay in his apartment for much longer. This was obvious as the nightmares hadn't stopped after the first one. But where would he go?

It had a been a few weeks since *they* left, and Jeremy could feel his fear rising with each night he was in the apartment. For the most part Jeremy hadn't made any progress with anything he just spent his days wandering around and taking food from the supermarket. The power had never come back on and plenty of the meat had gone off. He managed to save some by salting and freezing it, but the ice has long since melted, and the salt can only do so much. But today was different. Jeremy had finally decided enough was enough and that he would find somewhere to set up his base of operations. In his wanderings he had made note of several places that may be a worthy contender for his new home. So, he set off on his bike to inspect each area.

*'The ideal area would be somewhere with easy access to a supermarket with enough protection that I won't get rained on and I can renovate it to suite my needs'*. Unfortunately,

and Jeremy knew this, he had no clue on how to build a suitable shelter to live in. *'I'll deal with that when I get there'*. After about ten minutes Jeremy finally reach spot number one. It was under a bridge near a supermarket. Despite the fact that it met two of the three requirements Jeremy didn't really like the idea of living under a bridge, so he rode on to spot two. This was a large shopping centre. At first Jeremy thought it would work fine and went to explore the massive complex a little. He soon realised that a massive *empty* shopping centre would be a little too much for him. He rode on.

Spot three was perfect. It was in between two rows of shops and stores, there was a grassy area in the middle with a nice canopy above covering most of the grass. There was room for Jeremy to build and make this area his own. It was a ten-minute trip from the mall so he could travers to and from with relative ease. One of the shops that was next to him was a local grocery store so that would keep him going for a while. There was also a bookstore to keep him entertained and there may be manuals on how to build or renovate.

Jeremy new that selecting his new home would be the easy option. Now came the time to put himself to work. Turning his selected are into a cosey and liveable place would be no easy task. Jeremy decided to start with making a plan of his new home. What he wanted was it to be open planned with lots of different objects around making the space seem full. He also wanted to have fairy lights strewn up and hanging around on the canopy. *'That would require power though.'* Jeremy was starting to understand how futile his power scenario was. For now, Jeremy had to figure out to put in his base. He would obviously need to put a sleeping area somewhere, like a campsite. Jeremy then got his first two ideas. A sleeping bag and a fire pit.

Jeremy decided to take a trip to his mall to see if there was a camping store. After some wandering in the mall, he came across a place that sold camp gear. Heading in, Jeremy realised that there was a lot of choices to make. He thought a tent would be good but then realised how big they were and thought against. At first, he was worried about rain and how he would sleep with that, but he thought the canopy would protect him enough, so he went on. He arrived at the sleeping bags and just picked one at random, not knowing enough about them to make an educated decision. *'As long as they keep me warm, I don't care what kind they are'*. Jeremy told himself. Having selected his bag Jeremy kept on exploring the shop and soon stumbled upon what looked like *'GENERATORS!'* Jeremy was ecstatic. He would have power.

Back at his new home, Jeremy was trying to figure out how on earth he would use a generator. He knew that he couldn't just "plug it in" and hope for the best. But Jeremy didn't have a clue on how to use it. When Jeremy found these generators, he was so caught up in the moment that he didn't take his time choosing which generator looked easiest to use. Jeremy had just grabbed the first one he saw, which seemed to be the most complex one. He had managed to bring it back by attaching a little cart to his bike and putting the generator in it.

*'Well, we'll need an easier one'* Jeremy decided. So, he returned to the mall and went straight to the camping store. He started browsing their selection. He eventually came upon one that seemed pretty straight forward. It had a simple power outlet on the side and heaps of buttons and dials on the front.

*'This'll do'*

It worked beautifully. On his way out, Jeremy had grabbed a power board and a new phone charger. It took him a minute or two to figure out how to start up the generator but once the right button, the box light up. He plugged in the power board, his phone charger and with bated breath, he put his phone in. Over the two weeks, Jeremy's phone had died, but one he pulled it in it also light up. Jeremy didn't think he had been happier in his life. With his new discovery Jeremy had limitless potential. Over the course of the next couple of weeks, Jeremy made huge progressions with his home. He set up his sleeping bag and fire pit and had strung up fairy lights around the canopy and the poles connecting it to the ground and these lights were powered by his generator. And as he made the progressions, he felt happy that his new home was coming together but at the same time he couldn't help but feel all the more alone.

He finished his home project in just over 4 weeks. And when he finally took that step back to admire his work, he felt empty. It was a nice area, with little lights around the place to add a pleasant atmosphere. But what was the good if no one else was around to appreciate his work, congratulate him on a job well done. Jeremy thought he had accepted they're disappearing, but in that as he looked at what he had achieved, he realised he never got over it. The tears started to well up inside his eyes.

*'No, don't cry. You stronger than that. You can make it through this'* a voice inside him told him this quietly.

"Why would I want to?" he responded bleakly.

The days turned into weeks, the weeks turned into months and the months ... into years.

He started a farm.

He read almost every book in the nearby store.

He conversed with himself.

But nothing really let him escape his loneliness.

Thoughts crept into his head. And they grew louder with each passing day, until eventually they grew to be too much to bear.

It was 6:00pm when he walked to his old apartment building. He entered and climbed up the stairwell as it grew darker. The higher he went the darker it got. Until he reached the roof.

The darkness was blinding, impossible to ignore. *'Turn your head'* he thought.

He didn't move.

He stared out across his dark and empty kingdom. How he wished, just a single light would flicker on. Nothing happened. How he wished *they* would return and scare away the darkness forever. Nothing happened.

He stared out across his dark and empty kingdom.

Wishing to go back to when Jessica was complaining about her 90 out of a hundred.

He tossed and turned the gun in his hands. He had found it in one of his explorations.

He put the gun to his head.

Yet on the horizon, out in the far distance

A light flickered on.