

## London Calling

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The cold breeze blew through Myra's hair as she stood upon the rubble of the fallen buildings that were once London. She listened to the sounds around her, the rats scurrying amongst the ruins, the crunching of gravel under foot, the whirring of Four's mechanical brain. This devastated place was once a beautiful city, filled with towering buildings and streets bursting with life, calling for people to live in it. Now, all that was left was debris and wreckage. It had been three years since the outbreak; three years since all those innocent people had been killed; three years since she had lost everything.

Lifting her head, she peered into the distance. They were there, somewhere in the gloom of the shadows, watching her. They had been watching her for some time, studying her some would say, if that was even possible for their kind. Those vampire-like creatures that used to be human.

Three years ago, medicine and technology were at the peak of their advancement. Alzheimer's had just been cured, and intercontinental travel had been reduced to the click of a button. Heck, even cancer had been cured. But all that had come at a cost. The Earth began to change: rising sea levels, off-the-chart earthquakes, tsunamis that wiped out entire countries at a time. But it was more than that. Everyone knew it was more than that.

'Miss Lynch?' Myra was snapped from her brooding at the sound of Four's scratchy mechanical voice.

'Yes, Four?' she replied, wiping the sweat from her furrowed brow. It was only mid-Spring, but air around her was heated and muggy. Turning to face the Mark IV War Robot, she looked at him inquisitively. He towered over her: a full eight feet, his red armour glinting in the moonlight. 'What is it Four?' she asked.

'They approach,' replied Four, his voice echoing across the rubble strewn town square. For weeks these creatures had been pursuing them, watching them. Now, it was time they made their move. Myra drew her sword – a beautiful 16<sup>th</sup> Century Katana – and moonlight bouncing off the blade. This sword once belonged to a great warrior, a feared warrior, and now it belonged to her, Myra Lynch, the last survivor of Earth.

At first, she only saw their eyes, those big, glowing, red eyes. Then a head, the moonlight reflecting off its shiny scalp. At last, one emerged twenty feet in front of her. She clutched the hilt her sword, in fear it might disappear if she loosened her grip.

The thing in front of her was much taller than she expected, standing at a full height of about seven feet. Its body was bare, apart from the rags it wore as clothes, its arms and legs covered in bruises. Its skin, ghost white and riddled with black veins, and fingernails that could slice through flesh, and teeth that could shatter bones. This creature was the ultimate killing machine: the perfect soldier to win a never-ending war.

It inched closer.

‘What are you going to do, Miss Lynch?’ asked Four, turning his head to face her.

‘I’m going to kill it,’ replied Myra, her voice unwavering. Her hands steady, holding her sword in front of her, her breathing slow, and her eyes locked on her target.

Cautiously, it took another step, and another, and another, until it was standing six feet from Myra. *The creature is clearly the leader*, thought Myra. *Who else would they send to kill me?* By now all the other creatures were visible, some tall, some shorter, some only children. If she killed their leader, maybe she could finally live in peace, with Four to protect her.

It was so close to her now she could smell its foul odour: dead things and dried blood. She raised her sword level with the creature’s chest. The thing appeared intelligent, but it couldn’t outsmart her. She had spent her share of time out in the barren wasteland, surviving at all costs. She had learnt a lot of valuable lessons in the past three years. In this world, she couldn’t trust anybody; it was kill or be killed.

Myra leapt forward, her sword glistening in the moonlight as it came swooping down toward the creature’s head. In a swift sidestep, the creature dodged the fierce blow. *So, it is intelligent*, thought Myra.

The first encounter she had with these creatures had been two years ago, when she had started her journey across London. She remembered them as savage, unintelligent creatures that would kill their own children for fun. But this creature standing in front of her was different. This creature was evolved.

‘We want to help,’ it hissed. ‘We don’t want to live like this anymore.’

Myra was stunned. She didn’t even think they could form words, let alone speak sentences.

‘And why should I trust you?’ Her voice faltered. ‘You’ve been following me for weeks. Why not talk to me sooner?’

‘We feared you. We know who you are, Myra Lynch, the last survivor on this planet, or so you think.’ Its voice was shrill, like fingernails on a chalk board.

‘Do you have a name?’ she asked.

‘I do not remember my name before this time. To my colony, I am known on as Leader.’ It spoke in a hoarse whisper, low, so only Myra could hear.

‘Okay,’ Myra murmured, inching her way toward the Leader. ‘What if I call you Atlas? At for short.’

‘I would like that, Myra Lynch.’

‘What did you mean when you said, “Or so you think”?’ asked Myra as she sheathed her sword. ‘I have been alone on this planet for the last three years. There’s no one left.’

‘Oh, but there is Myra Lynch, a whole colony of people who survived.’ Atlas sat down on a nearby concrete slab.

‘Where are they? How did they survive?’ Myra couldn’t believe what she was hearing. *This must be a trick. There’s no one left, only me.*

‘My colony travelled to the settlement once, but we were savage then. We didn’t understand what we had become, what we were capable of.’

‘How do I know you’re not lying?’ Myra moved closer to Atlas. She could imagine other people milling around a small village. Maybe her family might be there. The thought of her dead parents and brother nearly overwhelmed Myra with grief.

Her and Cal were more than siblings; they were best friends. The last time she saw her brother, he had just turned fourteen. That was three years ago, on the night their house collapsed in the earthquake that destroyed London. There was no way they could be at the colony. There was no way anyone could be at the colony. They were dead.

‘Where is the colony, Atlas? Can you show me?’ Myra sat down next to Atlas but kept her distance.

‘The colony is across the Channel, along the waterfront.’ Atlas looked as his hands, his fingers grimy with dirt from the wreckage; his fingernails black with bruises.

‘Do you mean Cardiff?’ asked Myra.

‘I do not know its name, but I remember the houses, the streets, the rock-strewn beach.’ He looked up. His colony was coming out of the shadows, moving around him to listen.

*Maybe he is telling the truth,* thought Myra.

‘We can take you there. But we need something in return.’ Atlas stood, towering over the rest of his colony. ‘If we take you to this other colony, you have to help us.’

‘But I don’t know how to. I’m not some scientist, I didn’t even finish high school,’ said Myra, standing on the concrete-slab so her head was level with his.

‘There are people in the colony who can help us,’ said Atlas.

‘Okay, we’ll travel to Cardiff, to the colony, and get you help,’ said Myra, jumping down from the slab. ‘We’ll leave tonight, with the moon high above us.’ She walked over to Four and climbed upon his armoured back.

As they moved off into the night, Myra looked back at the decimated city and could not help but think of what the world would be like if the earthquakes never happened. London was no longer a city calling for people; it was a wasteland.

They travelled for days, following deserted roads and crossing crumbling bridges. Over the Bristol Channel and along the pebble strewn beaches. After days of walking, they reached the iron gates, ten feet high with multiple locks on each door. Walking up to the gates, Myra didn’t know what to feel. After three years of being alone, she was going to see other humans, have a normal life, if that was even possible now. She reached the gates with Four and Atlas at her side. Camera heads swivelled to meet them, their little red lights glowing like Atlas’ eyes.

The great gates squeaked and squealed as they opened on their rusting hinges. Of all the things Myra had imagined about this day, she could never have imagined the young man standing before her: his short auburn hair, his tall, lean body, and deep hazel eyes. It had been nearly four years since she had seen her brother Cal, but she would always remember his smile, which could infect even the saddest of people.

She was home.