

Chapter One

The Beginning

Patient zero was a twenty-five-old female from a small farming town in Southwestern Pennsylvania. She presented to the emergency department late on the evening of September 14, 2012 with basic flu-like symptoms. Concerned about her complaints of headache, altered mental status, and spiked temperature, the on-call doctor admitted her to the hospital. The story relayed to health care professionals was that the young woman is a scientist who ended up getting stuck by a needle used for one of the viruses that she had been researching. The event occurred approximately twenty-four hours before symptoms began. She followed proper protocol as far as reporting and cleaning the wound. The doctor who drew initial blood work after the incident told her the rash that was forming could be a reaction to the virus. Her family had no idea she was already dying. Nobody knew about the danger lurking in the petite young woman.

Her parents left for the night, leaving the woman's identical twin to stay. Patient zero remained in the fetal position hugging herself and crying. The infection spreads depending on the size of the bite. For the more gruesome of bites the turn is fast. Only a matter of minutes. Smaller bites can take up to forty-eight hours. Patient zero turned within a day. No one is entirely sure why.

The first symptoms are typically a scratchy, sore throat and a rash that resembles hives. Nothing major. They think it's nothing more than a cold or the flu, perhaps even an allergic reaction. It escalates from there. Soon, a fever sets in. Then the afflicted complain about being cold despite having a temp of one hundred or more and a headache starts. Their skin begins to get clammy, and small sweat breaks out on their forehead. A few hours later they have respiratory problems.

Their breathing becomes shallow and raspy. Right before death their eyes get a milky cloudiness to them, their pupils dilate so much it looks like they're black. Aggression is the final stage. At that point, they're contagious. Of course, this is when they're most likely to bite you, before dying.

Patient zero was taken to the hospital toward the end of everything. Her family didn't know she was so sick. They had no reason to believe their beloved child and sister was mere hours from death. She was put onto a neurological floor, even though the doctors weren't entirely sure what was wrong with her. They just knew the altered mental status was new. She wasn't an aggressive person by nature, but she was throwing swings at personnel and trying to bite them. As the family sat by her bedside they were distraught watching as she slipped further and further into delusion and the sickness that overtook her ravaged body. They were terrified she'd never be the same.

In the middle of the night, the aggression worsened. Most of the family had already gone home, her twin decided she'd be the one to stay. She ended up falling asleep in a recliner next to her sisters' bed but woke when she heard grunting and growling. She looked and saw her sister sitting up in bed. Her head lolled from side to side. It's too bad she didn't run. It's too bad the nurse didn't run.

"Becca?" she called softly.

Her sister's head turned wistfully toward her.

"It hurts so much," she said.

"What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," Becca replied.

"Do you want me to get your nurse?"

"Why? They don't know what's wrong with me. Nothing they've done is working." Tears streamed down the girl's face in silent agony. "It had to be that virus. They said it was fine. We were supposed to be creating a vaccine. Something to save people. Not...not do this."

"They're going to figure out what's wrong. Don't worry."

"No, they're not."

"You don't know that. I'm sure they're figuring it out right now."

"No, they're not. Listen to me. There is no cure. It's not a vaccine. It was a weapon. They *lied* to us!"

"Who? Who is they?"

"It's not important."

"Yes, it is!" her sister nearly screamed. "Who is they? What virus?"

"It's something new. They never told us the name. It was just referred to as E1."

"E1?"

"I'm tired. I need to sleep."

The twin sat and watched her sister. She didn't know what to tell her. She didn't know if the doctors would figure out what was wrong or not. Not long after, she watched the life fade from her sister's eyes. She had no idea what she'd seen. She didn't know the severity of the situation.

"Hey? Are you alright?"

Patient zero remained motionless. She said nothing. She didn't breathe. As her sister drew near patient zero's eyes flew open and an otherworldly scream erupted from the woman's mouth. The sister stumbled backward and fell to the floor staring on in horror.

"Becca!" the young woman wailed.

"Arrgah," patient zero replied.

"Are you alright? Becca, what's wrong?" she pleaded with her sister.

Patient zero said nothing. Her head lolled toward her sister and she bared her teeth like a wild animal.

"Come on, Becca. I know you're in there somewhere," the sister said through tears, "I love you. I need you. Please be okay!"

Patient zero yanked on the wires attached to her chest and ripped the IV in her arm out. The sister jumped up and pressed her back against the wall, shocked and terrified by patient zero's action. That was not how her sister acted. The person in the bed was not her sister.

"Um, somebody! Hey, she's getting up and pulling off the wires!" the twin shouted.

The room was near the nurse's station, so she knew someone would hear. Somebody had to come and make sure her sister stayed in bed. When no one came running she went to the hallway.

"Hey! Get in here! She's ripping stuff off her body! There's blood everywhere!"

"What's wrong?" the tall, brunette nurse asked as she turned on the light. "Oh god."

She grimaced at the sight of the girl in the bed and the wall beside it. Everything looked like a bag of blood had been punctured and squeezed everywhere.

"Did any get on you?"

"No," the sister replied, wiping the tears from her cheeks.

"Okay, good. Tell me what happened."

"She just sat up and started growling. Is she alright? Why is she acting like that?"

"Hmm... well, let me check her out, and see what exactly is going on," the woman said smiling.

The girl watched as the nurse pulled out her stethoscope ready to listen to patient zero's heartbeat. Patient zero was still sitting up, the growling still going, and her head seemed like it belonged to a rag doll. It was like she had no control of it. The nurse placed the stethoscope on patient zero's back and listened. Patient zero continued getting more and more agitated. She snarled and snapped at the two who were trying to help. As the nurse maneuvered around the girl, the sister watched in horror as patient zero latched onto the nurse's arm. Blood spilled from her mouth and from the nurse's wound. It flowed onto the bed mixing with the patient's. The nurse screamed out in pain as patient zero held onto the woman's arm.

"What the shit!" the nurse screamed, pulling her arm from patient zero's mouth. A large chunk of skin and muscle was missing. White bone was visible.

"What happened?" the twin asked, jumping back quickly.

"She bit me!" she hollered, holding the injured arm. The nurse dropped to her knees screaming in pain.

"Oh my god! I'm going to find another nurse or someone to help!" the sister shouted, running out of the room trying to get away from the blood and her increasingly angry sister. "Can someone help? My sister, she bit the nurse, and there's blood everywhere. I don't know what's wrong with her."

The rest of the nurses and aides who were sitting at the nurse's station jumped up and rushed into the small room pushing the girl to the side. The twin stood outside the door, watching in horror as four nurses and two aides tied her sister to the bed with something they called a Posey. She cried as the green vest was slipped on her sister. She couldn't believe it when they put the white mitts on her hands. The sister watched as patient zero struggled and fought against the hospital staff. One of the nurses ran out and to the phone. She couldn't really hear the conversation, but there was something about a code; paging security; and finding someone on call. After slamming the phone down on the cradle, the nurse ran off to a supply room. The young girl had no idea what was going on. Was all that necessary? What happened to her sister? Was she in trouble?

Within seconds an overhead page could be heard, and people swarmed onto the floor from everywhere. Doctors, nurses, and security guards converged on the room.

"Excuse me?" she asked one guy who ran past her.

He kept going.

"Uh, sir?" she asked a guy in what appeared to be a security uniform.

He didn't say a word. He carried a large black case and squeezed into the room.

"What is going on?" she cried. "What's wrong with my sister? Please tell me!"

Nobody answered her. They murmured amongst each other. Some nurses she didn't recognize lingered in the hall. They looked as though they were relaxing. One even laughed. She was flabbergasted they could be so callous when an apparent emergency was happening.

"Alright, what happened!" a tall, Amazonian like brunette woman in blue scrubs and a white lab coat asked, rounding a corner.

The two nurses who were leaning against a wall chatting stood up straight and looked down.

"I said what happened!" she bellowed once again.

The girl said nothing. She hoped the terrifying woman would look past her as if she were furniture like everyone else did. The nurses didn't though. She stared right at the girl with piercing blue eyes. The young girl bit her lip and stared back unsure what to say. The bitten nurse finally emerged from the room. Blood covered the front of her uniform and more was pouring from the wound. A young doctor held onto the uninjured arm helping the nurse down the hallway.

"What the hell is going on?" the Amazonian nurse asked.

"My sister bit the nurse," the young girl whispered.

"What?" she snapped.

"My sister bit that nurse."

"How the hell did that happen?"

The young girl shrugged her shoulders.

The nurse rubbed her temples and took a few deep breaths. "This is unbelievable. Do either of you know what happened?"

"No sorry, Katie. We were in patient rooms when it happened."

"Alright. I'll be back as soon as I can." She stormed off in the direction of the bitten nurse.

Standing on tiptoe the young sister tried to peer over everyone's heads. She just wanted a glimpse of her sister to make sure she was okay. Just as quickly as everything started, it was done. People came out of the room murmuring amongst each other. Nobody paid the young girl much mind. She could have been invisible. Once the last person cleared out she saw her once lovely, full of life sister lying unmoving on the hospital bed. The nylon vest had been replaced with leather restraints. Her ankles and wrists were bound and tethered down. She gasped back a sob as she saw the frail girl laying there.

"Becca?" she asked quietly as a tear slid down her cheek.

Patient zero didn't respond. No growls, no grunts, nothing. She never even moved.

"Hey, Becca, it's okay. I'm still here," she whispered, inching closer to the bed.

"I'm sorry, honey," an older voice said from behind her.

"What's wrong? Is she sleeping?" the sister pleaded.

The older nurse shook her head solemnly.

"She's not..." the girl's voice trailed off.

"I'm afraid so."

"No. You're lying! People don't die from insect bites!"

"I'm sorry, honey," the older woman said.

"How? She was perfectly healthy yesterday! I don't understand how she could have gotten this sick this quick." Tears streamed down the girl's cheeks. She didn't want to believe her sister could be dead just like that. They weren't supposed to die until they were crazy old ladies in a nursing home.

"Sometimes these things happen. Nobody knows what bit her or what disease invaded her body."

"How can nobody know? This is a hospital. You people figure this shit out! Why didn't anyone save her?" she wailed, staring at her sister's dead body.

"I'm sorry," was all the nurse could say.

"It's not fair. She was so young, so full of life." The girl continued to cry as she stared at her dead sister's ashen face.

"No, it's not fair." The nurse put her hand on the girl's shoulder in a meager attempt to console her. "We really did try everything. It's just that whatever bit her...we didn't know what it was."

The girl stood near her sister's bedside staring at her. How were her parents going to handle this? How was she going to get through life without her best friend? How could life be so cruel?

A soft groaning started from the supposed dead girl. Her eyes shot open; they were bloodshot, cloudy, and just not normal. The younger sister looked up scared but hopeful. The doctors had all made a mistake! Her sister wasn't dead!

"She's not dead!" the girl squealed trying to run to her sister's side.

"Um, she was." The older nurse held tightly to the young girl's shoulder, not letting her get close.

"Let me go! She's okay! See?"

"I do see, but four doctors pronounced her dead. There is no way that four doctors could be wrong." The confused nurse pulled the girl out of the room.

"They were wrong!"

"I don't think so, sweetie. Come sit at the nurse's station, we'll get this all situated, and as soon as the doctor gives the okay, you can see her." The older nurse smiled at the young woman trying to reassure her.

The young woman wasn't a fool though. She couldn't help but feel like she was being lied to. The nurse was freaked out and if four doctors pronounced her sister dead, how was it possible she was still moving around and making noise?

Patient zero was the first undead.

I am patient zero's sister.

