they are not zombies

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Summary

Zombies happen, and no one is certain how or why; some blame the government, some blame mad scientists, some blame a curse. Leo is certain they aren't zombies, because zombies aren't possible. Hazel is left traveling from New Orleans to a cabin in Alaska, alone, because she is the only living person she's seen who has never been attacked. Frank is just having a bad day, between flesh eating monsters and extra long visiting time with his grandmother. Maybe they'll come together, and weather out this thing with one another.

Notes

So, apart from just not writing a ton recently, I purposely was waiting to read Trials of Apollo before updating some of my other stories, just in case I needed to adapt aspects of the story. (also I just needed leo okay i just i just needed my son)
(I have read ToA now, but I don't think i'll be doing anything spoilery here, so if you haven't don't worry.)

In the meantime I was watching other shows, reading other fics, and in that process I saw someone say 'everyone has written at least one zombie fic before' AND I realized I never have. So now I have. Or...am.

I also tend to have longer chapters, but this story, so I don't end up in another Caged situation (this is a one shot lol nevermind it is now a novel) I'll be keeping these chapters fairly short and sweet. Well, as sweet as you get with zombies.
“That isn’t possible,” Leo muttered while his eyes were fixed on the screen in his hand.

“The CDC is reporting 1,543 confirmed cases within the continental United States, and at least 10,000 more cases within the Americas. Tensions are currently high to find a cure, but so far all attempts are for not. Containment is the only option. If you or any loved one starts comes in contact with someone infected or showing signs of infection, please report yourself.”

Leo shifted in his car seat, crossing skinny legs over one another. Mass panic, that’s what they were facing. Everyone was screaming about zombies, infected, walkers—whatever names common culture had stuck in their brains. But, it wasn’t possible.

“It is,” Piper said, voice coming over a bit grainy through the phone speaker.

“No, it is scientifically not possible.” Leo huffed, glaring at his phone while thinking of the cars in gridlock around him. Everyone was trying to get the fuck out of Austin in a hurry. “Zombies literally can not exist. Even if they did, biting is such a horrible way of spreading disease— not to mention they would have all the weaknesses humans have! Reanimation of a corpse without working systems isn’t—"

“Leo, you’re right, zombie movie logic isn’t possible.” Piper cut in, this wasn't the first time this week she'd heard this rant. “But this isn’t a movie. These aren’t dead people coming back to life. It sounds more like—"

“Rabies!” Leo yelled, “which still has relatively low rates of spread!”

“Look, they aren’t talking about this much, but what I’ve heard is… it isn’t just through bites. The infected have… sores and wounds. Blisters. When they pop, burst, whatever— the infection spreads; it’s bad news.”

Someone near by began honking their horn repeatedly and yelling, which Leo instinctively flipped off without looking up. Austin drivers were somehow worse than Houston.

“It doesn’t matter, BQ, with relative successful containment, the bodies will fester and rot and be immovable within a super short amount of time. There’s literally no way a zombie outbreak can happen. It’s science fiction, it is complete bullshit. If you’re not an idiot, you’ll be fine. There’s no fucking reason for these goddamn mass exoduses—"

Someone smacked onto Leo’s window, causing him to curse and whip his head up and look at whatever moron thought Leo could do anything about the traffic.

“Pipes, one second I need to— to…..uh, call you back.”

“Leo? What’s wrong? Leo?” Pipers voice was coming through, but Leo wasn’t paying attention.

Slamming their fists into the side of Leo’s 1993 Ford Taurus was a middle aged man, but something was wrong. He looked like, well, a zombie.

“That… isn’t possible.” Leo mumbled, frozen. The things skin looked sickly, greying and rotten in
parts and pieces of flesh removed all together. In fact, on his left arm, it was more bone than tissue.

“No, that—...you can’t move without tendons or muscles you can’t,” it slammed down on the window once more and small crack in the glass appeared.

Leo decided maybe it was time to put the breaks on scientific reason, and act more in the now. Without taking his eyes away from the definitely not an actual zombie, Leo leaned down and grabbed something off the floor of the passenger seat. He had a blow torch, the benefit of being an engineer, if the thing broke the window Leo might be able to defend himself; but if Piper was right and the infection spread not purely through a bite (because it definitely wasn’t a zombie) then it getting cut or burnt might end up just spreading the infection more.

Leo glanced to the front and back of him, there were still cars stalled, but there didn’t seem to be many people still in them. They fled. In fact, it looked like there were other broken windows in cars near his. And, it looked like more shambling not-zombies between those cars.

I’m dead if I stay here, but I’m also probably dead if I leave. This is bad.’

The crack in the window grew larger with another slam of the fists, and it was attracting the others. As another two muddled up to the window, and raised their fists, Leo leapt into action. Or, well, he pushed back into the back seat, and threw himself out of the opposite side door and ran out and threw an alleyway. They noticed him, and while two remained relatively confused, one began to crouch before it took a jumping run over the hood of the Taurus. Leo was a fast runner, but it was faster- wilder. Leo turned on the blow torch and whipped around as the stomping got closer.

It froze, and cocked its head.

“You don’t like fire, huh?” Leo waved the flame at it. “That’s kind of cliché, but I appreciate it in this particular situation. You know, a lot of the best stories are really built upon clichés, but take a common theme and reexamine it or turn the genre up over on its head. I mean, Neon Genesis is a great example of—”

The not-zombie seemed to get over its trepidation of the flame, and jolted forwards, sinking it’s teeth into Leo’s forearm. At the same time, the torch burned a hole through the beast, for which it didn’t seem to notice. After the bite, it stopped. It simply let go, turned, and shambled out of the alley. Leo stood on shaking legs, before dropping to his knees and dropping the torch from his injured arm.

It broke the skin, and not just by a little. The wound was deep and dark and already bleeding profusely.

“Zombies aren’t possible,” Leo whispered, staring in horror at the bite mark. “I’ll be fine…I’ll…be fine.”

5 minutes later, Leo was still in the alley, with his head between his knees.

“As my body shuts down, my metabolic system will stop, the bacteria and viruses in my body will have no host defense to stop them and will begin to decompose me from the inside out.” Leo paused and looked up around him, frowning. “Humidity will also increase speed of decomposition. My eyes will be one of the first things to go, ear drums will collapse…”
A scuffle down the alleyway had Leo looking up, and looking at a haggard looking couple a few feet away. They were a bit older than Leo, a woman and a man. He guessed they had been on foot longer than he had been, probably a bit more observant than Leo was about the issue.

“You’re stuck here too?”

Leo nodded slowly, “one broke into my car. I just wanted to get out to my friends place in Cali, in case there was going to be riots.”

“We…we were going to drive to Alaska, you know…It’s safer there, or so we’ve heard. But now…” The woman trailed off, she looked about ready to cry. Leo wasn’t good with crying people.

“You- you’ve been bit?” The woman asked suddenly. She had an obvious chunk removed from her left leg.

Leo waved his injured arm, ignoring the flash of pain that ran through it. “Unfortunately, yeah. Twinsies, I guess.”

“I’m glad we don’t have to go through this al-“

And with a blast, part of her head was gone.

“What the fuck?!” Leo screamed and jumped to his feet as she fell forward, holding a shaking hand of his mouth and trying to bite back the urge wretch.

The man behind her had a gun out, his eyes wide and wild. “This is the end, the end of the world. I couldn’t let her suffer, I couldn’t. I did it because I love her. I love her. I can’t be without her- I, I can’t. I don’t want to become one of them.”

The gun moved, and Leo didn’t have to yell before it rang out and the man joined the woman on the cold cement. Leo was left, color draining from his face, looking down at the two lifeless bodies.

“Zombies…aren’t real,” Leo repeated, trying to tell himself. “You died for nothing.”

Sirens far off in the distance hadn’t stopped since the whole mess had begun being reported a few days ago, but screams were now accompanying them.
New Orleans had faced a million and one problems since before its creation up until now; from indigenous peoples driven from their homes, to slavery, to poverty and natural catastrophe. But, in the wake of such things, there was always noise, there was always music. They always had hope.

Hazel stood in the middle of a quiet parish, no music to be heard.

Everyone was gone, hiding, or otherwise dead. It hit here faster and harder than some places. Some people blamed the climate, some people still blamed Katrina, and some blamed a curse.

They might be right, Hazel had thought.

The voodoo communities of New Orleans, and the rest of the southern voodoo communities believed this to be the work of a bokor, a sorcerer for hire. Hazel’s own mother, a priestess in her own right, had made desperate attempts to secure her and Hazel’s safety. It didn’t work. One night, her mother simply never came home. Hazel stayed hidden in their basement, it was mostly watertight, for now; but a week later one of her uncles showed up.

It was time to go, he had said, you can’t stay underground forever. Hazel didn’t want to leave, she didn’t want to see what was happening. She had already seen death.

But, Hazel went with him. That was a few minutes before they were ambushed, and at least three of the monsters began to rip and bite and pull and tear and rend flesh from bone.

But, they didn’t look at Hazel. They didn’t go near Hazel. She watched, from the sidelines, with no weapons to speak of as a larger and larger group of monsters made up of her former neighbors and friends appeared.

Hazel stood between them, she walked between them, until she reached the machete her uncle had been carrying. None of them touched her.

She didn’t know if she was immune, or something else entirely, but she didn’t want to be here anymore. She couldn’t look at them anymore.

They had another property, a cabin in Alaska- Hazel never knew how her mother afforded it, but she had been a few times in the past. All Hazel knew is that she didn’t want to be here anymore, she
d)idn’t want to be around anyone anymore.

There was an abandoned motorcycle in the street, with a full tank of gas. Hazel didn’t know much about cars, or bikes, but she knew the boy this bike had belonged to. It was a Honda Rebel, and with it, she could at least get out of Louisiana. She didn’t know where along the road she’d be able to get a fill up, but Hazel would face that problem when she got there.

It had taken a month or better to reach only Kansas, and not because of the Zombies, but because of other humans. Abandoned roadblocks, and cars that filled up the streets made it nearly impossible to get through some areas; while in other towns the places were so ransacked and emptied out, that it took Hazel pushing her motorcycle for miles and miles before she reached the next town.

There were zombies around, there were always zombies. In towns there were more, on the roads there were less, but a day didn’t go by that Hazel didn’t see at least one. She saw them more than she saw other people. Hazel was kind of glad for that, really. She didn’t have the equipment or ability to help anyone else. She couldn’t offer rides, and she couldn’t offer protection beyond her blade. There was also an unfortunate tendency for desperate humans to revert to their lowest impulses; a few men had already attempted to steal her motorcycle. Hazel learned safety was in fact in numbers, but for her it meant sticking around the zombies whenever she made her way through a larger city. No one would touch her if it meant going anywhere near a horde. Some stayed away just because they were afraid of her.

She stopped in Wichita, Hazel normally spent her time in towns digging up any supplies she could, and visiting any super markets available that might still have food. There wasn’t really anyone alive around any more, most survivors had been taken to the military base near by. It was the procedure around the country, probably around the world. People were inspected, inspected again, and rechecked all over before being admitted in. From there they could stay, or they could be flown to another location if need be. Few stayed behind in their own homes, not in the face of actual horror.

Rounding a corner of the Snyder’s, Hazel stopped in her place; there was a person, an actually living breathing human eating what appeared to be a now less than frozen Popsicle in the frozen foods isle. He looked not well, skinny, very skinny, and his clothes were tattered and dirty. There was a zombie in the isle as well, broken in half on the ground and squirming around. It didn’t seem to notice the guy, or Hazel. “Uh,” Hazel coughed softly, and the man looked up quickly. He yanked earbuds out of his head, and gave an awkward wave. “Hey, I’m uh, Leo. This guy is still probably dangerous, so you might not want to be in here.” Leo gestured at the zombie on the ground. “He’s a nibbler.”

“…Right,” Hazel frowned. “Why are you here?”

“Oh, they don’t care about me.” Leo shrugged. “Been there, done that kind of thing. You look like you’ve been going all Rambo though, pretty cool machete.”

“I…don’t usually use it on them,” Hazel admitted. It was still kind of hard for her to kill something with a human face. Not that she hadn’t, it just wasn’t ever easy. “I think I might be like you.”

“You like me? I’m flattered, but-“
“No, I’m like you.” Hazel cut him off with a pointed look. He had a cheeky expression, like he was the kid who his teachers hated. “Zombies don’t notice me. They don’t care about me.”

“They’re not zombies,” Leo said immediately, like it was a knee jerk reaction. “They’re biological anomalies I’ve yet to pin down the exact nature of. But, zombies are science fiction.”

“No, they’re mindless slaves, brought back by the bokor. Necromancers, who oppose the priests and priestesses and our Ancestors. They work with dark magic.”

Leo’s expression was blank. “I’m from New Orleans. They’re a part of voodoo.”

“Oh,” Leo frowned. “I’m sort of an atheist...so...”

It was Hazel’s turn to shrug. “Do you know why they aren’t attracted to us?”

“Ain’t nobody not attracted to me, man.” Leo said confidently, while looking like a dirty noodle. “Okay, sorry, reflex. Well, I have my theories but- well, have you been bitten or otherwise exposed?”

“No,” Hazel shook her head. “Well, I’ve been exposed now, but they’ve never come after me.”

“There goes my theory,” Leo sighed heavily, before pulling back a shirt sleeve and revealing a nasty wound.

“How long?” Hazel asked, taking a step forward, rather than away.

“Not sure, two months I think. I started off in Houston, got bit in Austin in a traffic jam.”

Hazel grabbed his arm to look at the wound, “you’re immune?”

“I guess so, but clichès haven’t historically worked in my favor. Who knows what you are though. Besides hot as hell. Sorry, again, reflex. I have a very small brain to mouth filter.”

Hazel found herself laughing for the first time in a very long time.

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