Story Four

SHADOWMAN

VS

THE UNDEAD

By William Pattison

Dedicated to George Romero

and to my dear friend Felicia Day.

As well as the brave men and women of

 the RLSH, who patrol our streets and

serve our communities selflessly.

 Hi all. It’s me, your friendly neighborhood, red-haired, geek girl, Felicia Donavan…or at least that’s who I used to be. You probably remember me as the potential werewolf slayer in the final season of *Muffin the Werewolf Basher*, or the computer genius Robby Roddenberry on *Paranormal*. I was on that show for four years before they had me killed off in a very bloody way. Oh well, that’s TV for you.

 Okay, you might not have watched those shows. But more than likely, you read about the insanity I went through with *Game Gate*, or my rise from being the daughter of really intelligent hippy-type parents and scientist grandparents to become the head of an internet entertainment company. It was all in my New York Times best-selling memoir, *Geek Girl in the Big World*. But that is all in the past.

 To semi-quote Stephen King’s *Dark Tower*, the world moved on, or to be more precise, it fell apart.

 It is most likely that those who were responsible for the fall of civilization are all dead by now. I hope so, because they so deserve it.

It all started with a plague that got loose and quickly overwhelmed the emergency services, scientific establishment, and even the military. The plague traveled around the world within a few months, and most of the population of the world died.

Unfortunately, they didn’t stay dead. You see, to the surprise of everyone, we found out that a zombie plague was more than the thing of scary movies, books, comics, and video games. The zombie apocalypse became a reality, and those of us who survived the initial nightmare were stuck trying to survive in this twisted new reality.

 This is where my story begins, though at the time I didn’t realize it, because I was a little bit insane. You see, a little over a year after everything fell apart, I lost the last of the people I loved.

It happened fast. One minute my fiancé Wesley—you know him as the kid that played Will on the sci fi show *Galaxy Trek: The New Team*—and my older brother Ryan were with me, breaking into an abandoned mom-and-pop grocery. Then the next we were overwhelmed by a horde of zombies. Oh, god, all I could do was watch as these undead monsters literally ripped Wesley into pieces and started eating him. Ryan tried to save me, but the zombies started biting chunks out of him as well.

At the time I didn’t know how I got away. It was just that, somehow, I managed to run from there and get away from the zombies. After that, my mind simply closed itself up behind a fantasy. For years I functioned, but I saw myself and the world through a rosy false filter. That is, until The Shadowman entered my life and woke me up….

 Felicia opened her eyes and smiled at the world. It was yet another happy day on her reality show, *How to Survive the Zombie Apocalypse*. She sat up, turned over, and kissed her mannequin boyfriend Wesley.

 “*Morning sweetie,”* he said. She couldn’t get enough of that sexy voice of his.

 “Good morning to you, Tiger.” She gave him that seductive look she reserved only for him. Her leg rubbed up against his cold, hard, leg.

 *Cold? Hard?* her mind screamed at her.  *No!* she told herself. It was warm and soft and loving…He was warm and loving. Nothing was wrong. Everything was okay. She was okay. The world was okay.

 She pulled away from him, not because there was anything wrong, but because this was a family show and sex was out of the question. It had been for quite a while.

 *Breakfast time!* she told herself, hopping out of bed. As always, she was wearing her red sweater with the cute cartoon bunny on the front that had the matching red little pom-pom nose. Also, she was wearing her gray distressed jeans—ripped jeans were so in style—with her perfectly white socks and sneakers.

 She never worried about the fact that her clothes were always clean, because this was after all a TV show and that was the way things were. She smiled up at the hidden camera and flashed her perfectly white teeth, which she never had to worry about brushing.

 She walked over and pulled the gleaming can of food off the counter and looked at the label.

*What was it today?*

She smiled. As always, the label read fruit cocktail, her favorite treat. Those set people were fantastic. They always knew what she liked. She found her can opener and opened her breakfast.

 Then she picked up her shiny clean spoon—she only had one—and started munching down on her food straight out of the can. The mix of grapes, pieces of peach, chunks of pears, and half cherries were wonderful. She could never get enough of it.

 After eating her fill, she tossed the empty can on the floor for the clean-up crew to take care of, as they always did.

 She headed straight into the bathroom. For a split second, she thought it was a mess and ugly. The walls looked gray. The mirror over the sink was a mass of cracks and broken-out pieces. The sink was covered with dirty handprints, and the toilet was soiled and overflowing with brown icky poop and old ripped-up newspapers. But then she blinked, and all was as it should be. The walls were pretty pink, like all the others in her lovely little apartment. The sink and toilet were white, gleaming, and inviting. Most importantly, the mirror was pristine.

 Why, you ask, was the mirror in the bathroom so important? Well, that was where she would do her intro to the show and her final thoughts at the end of the day before going to bed and finishing the episode, silly.

 She looked into the mirror, and for a second another woman faced her. This woman was disgusting. Her hair was a chopped-up mop, nothing like her perfectly-trimmed ginger crown. That woman’s face was dirty, underfed, and just plain stinky. She, Felicia, was perfectly healthy, and her ivory skin was always clean and presentable. And then there was the ratty, dirty, hole-ridden sweater this person wore. She would never wear a rag like that. Bag ladies wore stuff like that, not Felicia Donavan, web superstar.

 But then, like the other times, this horrid image faded and Felicia saw her own smiling face. You had to smile when you hosted TV shows. It was mandatory.

 “Hello everybody!” she said in her quirky, happy way, waving at the mirror. *Everything is fine. Everything is happy…*her mind insisted. “Welcome to another exciting episode of *How to Survive the Zombie Apocalypse: The Reality Show*. I’m your host and star, Felicia Donavan, and today is scavenging day on the show. Once again, I’m going to go into our simulated zombie-infested town and show you how to find food and other useful items. Doesn’t that sound like fun, kiddies?”

 She knew the editors would add a clip of people clapping, so she pretended to hear it and made her smile grow bigger. “All rightie, then let’s go scavenging!”

 Felicia skipped happily down the street in the downtown area, looking for a perfect store to break into for her demonstration. It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining and the sky was blue, as always. Pretty yellow flowers grew out of cracks in the sidewalk. The air smelled wonderful. It smelled like spring and roses.

Amusingly, the set-decorating department had tossed a bunch of plastic skeleton parts around on the sidewalk to try and make it look more apocalypse-like. To her, it looked a bit tacky. Well, it was a web series, and didn’t have money for anything more, so she tolerated it.

Last week she’d broken into a deli a few doors back. She’d been happy to find that the crew had left her a bunch of cans of fruit cocktail. She even had enough so that she was able to give some of them to those extras as she headed back to her apartment—the ones posing as a mom and her kids.

 She loved when the crew threw in little surprises like that. The mom and kids played their parts really well, and she even gave the kids autographs, using her trusty pen and pieces of ripped-up paper bags she had in the flower-patterned pink backpack she carried with her on her scavenging trips. The kids had reluctantly taken the autographed papers. She knew they had been thrilled to meet her. It showed in how they hugged the cans of fruit cocktail she gave them.

 She looked around at the stores, and decided she’d hit the organic food store just ahead of her. She loved organic food. Maybe they had some organic fruit cocktail. She’d love that.

 “So, kiddies, today we are going to break into the Aladdin Organic Grocery. I know it’s not nice to break into other people’s property, but this is the zombie apocalypse, and more than likely the owners are dead, so it’s all right,” she told her invisible audience. After slipping off her backpack, she pulled out the pink spray-painted pry bar she had packed in there.

She held up the pry bar to where she thought the hidden camera was. “Always remember, kids, be prepared. The right tool for the right job can make the difference between life and death here in the zombie apocalypse…”

 The Shadowman watched the girl from the roof of the store across the street as she shattered the glass door of the Aladdin Grocery and went in. In the old days, before the world fell apart, he would have swooped down on her like the wrath of God himself and stopped her, but now breaking into shops was not a crime—it was a necessity. The Shadowman had had to adapt to the change of circumstance. He was no longer the unyielding fist of justice. Now he was the guardian and protector of the city of San Mareno, and of all the souls who managed to survive there.

 He’d been keeping an eye on this particular girl for a while now. She was a special case. If things worked out right, she would have a special destiny ahead of her. The thing was that he had to treat this situation with kid gloves. He had to wait for the right time to make her aware of him.

 The Shadowman was distracted from his thoughts of the girl by a very familiar sound that chilled his blood. He looked down the road that had once been known as D Street, and confirmed his worst fear. At that moment, The Shadowman uttered something he would never usually say.

“Oh, fuck!”

 Felicia looked up to where she thought the hidden camera was and smiled broadly.

“So you see, kids, to the victor goes the spoils,” she said, enthusiastically holding up a can she had just picked up from the stack on the endcap in front of her. On the can was written ‘Organic Fruit Cocktail.’

 At that moment, she heard a loud crash come from the front of the store. Startled, Felicia dropped the can into her bag and pulled her pink crowbar out of it.

*What the hell is going on?* she asked herself. This wasn’t part of the script. Or had the crew planned this as a trick on her?

 Then a large, shadowy figure of a man came into view. The figure held out his hand to her and said in a deep, gravelly voice, “Come with me if you want to live.”

 Felicia looked at him quizzically. “Is this some kind of a joke?”

 “No,” the figure said, stepping into the light. “This is very real.”

 The man in front of her was nearly a towering seven feet tall. He was cloaked in a long, weathered-looking black trench coat. Underneath that he wore a black plastic chest plate with what looked like chainmail underneath. Around his waist was a leather utility belt with various items attached to it. The chainmail went down his legs and ended at weathered steel-toed boots. On his chainmail-covered head was a wide-brimmed, dark brown worn-looking hat. He had a pair of dark-lensed goggles across his eyes, and the lower part of his face was covered with a black bandana.

 “Did the crew put you up to this?” Felicia shook her head. This had to be a joke. This wasn’t supposed to happen.

*This isn’t part of the show!* her mind screamed.

 “There’s no time for your fantasies!” the man retorted. He rushed Felicia and grabbed her arm with his heavy leather-gloved hand and dragged her toward the front door of the grocery. Felicia was too confused and shocked to try to pull away.