

“Changes”
“The Run” Vol 6



Dennis and Jeremiah stared in horror from the truck. Anna had a hand firmly around Mac’s throat.

“What is she *doing*?” Jeremiah squeaked in fearful confusion.

“Her wound,” Dennis gasped, “she must be **infected**.” But as he spoke, something strange happened. Anna’s left hand reached up and gripped her right arm by the wrist, wrenching it away from Mac’s neck. Mac retreated hastily, maneuvering so that a boulder stood between himself and Anna, but he seemed unhurt. What in the world was going on?

Dennis stomped on the gas, launching the truck forward. Hearing the noise, Mac and Anna looked up. Relief flooded Mac’s face, but Anna just seemed scared. Dennis pulled up a short distance away and hopped out, strains of bluegrass still trickling from the now-functioning radio.

“Unbuckle yourself,” Dennis told Jeremiah. He was reluctant to put the boy in harm’s way, but they’d be safer together if they needed to fight — or flee — Anna. “Stay near the truck, but be ready for anything.”

Jeremiah nodded bravely, making Dennis proud and a little sad — they’d all had to grow up quickly to survive this zombie plague. Only a few weeks ago, he, Mac, and the other workers had been sitting happily around the

table in the Greersons' kitchen, listening to Petey Coltrain and playing poker with hardly a care in the world. And now — now one of his friends was trying to strangle another.

“Mac!” Dennis yelled, sprinting toward them. “Are you okay?” Maybe it was his imagination or the rising sun’s reflection, but he thought Anna’s eyes held a glint of red. She didn’t look hostile, though, just shaken and confused.

“Great timing, Dennis,” Mac said, keeping a wary eye on Anna. “We may have a slight problem.” He gestured toward Anna, whose frightened gaze was back on her hand.

“Anna, are you okay?” Dennis asked her. “What happened?”

“I think ... ” Anna’s voice trembled. “I think I’m turning into one of *them*.”

Dennis and Mac exchanged a glance. Neither needed to ask who “them” meant. They looked at her bandaged right shin and noticed angry purple streaks creeping upward from it.

“It started with my leg,” she continued. “It was tingling all night, and then it began pulling me.”

“Your leg pulled you?” Dennis asked, his stomach tight with fear.

Anna nodded. “My arm started feeling funny, too. Almost like it was asleep, but also like something else was controlling it.” Her right arm twitched violently when she spoke, as if to prove her point.

Mac felt desperate. It seemed evident that Anna was **infected** and slowly turning into a zombie — one who wished them harm. But she was also still *Anna*, and Anna was their friend. How could they help her? How much time did they have? Dennis’s troubled face suggested that he shared these **conflicted** thoughts.

“Don’t worry,” Jeremiah piped up suddenly. “We’ll find a way to help you.” The others looked surprised but appreciative of his clear determination.

“Thank you,” she replied, her eyes now clear. “I promise I’ll try not to ... you know.” She regarded her rogue arm fearfully.

"Let's start driving," Dennis said. "If we can find more survivors, they might know what to do. We've made a lot of noise — it's probably not safe to stay here any longer."

They started toward the truck. As Mac passed Anna, her right hand leapt out and grabbed his shirt. He yelped, yanking himself free. "I'm sorry!" Anna said, horrified. She grasped her right wrist with her left arm and stared down at her right leg, which was kicking out toward Mac.

Dennis gripped her gently by the shoulders. "Um, not to be rude," he said, "but maybe you should ride in back, Anna."

She nodded mutely and climbed into the truck bed. Jeremiah arranged the tarps into a makeshift seat. Mac hated isolating her, but he worried about her rebellious limbs interfering with Dennis's driving. Jeremiah squeezed her hand before hopping into the truck.

"Everyone buckled?" Dennis asked after Mac hopped in. "This could get bumpy." He threw the truck into gear, and they rumbled back toward the highway. He fought the impulse to speed away, not wanting to jostle Anna.

Dennis suspected Mac was casting his brain around for solutions as wildly as Dennis was — and without success. Uncomfortable in the silence, Jeremiah turned the radio back up, and Petey Coltrain's lively bluegrass rushed in.

Mac's head snapped up. "Since when is the radio working?"

Dennis shrugged. He'd forgotten about it. "I'm not sure. I turned it on out of habit when we left this morning, and bluegrass was playing. Why—"

"We have to go there," Mac interrupted. "Don't you see?" When Dennis looked blankly, he continued excitedly. "If Coltrain's playing music, that means he's *survived*. And if he's taking the time to spin bluegrass, his life must not be in danger. Right? Maybe he can help!"

Dennis wasn't sure Petey Coltrain could help them — or Anna — but felt relieved to have a clear destination. Mac was already poring over the maps that had resided in the glove compartment. "Okay, co-pilot," Dennis said, "just tell me which way—" but his words were drowned out by a violent thump on the rear windshield.

The boys' heads whipped around, though Dennis quickly turned his eyes back to the road. "What was *that*?"

Mac looked sick. "It's Anna," he replied, "Well — Anna's leg."

Another thump shook the rear window, so forceful that Dennis felt the impact through his headrest.

Anna had twisted herself around in the truck bed and was pounding the thick heel of her right hiking boot into the glass. Or rather, Mac suspected, Anna had lost control, and the zombie was taking over.

"We're going the right way!" Mac jabbed triumphantly at the map. "I recognize this stretch of highway from when we left the Greersons' ranch. The radio station's only 30 miles ahead."

Thirty miles didn't sound like much, but Dennis felt as though he was barely inching along. He was tempted to slam the gas to dislodge zombie Anna, but he knew their friend was still inside. He couldn't do it. As Dennis drove, the heel kept coming down, its rhythm an **ominous** contrast to the bright bluegrass still playing. The glass was strong, but how long could it hold?

The answer came quickly. Dennis gritted his teeth at the unmistakable noise of shattering glass. Cold air whooshed against his neck as the rear windshield gave way. Anna's leg, now a hideous purple, kicked through the remaining glass, and her boot's motion continued directly into the back of Dennis's skull. Dennis felt his head zoom toward the steering wheel, and then everything went black.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Throughout the story, the author describes Anna's leg and arm as "rogue" or "rebellious". Why might the author have chosen these words to describe Anna's limbs?

At the end of the story, before Anna's leg breaks through the windshield, it thumps against the glass over and over. What effect does this have on the mood of the story? Support your answer with details from the text.