

On the Road [The Run Series, #4]

by Lynne Stahl



"That doesn't look good."

Dennis and Mac glanced at each other, then over their shoulders at the girl. She was huddled in the back of the truck. Her eyes were wide with horror as she stared down at the gash on her leg. Dennis forced his own gaze back to the road ahead of him. Sunnydale was shrinking quickly in the rearview mirror. For a second, the only noise was the truck's engine as the group sped across the abandoned countryside.

"Well, I guess we found Anna," said Mac, "Now what?"

"Let's find a safe spot, like we planned," replied Dennis, "Maybe we can set up camp in the woods around here." He gestured to the west, where a thick tree line rose up not far from the road. Whether the seclusion it offered was inviting or ominous, nobody could decide.

"Will Anna be okay?" Jeremiah piped up, looking worried. He turned and mouthed, "Are you all right?" through the rear windshield. She gave a weak nod.

"I'm sure she'll be okay," said Mac with confidence. He didn't want the boy, who was clearly scared, to panic. But Mac felt close to panic himself. Would Anna be okay? He looked at Dennis, whose furrowed brow suggested that he was having the same thoughts. Mac glanced back at Anna again. She was hugging legs to her chest, her forehead pressed against her knees. Mac saw that she was shaking. He couldn't tell if it was from the bumping of the truck on the uneven road or from crying. The wound on her leg stood out angrily against her pale skin.

"How do you think the plague spreads?" asked Mac carefully, "I mean, how does someone turn into a zombie?"

Dennis shuddered, then seemed to steel himself. "It doesn't matter," he said firmly, "We saved her, and we're going to help her. Her leg is a mess." He steered the truck gently off the road toward the tree line. He slowed down, not wanting to jostle Anna in the back of the truck.

Mac nodded, "So we're a party of four now. Well, if I learned anything from my time on the farm, it's how to clean up messes." He tried to force some cheer into his voice for his own sake as much as for his companions, "Jeremiah, you didn't happen to take anything from the First Aid aisle at the gas station, did you?"

Jeremiah rifled through the stash of items he had grabbed. The gas station now seemed ages ago. "Band-Aids!" the boy held up a box of brightly colored Spider-Man bandages triumphantly, "and hand sanitizer!" He looked so hopeful that Mac had to suppress a laugh.

"Perfect," Mac replied. "She'll feel better in no time."

"This seems like a good place to stop for now," said Dennis. Fortunately, the woods were sparse enough that he had managed to inch the truck through. They were stopped at a clearing. Dennis parked the truck and removed the keys from the ignition. He let out a breath that he didn't know he had been holding, "I think we're safe for now." He opened the door, hopped out, and turned toward the back of the truck. "You must be Anna. I'm Dennis, and they're Mac and Jeremiah," he indicated his companions. "We heard you on the radio. Are you okay?"

Anna stood up, still shaky, and clambered out from the back of the truck. "You saved me!" her voice was ragged and breathless. "I thought I was a goner. Thank you so much."

Mac came around to the side of the truck and put a steadying hand on her shoulder. "Don't mention it," he said, "but we'd better take care of that cut." He led her to a rock where she could sit while he attended to her leg. "This is going to sting," he told her apologetically, holding up the bottle of hand sanitizer, "but that means it's working."

Anna nodded bravely and bit her lip. She winced as the clear gel made contact with the wound, but she didn't complain. "Do you..." her voice trailed off into a whisper. "Do you think I'm going to become one of them?"

Mac didn't have to ask what she meant by "them." With more confidence than he felt, he replied, "No way! The worst you'll get is a cool scar and a heck of a story to go along with it. If anything, you'll end up with superpowers from these Spider-Man Band-Aids."

Anna managed a small smile as Mac finished dressing the wound. Despite his joke, he was worried. Maybe it was his imagination, but the gash seemed to be intensifying in color. It had deepened into an unnatural shade of purple that almost glowed in the fading daylight. Anxiety gnawed at his stomach. He hastily covered the cut with the friendlier hues of the bandages. "You're all set," he tried to grin. "Now let's see how Dennis and Jeremiah are doing."

Dennis and Jeremiah had set up camp as the sun set. They used old blankets and tarps from the truck to create improvised beds. The four companions looked at each other, unsure what to do next. If not for the frightening circumstances, it would have felt like a fun camping trip. Nobody had much of an appetite, and all were exhausted. "We can make plans in the morning," Dennis said, "Right now,

I'm too tired to think." The others agreed and tucked themselves in as well as they could.

Balling up his jacket to use as a pillow, Mac decided not to voice his fears about Anna's cut. He would wait until tomorrow, when he could get a moment alone with Dennis. He didn't want to scare Anna or Jeremiah further. He closed his eyes. Images from the day's events swirled in his head, but eventually sleep overtook him.

Hours later, Mac awoke to a strange rustling sound. It took him a moment to remember where he was, and why. Then, recalling his anxiety from the previous night, he rolled over and looked toward Anna's pile of blankets. He gasped.

Anna was gone.

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Ed. : *The tale continues in Part 5, "Missing."*

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What injury does Anna have?

- A. a sprained wrist
- B. a gash on her leg
- C. a cut on her forehead
- D. a broken ankle

2. The climax of a story is the most exciting or intense point in the story. What is the climax of this story?

- A. the boys' conversation about whether Anna will be okay
- B. Anna's disappearance from the camp
- C. Mac cleaning and dressing Anna's wound
- D. Mac deciding not to voice his fears about Anna's cut

3. Over the course of the story, Anna's wound is getting worse.

What evidence from the text supports this conclusion?

- A. "...the gash seemed to be intensifying in color. It had deepened into an unnatural shade of purple that almost glowed in the fading daylight."
- B. "[Anna] winced as the clear gel made contact with the wound, but she didn't complain."
- C. "[Mac] hastily covered the cut with the friendlier hues of the bandages. 'You're all set,' he tried to grin."
- D. "Her eyes were wide with horror as she stared down at the gash on her leg."

4. Anna asks Mac if he thinks she's going to become "one of them". Who might she mean by "them"?

- A. doctors and nurses
- B. Dennis and Jeremiah
- C. the three boys
- D. the zombies

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A. Four friends go on a camping trip in the woods, but one of them gets hurt.
- B. An injured girl asks for help from some boys she comes across in the woods.
- C. Three boys help an injured girl as they find a spot in the woods to stay safe from plague-ridden zombies.
- D. Three boys hide from an injured girl whom they fear will get a plague and become a zombie.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"Maybe it was his imagination, but the gash seemed to be intensifying in color. It had deepened into an unnatural shade of purple that almost glowed in the fading daylight."

Based on these sentences, what might the word "intensify" mean?

- A. to become stronger or deeper
- B. to become weaker or lighter
- C. to become more painful
- D. to become worried or anxious

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Mac didn't want to scare Anna or Jeremiah further, _____ he decided not to voice his fears about Anna's cut.

- A. although
- B. while
- C. but
- D. so

8. When Mac is taking care of Anna's wound, Anna asks if he thinks she is going to become "one of them." What does Mac reply?

9. Describe how Mac feels as he is dressing Anna's wound.

Support your answer with evidence from the text.

10. Read these sentences from the text.

"Mac decided not to voice his fears about Anna's cut. He would wait until tomorrow, when he could get a moment alone with Dennis. He didn't want to scare Anna or Jeremiah further."

What might Mac fear about Anna's cut?

Support your answer with evidence from the text.