

# Changes [The Run Series, #6]

by Lynne Stahl



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.

--

Ed. : *The tale ends with Part 7, "End of the Road."*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is Anna doing at the beginning of the text?

- A. trying to kick Mac with her leg
- B. quietly sitting in the back of the truck
- C. grabbing Mac's throat firmly with her hand
- D. listening to bluegrass music

2. What is causing Anna to behave strangely and violently?

- A. She secretly hates Mac, Dennis, and Jeremiah.
- B. Her wound has been infected and she is turning into a zombie.
- C. She is trying to escape from the three boys.
- D. Her wound has been healed and she is becoming a human again.

3. Please read these sentences from the text:

"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."

Based on this evidence, what can you conclude about Anna?

- A. Anna has very strong willpower, and can stop herself from getting worse.
- B. Anna is trying to keep control, but is having a lot of trouble.
- C. Anna doesn't want Mac to join the others as they continue driving.
- D. Mac is stronger than Anna, so he can handle it when Anna gets violent.

4. How can Mac's and Dennis's overall moods best be described in this text?

- A. hopeful, determined, and calm
- B. confused, unhappy, and angry
- C. annoyed, disappointed, and tired
- D. scared, worried, and desperate

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A. A group of friends tries to figure out what to do and where to go as one of them seems to be turning into a zombie.
- B. A group of friends gets attacked by a swarm of people who have been infected with a zombie-making plague.
- C. A group of friends sets out in search of a man who plays their favorite bluegrass music on the radio.
- D. A group of friends tries to find a way to stop a plague that seems to be taking them all over and turning them into zombies.

6. 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?

- A. to emphasize that Anna's zombie limbs were not actually being controlled by the real Anna
- B. to show that Anna was making the decision to strangle, kick at, and harm the boys
- C. to suggest that Anna was becoming more and more of a traitor in the eyes of her friends
- D. to prove that all it would take for Anna to regain control of her zombie limbs is strong willpower

7. Please choose the answer that best completes the sentence below. Dennis and Mac feel conflicted because \_\_\_\_ Anna is becoming a zombie, she is still their friend.

- A. however
- B. although
- C. because
- D. meanwhile

8. Why do the friends decide to drive to the radio station?

9. How does the decision to drive to the radio station affect Dennis and Mac's feelings? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

10. 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.