



February.

FEBRUARY

Normally, when Ted went to the grocery store, he shopped with a list typed up on Excel, organized according to aisles traveled, with an additional column for “wishlist” items in case of a sale. Chocolate truffles for his wife, Tini. Sugary cereal for his teenage daughter, Kristin. It’s not that they couldn’t afford these things, but he saw how wasteful his clients were—buying coffee at Starbucks everyday instead of brewing it themselves, renting movies on iTunes that were already available on the streamer services they belonged to—and insisted his family spend and invest their money wisely. It was so primitive to purchase anything out of impulse. People needed to fight their baser desires and practice restraint.

He had no list today—and no sense of restraint—when he drove to the Army Surplus outlet off a county highway. He was in survival mode.

There were shortages everywhere. He had tried Home Depot, Lowe’s, Menard’s. He had tried several different locations of Ace hardware in Faribault, Owatonna, and Lakeville. Anything near Minneapolis had been cleared out. And everything online was backordered with no promise of delivery for several months.

The full moon was a week away, and no one knew what that meant. No one knew how far the infection had spread. Or even how it spread. Some said

saliva and some said blood and some said bodily fluids. Some said it was airborne and some said you had to be bitten.

And others said the moon itself was to blame.

The building was a pole barn with a concrete floor cold enough to soak through his loafers. Tangles of extension cords wormed across the floor and every twenty feet or so the guts of a space heater glowed orange. The air inside smelled of musty canvas and gun oil. He rattled a cart slowly up and down the aisles. He grabbed a coil of rope. A roll of razor wire. A few boxes of nails and a stack of two-by-fours. A bear trap. A bottle of coyote urine. Pepper spray. Duct tape. Batteries. A gas tank. Flood lights.

He stood before a glass counter that displayed decorative knives. A thickly built man with bloodshot eyes and a mustache smearing his upper lip walked over and said, "Help you?"

"Yes," Ted said. "Do you sell silver bullets?"

"That's just a myth, you know."

"What's myth and what's truth are hardly clear anymore, I'd say."

The clerk made his hand into a gun and popped his thumb. "You get one in the head with a .357, they're toast."

"Nevertheless, if there are silver bullets to be had, I'll have some."

"These hollow points over here pack a real good punch."

"Do they come in silver?"

"Silver's gonna cost you extra."

"I understand that."

"Only got a few to spare. Lot of people calling. About the silvers."

Ted knocked his knuckles against the counter. "Just tell me how much. And throw in one of those knives as well."

"Which one you got your eye on?"

"The one with the wolf's head carved into the grip."