



Our Own Private Paradise

K. C. Sherwood

“Where are you going, Paisley? It’s ten o’clock at night.”

“To the store. It’s gonna get crazy.”

“*You’re* crazy. It’ll be fine. There’s nothing to worry about.”

“I don’t care. I’m going. I’m not taking any chances. Do you need anything?”

“Nope.”

“Okay then, don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

I left my fiancée sitting on the couch with a bag of chips in his lap, staring at the television. Wes proposed three months ago, and we moved in together only the week before last. We were still very much learning how to live together. Now, from what I’d just heard on the news, I thought this would be a good test. Some kind of new virus was beginning to spread across the world. People were starting to stock up on things and shut themselves up in their houses. I’m the type of person that likes to be prepared for anything. Wes is more of a fly by night kind of guy. So, we’ll see how he fares. I’ll get food and necessities, but as far as his specific needs, he’s on his own. Hey, I asked if he needed anything, didn’t I? He had his chance.

Two hours later, I returned home, feeling like I’d been through a war. Long strands of straggled hair fell from the neat bun I’d had it in and a thin layer of sweat covered my forehead.

Wes’ eyes bulged as he took in my ragged form. “What happened to you?”

“I had to fight for everything you see here, which isn’t much. It’s total chaos.” My voice was tight with anger.

Two weeks later, Wes ran out of his favorite body wash and shaving cream, and we were low on toilet paper. I flat out refused to go to the store.

“No way. I’m not going through that again,” I firmly declared.

“Come on, it couldn’t have been that bad.”

“If that’s what you think, then please, I invite you to go.”

“Okay, fine. Be back in twenty.”

An hour and a half later he returned with his shaving cream, a no name brand of body wash, and no toilet paper. He looked defeated.

I laughed. “Aww, what’s the matter, pumpkin?”

“Not funny. Look, maybe we should head up to Otter Hole Lake and stay in my cabin for a few weeks. This thing keeps getting worse, and I’ve got a month’s worth of supplies up there.”

“If I knew that’s what it was going to take to make you take this seriously, I would’ve sent you to the store a week ago.”

“Uh huh,” he grunted. “Let’s go.”

It was pure bliss at first. Rest, relaxation, and complete isolation. I enjoyed every minute of it. No television, no internet, and no signal on my phone at all. Wes had one tiny little bar. I hiked in the woods. Wes fished in the lake. It was our own private paradise. It almost made me forget what was happening in the rest of society, and I wondered why we didn’t live like this all the time. The bills. Oh yes, the bills. Need money to pay the bills. Well, it was certainly nice for the time being.

When our supplies began to run low, Wes drove down the mountain to the nearest town to stock up. It was a one-horse town with a general store, but surprisingly, he came back with what we needed.

“How did you manage to get toilet paper?” I asked.

“I don’t know. It was weird,” he said. “There was just one old man behind the counter at the store. The shelves were fully stocked and the town seemed to be deserted except for him. I asked him about it, and he just said that everyone must already have what they need and are holing up for a while.”

“Well, that’s good for us, I guess.”

“Yes, but, then I tried calling my parents, and my sister, and a few of my buddies, but no one answered. No one. It’s strange, and it’s freaking me out a little bit.”

“Okay, let’s both drive to town tomorrow and try again. I’ll try my parents too.”

The next day, I put my phone down as we pulled up in front of the general store.

“Nothing. I’ve tried everyone I know. What the heck is going on?”

“Same for me. Come on, let’s go talk to the guy inside.”

The old man stood with one arm leaning on the counter, his head hanging low. “Excuse me, sir? I was here yesterday and...”

The man jerked his head up. His mouth was hanging open at an odd angle and a line of drool was sliding off of his chin. His eyes were black. Pure black from end to end. He made an otherworldly groan and then snapped at us, reaching for us across the counter.

“Let’s go!”

I screamed and grabbed Wes’ arm. We ran for the car. My hands clutched my chest as Wes pushed the car to its limit. A few other people emerged as we passed through the town. They all had black eyes and slack mouths and they swiped at the car as we flew by.

“What was that?” I asked in complete panic.

“I don’t know. Let’s get back to the cabin and secure the windows and doors. I’ve got a hunting rifle in the closet.”

“Wes, was that...?”

“Don’t even say it, Paisley. Just don’t. It can’t be. It just can’t be real.”

But now the sun has gone down, and we’re here in the cabin. There’s rustling outside all around us and scratching at the windows. Wes is standing by the door aiming his rifle at it as something is thrusting its weight against it, trying to get through. I’m curled up in the corner, with my arms wrapped around my legs, rocking myself back and forth, watching in horror.

A loud crack of wood rang through my head.
“Paradise. Our own private paradise.”

