

Sinners & Saints

By: Kristina Garlick

Chapter 1

United we... united we... we were supposed to stand together as a society but it did not work out like that. The United States and much of the world, actually went to shit for a little bit when the zombies came. Perhaps the only saving grace was the fact that man learns to adapt. We always do. A prime example would be the invention of the wheel, the television or even a toaster pastry because why the fuck not eat something bad for you?

For you see, if man has a want or desire, it may take years, but he'll invent it. One thing I am still waiting on is that damn time machine. I am looking at you, Doc Brown. Ha! However, not all inventions should ever leave the paper. Sometimes an idea is just an idea as biological weapons rarely ever make anything better. Yeah, perhaps not every weapon should be tested or even used, as the results can't always be contained. United we... united we... *we were supposed to stand together.*

Present Day, June 30, 10:25 pm

Catey: "So is it cool that I sign you up for speed dating?"

Zoey: "What? No, fuck no."

Catey: "Why not?"

Zoey: "There should be no speed dating in the zombie apocalypse."

Catey: "It's post apocalypse so get it right."

Zoey: "For now."

Catey: "And this is why you are single. You are so damn negative."

Zoey: "Huh, I didn't know that was the reason. I just thought it was because every eligible bachelor who isn't a toad has been either taken or eaten but hey, maybe I am wrong."

Catey: "I think it's because you put up a wall."

Zoey: "Stop analyzing me, or at the very least give me a Rorschach test or at the very least a crossword puzzle to pass the time then."

Catey: "Funny."

Zoey: "Look, I always thought that if shit went down and zombie's started going nom, nom, nom on people's faces that relationship status would no longer be relevant."

Catey: "You were thinking about a zombie apocalypse before it happened?"

Zoey: "Um, how many zombie television shows and movies use to be available for me to watch? I used to watch zombie themed television for hours, which only made me imagine the worst-case scenario for almost everything. So yes, I thought about a zombie outbreak back in the day and what I would have done, if they were real. I probably devoted too much time to this notion. If I only knew that in a couple of years, a shady dictator with unlimited resources and a scientist would create such a virus, I wouldn't have spent so much time thinking about the undead. I probably would have been working on a way to put a bullet in the head of the scientist who crafted this deadly virus."

Catey: "This conversation when south so quickly and very much off topic."

Zoey: "I supposed it did."

Catey: "But it's not going to work. You will not distract me from my mission."

Zoey: "Damn it."

Catey: "I am signing you up because I don't want to see you end up alone."

Zoey: "Well I won't go. I have given up on men so too late to try and save me from myself."

Catey: "You have said that countless times but you never say why."

Zoey: "I lost someone."

Catey: "We all have."

Zoey: "Not everyone. You still have Sajeev and your son, Dylan."

Catey: "You may not know this but I wasn't with Sajeev when this all began. He was Dylan and my champion. Before Sajeev, I lost a lot of people I cared about so you see we all have fucked up stories and pain we are dealing with. Man, this is getting fucking depressing and too damn real. I need a drink. Bartender, two shots of whiskey."

Bartender: "Any preference?"

Catey: "Cheap and slutty."

Zoey: "Catey!"

Catey: "We are here to have fun. Now take the shot with me before my downstairs gets any sadder. Let's, at the very least, find you someone to fuck, so maybe you will get over your man-hating phase."

Zoey: "I don't hate -"

Catey: "Take the shot."

Zoey: "But -"

Catey: "I said take the damn shot."

Zoey: "Fine."

I quickly downed the shot, in hopes of appeasing Catey but it only encouraged her to order us both another. Rather than argue, I drank the second shot but then I walked away from the bar counter. I did not need a third shot. Sitting down at a nearby table, Catey soon joins me with now an entire bottle of whiskey and two glasses.

Zoey: "You could have at least brought over rum."

Catey: "Rum is for pirates."

Zoey: "Rum is for me, if you truly want me to drink."

Catey: "Duly noted."

Catey pours herself a glass.

Catey: "Are you sure you don't want any?"

Zoey: "Nah, I will pass."

Catey: "More for me."

I watch Catey swish her glass before she begins to sip from it.

Zoey: "So you know, there is a guy I am interested in sleeping with."

Catey: "Hallelujah! The girl is alive and has a pulse."

Zoey: "He is not here though."

Catey: "Then let mama have a look around and find you someone that's here right now. Ah, there we go, what about hot pants at six o'clock.

Zoey: "I think that's more like three o'clock."

Catey: "Fucking semantics. That man has a fine ass. Judging by the fact he's bent over and plugging in sound equipment, he knows how to use his hands."

Zoey: "True, but let's just take a moment and relish in the fact that this place is utterly sound proof. We are able to listen to music as loud as we want and have no worries of zombies approaching Fort Star. Sure, the zombies would be no match for our defenses but sound proofing is still wonderful technology."

Catey: "And... the moment... has come and passed. So let us get back to that hot piece of man meat and how I would love to remove his pants.

Why I tell you -"

Zoey: "Catey, you're married."

Catey: "And tomorrow Sajeev could be called up on the next mail run. He could end up zombie food. And a smart girl always has a sexy back up just in case."

I laugh but only because I knew she was kidding. Catey had a dark sense of humor as did I and that is why we got along. Never would Catey, trade Sajeev in for another man, that girl loves him more than she would ever admit. Catey would be devastated if Sajeev died. Catey wasn't kidding about one thing though, the stranger on the stage had a really great ass. I wonder if the front looked as good as the back. Man, those two shots must be affecting my sense of restraint.

Catey: "You going to talk to him?"

Zoey: "Maybe."

Almost as if Catey willed it, the man stood up and turned around. I couldn't help but frown as to who it was. This was not a man, whom would be sharing my bed tonight or any night for that matter; even if he was the one, I had been fantasizing about of late. Almost as if he sensed that I was looking at him, the man began to make his way towards me.

Zoey: "Saint."

Catey: "Honey, that man is anything but a saint."

Saint: "No, she was saying my name. Nevertheless, you are right. I am no saint. I actually prefer to go by Sinner as it's more mysterious and likely to get me laid."

Zoey: "I disagree. It sounds like you are a part of gang in a Broadway musical. We will call this musical Saints and Sinners or Sinners and Saints, whichever you prefer. Just let me know when the big show stopping number is so I don't get up for some popcorn and miss the big scene."

Catey: "Oh, I get it. You must be a part of the Patriot Sun's group."

Saint: "It's actually called the Patriot Sin Coalition."

Zoey: "Call yourself what you will cupcake, but it's still sacrilege against our once great nation."

Saint: "Not with this, again. Your sentiments for a deceased country while endearing is also somewhat sad. You have to realize societies rise, fall, change and evolve. The America you knew, is no more but you can find comfort in the fact that certain aspects still remain."

Zoey: "I can't accept that."

Saint: "That is why, my dear Zoey, you will fall behind."

Zoey: "I disagree. I will be here waiting for the rebirth. I use to know someone who was beyond great, who I know would have felt the same way I do."

Saint: "Who is this person? Actually a better question is where is this person today?"

Zoey: "Who or where he is does not matter but the fact he believes it does matter. America will rise again."

Saint: "How can you be so sure?"

Zoey: "Because the zombie's will eventually be wiped out of existence."

Saint: "Again, how do you know?"

How do I know? Well, because not so long ago there was someone who was close to the cure until the Patriot Sin Coalition fucked things up. Saint really ought to be careful who he aligns himself with, but without explaining everything I saw and did, my warning would fall on deaf ears. While I should open up about my past, it was not going to be with Saint. If anyone deserved my stories, it would be my friend Kyna, whom had been my friend and confident, longer than anyone else left alive.

Zoey: "Gut feeling."

Saint: "Gut feelings don't decapitate zombies."

No, but I do.

Zoey: "You have me there, but we will see who is right in time."

Saint: "I truly hope it is you."

Catey: "Since this conversation seems kind of played out, I have a question for either of you. How do you two know each other? I have not seen you before Saint and trust me, I would remember if I did. Zoey, you never once mentioned him."

Saint: "You never mentioned, your attractive male friend? Zoey, you wound me as always."

Zoey: "A friend does not rip a friend off nor does he price gouge people in need."

Saint: "That is just business."

Zoey: "Saint is one of the merchants who buys my product. He then resells my product with a much higher mark up to other walled towns,

forts and cities that he visits."

Saint: "What I do is risky and I need to make a higher profit for that reason. You do not have to accept my prices for your items. You are more than welcome to sell your products exclusively at Fort Star or to other merchants who happen to come through. I tell you though, there are less and less of us who are willing to travel and risk their life just to sell products."

Zoey: "True, but it's getting hard to get bath items because you have to venture further into zombie territory, to get the supplies you need. Last time I checked, buying from me was less dangerous than traveling to a highly populated zombie territory."

Saint: "I'm not sure if you are less dangerous... that has yet to be seen. Besides, you seem just fine getting the supplies you need to make your soap. If you can do it, I doubt I would have a hard time."

Zoey: "I wouldn't underestimate me. Maybe, I have a special trick."

Saint: "That I would believe as I still don't know how you do it."

Zoey: "Sadly, you will never know either. But my point is, if you run out of items what do you sell?"

Saint: "I always find a way to make a profit. If I'm not selling things, then I will play my music for the masses as I will be doing tonight."

Zoey: "Historically speaking, performers haven't been known to make much money except during times of prosperity."

Saint: "Yet, they always get laid."

Zoey: "That is what it is about for you. Sex and money... what a great thing to aim for and what a wonderful American Dream."

Saint: "Zoey, the United States is gone just accept it for everyone's sake. We are simply living on borrowed time so let us enjoy it. Drink, have fun and enjoy yourself like everyone else is trying to do here."

A roadie, or I guess that is what a person would call him, walked up to Saint and tapped him on the shoulder.

Roadie: "I finished setting up everything for you. The bartender told me to tell you, that you are on in five."

Saint: "You're awesome. Thanks."

The roadie walks off into the crowd.

Saint: "I hope you two lovely ladies will stay for my set."

Catey: "I am down."

Zoey: "Sure."

Saint: "By the way, Zoey, I thought you said you don't go to bars and that is why you never would come to any of my prior gigs. It is why I stopped asking."

Catey: "She usually doesn't. I had to drag her almost kicking and screaming. It would have been easier to just bring my husband, Sajeev."

Zoey: "What can I say? The Drought Bar is not my scene."

Catey: "True story."

Saint: "Well scene or not, I better get up there and play for my adoring fans."

I was going to comment to Saint that the only adoring fans he had were in his head but I didn't feel like being mean. Saint wasn't a bad guy. He was just a typical alpha male that was left standing after the outbreak. I have my reasons for keeping my distance. Not only did Saint, look like a heartbreak waiting to happen but I also couldn't let him find out my secret. If Saint knew what I hid, he might turn me over to that coalition of his. Then I would have to stab, stab, massacre the Patriot Sin Coalition and I gave up the way of the warrior over eighteen months ago. So I prefer to just blend in to the society and make my soap. Regardless of my skill set, it is best if I am left alone to my own devices.

Catey: "Smile. Don't look so sad."

Zoey: "I am just enjoying the music."

Catey: "Oh yeah? What it is he singing about?"

Zoey: "Love at first sight and the one who got away."

Catey: "Ha! Well I'll be... you have been listening."

Zoey: "Of course, I have. Saint has talent but never repeat that to him."

Catey: "I won't if given a chance but seriously why didn't you ever mention him before?"

Zoey: "I have. He is the one I call the ass, the pompous ass or occasionally the dill-hole."

Catey: "Oh, well, you couldn't throw out the fact that he was good looking."

Zoey: "Why does that matter?"

Catey: "You guys have chemistry."

Twice in one night, I found myself laughing. I hadn't laughed so

much in the last eighteen months since... no, I am not going to even think of his name. The man I love is gone and I need to continue in a forward direction. I need not think of the past and the person I use to be.

Catey: "I am being serious."

Zoey: "Maybe, you are right, Catey, but I am not going down that road."

Catey: "A girl can't live on soap and frustration. I think you would be happier if you give him a chance. I mean look at those tattoos on his arms and he is just plain old fucking sexy!"

Zoey: "I think you are getting worked up over nothing. For all we know, Saint might not even be interested."

Catey: "Girl, I saw the way he looked at you. I was basically ignored when the two of you were having a conversation."

Zoey: "It's complicated."

Catey: "Oh, shit. I think I figured it out. Saint is the guy."

Zoey: "What?"

Catey: "The guy you were talking about earlier. The one you wanted to hook up with but wasn't here."

Zoey: "Leave it alone."

Catey: "Yay! I am right. You don't know how badly I want to squeal with delight."

Zoey: "Please don't."

Catey: "Why not?"

Zoey: "If and when something happens, let me be the one who initiates it. This is not the time for me to make a move in regards to him."

Catey: "Why not? If you two are sleeping together, I think, he may buy your stuff at a much higher cost. You in turn make more money and in the process, you get your rocks off. So all around it is a win-win for you."

Zoey: "You may be... what the fudge is that man doing here?"

Catey: "Who are you talking about?"

Zoey: "Fucking Cortez is not at his post. We all take turns for a reason."

Catey: "Nothing has ever happened so -"

Zoey: "Thinking like that, is what gets people killed. So what if we have a wall and also a force field? I have seen a force field fail and walls can be knocked over. There should be multiple people guarding the fort, especially at night. Unfortunately, at the latest Town Hall Meeting it was voted for just one guard, who routinely inspects the power grid and then checks the perimeter. Now, we don't even have the one guard. This is unacceptable."

Catey: "Oh, shit. Don't do it."

Zoey: "Someone has to be the voice of reason."

I push my way through the crowd and over to the bar where Cortez sat. Cortez at first, was unaware of my presence and just obliviously, enjoying some dark ale on tap. The fact that Cortez didn't even see me standing next to him, only heightened my anger.

Zoey: "When the zombies get inside the fort, I hope you are the first to get eaten."

Cortez: "Excuse me?"

Zoey: "You heard me. You left the fort unprotected, asshole."

Cortez: "Ah, c'mon, Zoey. It's late and I did three sweeps already. Jack Mars will be there in a little over an hour to start the next shift."

Zoey: "Then you should have waited that little over an hour for him to relieve you of your post."

Cortez: "Woman, you seriously need to just get that bug out of your ass."

Zoey: "I have seen people die for less stupidity. You can never let your guard down. Never! It's when you relax that you become zombie food."

Cortez takes another sip of his ale before putting it on the counter. It seemed like Cortez was working out some kind of rebuttal to what I had just said. I knew whatever was going to come out of Cortez's mouth would be useless slop.

Cortez: "What is the point of life Zoey, if you spend it worrying all the time?"

Zoey: "To preserve life. So there are future generations. We can overcome this disease but we have to fight."

Cortez: "I don't have to do shit."

I am not proud of what I did next. With ninja-like reflexes, I snatched Cortez's ale and poured it over his head. In my defense, Cortez was lucky that was all I did. I was glad that I got the man to splutter as he rose to his feet in shock.

Zoey: "Don't worry. You don't have to do shit just as I don't have to be nice."

Without saying anything else, I turn on my heel and strolled off. I was half expecting Cortez to take a swing. In all honesty, I probably deserved to get hit but if he decides to swing at me, I would take him down. If I had to place money on it, Cortez wouldn't start a fight because he knows I am a better fighter than him. From what I know, Cortez had lived in the fort since the beginning of the zombie apocalypse, and in my opinion, he was too soft. He needed to leave the fort more.

No, I am not saying being protected makes a person soft, he just needed to be stronger. I didn't have any more time to waste on soft people who were underutilizing their abilities. I would go about doing the perimeter check until Jake comes to take shift. As for Cortez, I hope his boyfriend, Joe finds out about his carelessness and has it out with him. If Cortez was to listen to anyone, it would be Joe.

Anyway, as I exited the bar, it dawned on me, that I should say goodbye to my dear friend, Catey. However, I didn't go back inside, because I couldn't be in that place a moment longer. I would just apologize to her the next time I saw her. Without further delay I began checking the perimeter. Once I was satisfied that the fort was as safe as could be expected, I headed to the grid. I swear every day it still amazes me how the entire fort is protected by a single grid that is only a bit bigger than the backup generator at my childhood house.

When I finally look over the grid and deem that, this too is indeed safe, I sat down next to it. I was relieved that for another night Fort Star would survive. Yes, I might have overreacted with Cortez but it is better to be safe than to watch the ones you care about become zombie food.

Jack would be here in about thirty minutes and his post would begin. Perhaps I would just sit at the power grid and wait for him to show. Another perimeter check may take too long and I might miss him. I wanted to have words with Jack before took shift.

So the question was, what do I do for the next thirty minutes as I wait? Typically, I brought things to entertain myself when it was my turn for guard duty but tonight, I had naught for entertainment. Not one to sit still without something to do, I began to kick the dirt before jamming my hands into my pockets. I then begin to look around for anything to kill five or ten minutes. It does not take long before I fixate on Fort Star's flag, which waves high into the night sky. It is a courtesy that at every location that was left standing after the outbreak, to hoist a flag to say what faction that area was aligned with. If people dare venture to another territory, they know exactly what coalition or faction they were getting involved with.

Most territories are friendly and are just happy to see a new face. Some groups like the Patriot Sin Collation (PSC), well, they don't mesh with anyone who opposes them. Yes, for the most part, life goes uninterrupted by the PSC but I believe their goal is to have dominance from what was Maine to what used to be Florida. After that, I wouldn't be surprised if the PSC end game was to spread their influence from one coast to other coast. I am sure the zombies will have some objections to that.

The stupid fucks that the PSC are, they could have been rid of zombies but they blew that chance a while ago. So I sincerely hope that the undead destroy all their aspirations along with make their leaders food so their movement dies. Then again, another group will only rise if the PSC falls and the evil you know is sometimes better than what you don't. Personally, I prefer neutral areas like Fort Star. Call me old fashion, but I cling to the ways of old, which at this point, I am sure is quite evident. I still dream that one day my country will be restored and the good old fifty states could be sung about once more.

It was sad to think that in a couple years, the neutral flag that waves in the night sky of Fort Star, will probably be replaced by some cause or faction. Staying neutral for too long is rare feat. People will be forced to take sides. If you ask me though, the only flag that should be flown is the American Flag but that was unlikely to happen any time soon. Suddenly, I find myself wanting to pull down the neutral flag. I had more than enough American Flags in my home that I could easily afford to part with one so the fort could brandish one of its own. Yet I did not move to get one of these flags as I knew it was not the right time for Old Glory to return to its faithful post. If I was to hang the flag tonight, someone would just remove it in the morning. The flag could only be returned if and when there was a sign that America was on the road to recovery.

Present Day, June 30, 11:45 pm

Jack: "Hey, what are you doing here? I thought Cortez was on duty."

Zoey: "The only thing he wanted to watch was his beer."

Jack: "You are a good person, Zoey. A little rough around the edges but you always do the right thing by people."

Zoey: "Yet, I will be the one getting chewed out at the next meeting."

Jack: "What did you do?"

Zoey: "I may have said some words to Cortez."

Jack: "And?"

Zoey: "I may have also dumped ale over the dipshit's head."

Jack let out a hardly chuckle.

Zoey: "He had it coming."

Jack: "I am sure he did. May I never make you cross."

Zoey: "That you would never want."

Jack: "No, I don't. But I don't think there is a person at Fort Star who would openly challenge you... least not to your face."

Zoey: "No one would, because they might wake up tied to a tree outside the fort or -"

Jack: "You wouldn't do that."

Zoey: "You would be surprised what people are capable of doing."

Jack: "Surprised by others but you are a soldier of cause."

I didn't feel like answering Jack so I thought it best to change topic.

Zoey: "A nice night out."

Jack: "Yeah. Wish it would rain though. It's been so long since it's rained."

Zoey: "Ain't that the truth."

Jack: "So you doing anything for the Fourth of July?"

Zoey: "I thought that wasn't a thing anymore."

Jack: "It's a thing for you and Kyna."

Zoey: "In that case, we can do something if I am back from my run."

Jack: "They are going to catch you one of these times."

Zoey: "Oh, they have caught me many times outside the fort."

Jack: "Yeah, when you come back bringing the strays with you."

Zoey: "Your wife was one of them."

Jack: "She definitely was, but don't you worry, I tamed that hellcat."

Zoey: "I am telling her you not only agreed with me but called her a hellcat."

Jack: "Please don't. I will be sleeping in the dog house for a week."

Zoey: "What's in it for me?"

Jack: "I will make you the best barbeque chicken you've had post apocalypse."

Zoey: "You are a good man and we have ourselves a deal."

Jack: "Great! So if you are to make the barbeque, you best go to bed so you can sneak out to get your soap making supplies."

Zoey: "True. It just sucks that I have to venture further and further out every time to get anything of worth. My goal though is to make my business as self-sustaining as possible, so that I rarely have to leave my property to get what I need."

Jack: "You will still go out. These walls will bore you."

I grin at Jack as the man knew me well.

Zoey: "That is neither here nor there but I will try my best to be home before the fourth. Have a good night, Jack and stay safe."

As I walk home, I think about the last Fourth of July I celebrated pre-apocalypse. I was at my friend Clark's house and he was cooking on the grill while some crap music was playing on the radio. Several kids were running around the yard along with Clark's three dogs. There were sparklers and even a few illegal fireworks. Don't even get me started on the apple pie as it had smelled delicious but I ended up having none.

I was in a funk that holiday and had I known what was in store, I probably wouldn't have been moody. The reason I was feeling down was because I felt alone. Sure, I was in a crowd and surrounded by friends but I was missing that someone that all my friends seemed to have. My life revolved around my shitty office job, making soap and then also my other part time job at the shooting range. Perhaps in some ways, it is because of my work ethic that I am here today, but I am going off topic.

So anyway, there I was pouting and wishing I had someone. I was weak back then as I thought I needed someone to complete me. At the first hint of rain, everyone wanted to bring the party inside but I used it as an excuse to leave. I was feeling sorry for myself. I told them that not only did I desire to get home before the rain but I also wasn't feeling well.

I probably should have gone home but instead I went to the shooting range, which was closed. However, working at the range part time, allowed me a key and passcode access so I could come and go as I pleased. Little did I know, a late night shooting session would change my life forever. Of course, the zombies changed everything again for me, but that was months into the future. On this particular day, I became stronger. I became in some ways a better version of me and all it took was a little pain.