

# Rendezvous

This short story was written by Colin M. Drysdale, the author of [For Those In Peril On The Sea](#). Copyright: Colin M. Drysdale, 2013. While this story is free to download, it must not be stored or made available on any site other than <http://www.ForThoseInPeril.net>. The original can be found at [http://www.forthoseinperil.net/Free\\_Stories\\_From\\_Colin\\_M\\_Drysdale.htm](http://www.forthoseinperil.net/Free_Stories_From_Colin_M_Drysdale.htm).

This is the tenth time I've sat on this beach and waited for her. The first time was only a month after we got split up, the last was exactly three hundred and sixty five days ago. The small wooden boat I used to get here is pulled up onto the sand, its motor tilted up and sticking out behind. While I haven't seen any infected this time round, the boat's presence is the only thing that makes me feel safe on the mainland. The beach here is almost a mile long and its about seventy feet between the water line and the dunes at the back; and if any infected appear I know I can get the boat back into the water and away from the shore before even the fastest of them can reach me. The chances of any of them turning up somewhere quite so remote is small, but it's not zero, and I know from experience that I need to keep my wits about me whenever I'm here.

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We'd been on opposite sides of the city when the outbreak started, but somehow we'd still managed to find each other and get out before the military started dropping their bombs in a vain attempt to stop the infection spreading to the rest of the country. Needless to say, it didn't work; if anything it made things worse. We spent the first couple of weeks almost constantly running from one hiding place to another before we found ourselves at a remote farm house set into the hills above Loch Ness. We weren't the only ones to find our way there and gradually we grew into a loose community, each taking turns to do whatever needed to be done, including standing guard and taking out any infected which turned up.

At first they only did so in their ones and twos, and we could handle them, but gradually their numbers increased until one night we were over-run. Sam wasn't in the same room as me when it happened, and in the scramble to get out alive I couldn't find her before I finally had to flee into the night, hoping against hope that I didn't run into any of the infected. As the darkness enveloped me, I heard screams echoing through the building, knowing it meant not everyone had got as lucky as I had. By then, it was too late to do anything other than keep on running and I just had to hope she'd also gotten out alive.

In the first few days after I lost her, the only thing that kept me going was the fact we'd made plans in case just such a thing were ever to

happen. It was the first night after we'd reached the farm house, and we were discussing whether we would be safe there or not. I figured that while it would do for the time being, it was too near heavily populated areas, like Inverness, to be safe in the long term. That led us to start working out escape routes and plan what we'd do if it happened. This was when we realised we needed a rendezvous point in case we ever got split up.

Wracking my brains for somewhere suitable, I eventually settled on a beach on the west coast I'd known in my childhood. It could be reached by both land and sea, and was large enough and open enough that anyone waiting there couldn't get ambushed by the infected, or, indeed, other survivors. It was also remote enough that it was likely there'd be few infected there, making it relatively safe. I told her that if we ever got separated, I'd do my best to find her, but if I didn't, we'd meet on that beach. If she didn't make it there in the first few months, and I had to move on, I'd be there every year at sunset on the summer solstice, waiting for her and never giving up hope.

When the sun rose the morning after the farmhouse was over-run, I tried to circle back, but there were infected everywhere and there was no way I could get close enough to see if she might be trapped inside. For the next few days, I traipsed back and forth across the hills, trying to find anyone else who might have made it out, but I found no one. After a week, I figured that even if she had gotten out alive, she'd be long gone and would probably be heading for the rendezvous point so I headed that way myself. I finally arrived after a week of dodging groups of infected, half expecting her to be there waiting for me, but I was disappointed to find she wasn't. I set up a small camp nestled into the dunes, and waited, but she never came.

By autumn, I realised I couldn't remain there forever, fighting off the infected which turned up every now and then, and I'd have to move on. That's when I came up with my plan: out in the bay was an island which I knew was uninhabited and so would be free of infected. I also knew it could easily fulfil all the needs of one man as it had once been home to a small, but thriving community. The people had been cleared off during the Second World War so it could be used for testing biological weapons, giving it the local nickname of Anthrax Island, but now, some sixty years later, the island was almost completely uncontaminated and as long as I didn't stray into the wrong areas it would be much safer there than being on the mainland where the infected now roamed. Setting up a base there would also allow me to stay close to the rendezvous point in case she ever turned up.

I scavenged around and eventually found a small wooden boat with an outboard engine anchored off a cluster of low stone houses. The community seemed deserted, and there was no one to object when I swam out to it and started the motor. I brought it back to shore and rummaged through the houses, finding a pistol and some bullets, as well as food and various tools which might come in handy. I loaded

them into the boat and took off towards the island. I took a couple of days to carefully check it out, and once I'd decided it really was infected-free and would make a good home, I headed back to the beach. I set up a sign telling her where I'd gone and also telling her if she started a signal fire on the beach, I'd be able to see the smoke and would come and get her, but no matter how often I checked, I never saw anything to suggest she had arrived and was waiting for me.

The next year, on the longest day, I returned to the beach for the first time and waited, my heart filled with hope and trepidation. To keep myself occupied, I repainted the sign, but I should've known better. On hearing a noise, I looked up and saw an infected running towards me at full speed. I only just had enough time to pull out my pistol and shoot it before it reach me. Even then, it took three shots to bring it down and it was only a foot away from me when it finally stopped moving. Glancing round, I saw more infected off in the distance, racing towards me, and I figured they'd been attracted by the sound of the shots. I quickly scrambled into the boat and pushed it away from the shore before they got close enough to cause me problems. I waited until long after the sun went down before finally heading back to the safety of the island, weighed down by the sense of loneliness and loss – I felt as if I'd lost her all over again.

And so it was as each year passed. I'd return to the beach to wait for her on the longest day of the year, with hope in my heart that this would be the year she'd finally turn up, and each time I'd return alone, the scar left by her loss opened up once again and feeling as painful and raw as the night we'd first become separated.

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Off in the distance, a movement catches my eye. I can't work out what it is at first, even with the binoculars, but something's coming this way through the gathering darkness. After a few minutes, I work out it's definitely a figure, but I can't yet tell whether it's her or not. I can, however, tell by the way they're walking that they're not infected. The infected either race towards you or just shuffle around slowly. They certainly don't trudge, and this figure is definitely trudging. A sense of joy starts to grow in my heart, but I do my best not to let it get too out of hand in case it's not her. I think about running towards her, but I don't want to get too far from the boat, just in case we need to make a sharp exit. I catch myself, already thinking of us as we again when I didn't yet know if it was her or not. A minute after that and the figure's close enough for me to see that it's definitely a woman. She's the right height; a bit thinner than she was when I last saw her, but then again so am I. I wave and shout. She looks up, as if seeing me for the first time, and I recognise her face. It's aged a lifetime, but it's definitely her. I can see she recognises me too, and a smile spreads across her face. She tries to run towards me but she stumbles and falls onto the sand. I

go to her and help her up. We hug each other like we're never going to let each other go. Suddenly, I realise I'm crying as the waves of loneliness which I've kept bottled up for so long finally crash over me, but now I'll be alone no more.

We sit on the sand, holding each other, while she tells me what happened to her. She'd gotten out of the farm house, but the infected had forced her to keep on the move for the next few days. Eventually, she ended up at the northeast tip of Scotland where the last remnants of the troops which had tried to contain the outbreak had been making a final stand, but they were preparing to evacuate. She hadn't intended to go with them but the infected finally over-ran the compound and she'd been forced into the last of the helicopters. Before she knew it, she was in Norway, and, shortly after, Murmansk, Omsk and finally somewhere so deep into the Siberian wilderness she didn't even know its name. Even then there were infected there, and they'd had to be on the move almost constantly. All the time, the knowledge that I might be on a distant beach waiting for her had gnawed away at her, eating at her very soul, and finally she decided she needed to know one way or the other. Travelling through a land now ruled by infected was never quick, and without the help of modern transport options, it had taken her eight years just to get back to Britain, and a further two to travel north to the beach, driven on by the need to know whether I was somehow still alive.

I, in my turn, tell her about the island and how it's safe there. I tell her about the cottage I've built out of the ruins of old buildings, about how we'd never have to set foot on the mainland again. I tell her that I'd never lost hope that we'd find each other again, and that each year I'd been here, just in case that was the year she finally turned up. I know I'm babbling, but I can't help it; it's been so long since I had someone else to speak to. I look down at her and realise she's crying, but it's not tears of joy; instead, they're of pain and sadness.

She wipes her face, 'I can't go with you ...' Her voice fades out.

'Don't be stupid,' I stroke her hair like I always used to, 'Of course you can. You've made it all this way. Finally, we're back together again. It's completely safe, I promise you. I haven't seen an infected on the island in the whole time I've been there. It's got to be one of the safest places in the world ...' She caresses the side of my face and I notice her hand is shaking, and it stops me in my tracks.

'No. I can't.' There's a steely certainty in her voice and I pull away from her.

'Why?'

'Because of this.' She pulls back the sleeve of her jacket, revealing a ragged red wound. The teeth marks clearly visible against her pale skin. I recognise it immediately and it's as if my whole world has suddenly exploded. I hold her tight, 'When did that happen?'

'This morning. I was surprised by one of them. I got it, but not before it got me.'

I can't believe it: after all this time I'd finally found her, only to lose her once more. I'm crying again, but this time with sorrow and not joy.

She looks up at me. 'John, I want you to do something for me...'

I know what it is even before she asks. It was the only thing I could do for her now. I kiss her and whisper in her ear, 'Yes. When it's time, I'll do it. I promise. But it's not time yet, is it?'

'No, but it will be soon. I can feel the virus burning through my body. I've been fighting it all day just so I could get here. Just so I'd know for sure if you were still alive or not before I went.' She pauses for a moment, leaning her head on my shoulder and staring out to where the last of the sun is just dipping below the horizon. 'I'm glad I finally found you again, that I'll get to say goodbye to you this time, that I got to hold you one last time, that ...'

I feel her head slip off my shoulder and she slumps onto the sand. The time has come for me to do what I promised only seconds before. I pull out my pistol and check the bullets. There're two rounds left and I know what I need to do. She twitches as I put the pistol to her head and turn away, the tears streaming down my face; I realise that it's the hope of finding her again, of being reunited with her, of holding her once more that's been keeping me going all these years, but now it's been taken away from me in the cruellest possible way. I realise I have nothing left to live for and that I no longer want to be part of a world where such things can happen. She stirs again, this time more vigorously, and I know she's coming back as one of them. I pull the trigger, knowing once I've fulfilled my final promise to her, I'll only have one bullet left, but that's all I'll need.