

Ch. 12

How to Lose Friends and Alienate People

The more she thought about it, the weirder it got: she, a well known zombie fanatic was here during the apocalypse, drawing on what she'd seen in entirely fictional movies, trying to figure out the rules.

“Weren't there a lot of people calling in sick these past few days?” Raleigh said. As the company's social worker, it made sense that she would notice this.

Adrian remembered that before any of this nonsense had started, Hank mentioned that Lucy had been out for a few days. Could there be any connection between her absence and this apocalypse? Upon realizing this, Adrian figured that they should begin to look at the news that they had been reporting on in the past few days to see if there might be anything there.

It was getting later in the day at this point, around the time that they would normally start reporting on the major news stories. With everything

that had happened and with Nathan gone anyway, nobody had realized this. She hadn't been able to get around to the fact check, anyway. Nathan would have been pissed.

“Good thinking, Raleigh,” Adrian agreed. “I think you may be on to something.” She pulled out her phone and opened a note taking application she had.

“Nathan was late,” Adrian said, typing his name in. “I know that.”

“I've got the complete list right here,” Raleigh said, pulling out her PDA. She kept track of those who missed multiple days of work on the case that they were “calling in sick” with some mental baggage she needed to meet with them about.

“Let's see... it was Carrie first, then Dan, followed by Jared...” She scrolled for a moment before adding, “And then Lucy. She was the last to call in. Carrie, Dan, and Jared never came back. We assumed they were doing that whole 'ghosting your job' thing.”

Once they had the name of everybody who had been absent within the past two weeks, they got to work mapping out each of the employees' relation to one another, assuming there were any.

Somewhere in the midst of trying to figure this puzzle out, Adrian called Charlie again, this time because she realized her family may not know yet.

“I don't see how they couldn't,” came Charlie's answer. “I haven't been out all day and there is evidence of it. There's nothing running on television

right now besides reruns of bad TV shows, there have been multiple... *things*... scraping at our door, and something smells awful directly outside. I keep having to run upstairs to use the bathroom.” Ever since she'd known him, Charlie'd had a nervous bladder. Any time he was overly stressed or anxious about even the littlest thing, he would have to use the bathroom almost every five minutes.

“You realize you're alo... okay, never mind,” Adrian said, wondering why he'd bother going upstairs to pee, reasoning that in his mind, they'd be returning to their home once all of this was over. “But our parents. If they don't know, they'll know soon enough,” Adrian realized, defeated. “*At least* call them, okay?”

“Will do.” Adrian was getting ready to hang up until she heard him continue. “And Adrian? Adrian, don't worry, we are smart people, as are our families. We'll find a way out of this.” It meant a lot but it would have meant considerably more if she hadn't grown up with her parents saying similar things about figuring out why she couldn't get good enough rest at night.

“Thanks, Charlie,” she said. “Talk to you later.” She hung up the phone and they went back to charting out the relations between the employees they thought might be infected so far.

“Can I ask why we're bothering with this instead of figuring out how to stay alive?” interrupted one of the employees Adrian had seen at the picnic earlier and actively decided not to approach.

“Well sure,” Adrian replied, not showing that this sudden question had upset her. “I figured that if any of these people had worked in close quarters, we'd be able to tell how it got spread.”

“I'm not seeing you as a very good leader right now,” the employee (Karl, Adrian remembered) went on. “You're clearly just trying to look like you're doing something important when you really have no idea what's going on.”

It was well known around the office that Karl was a difficult person. As a head reporter, he had a fairly large ego, so the fact that Adrian was running everything right now did not sit well with him.

Resisting the intense urge to slam her hand on the table and completely go off on him, Adrian instead took a deep breath and said, “Okay, clearly being cramped up in here is starting to get to us. And last time we were out there, it was just to try and defeat some of them.” She herself wasn't doing too well and knew it was only a matter of time before someone had some sort of mental breakdown. “If anybody's siding with Karl, they can help lead the expedition to get us all some food.”

“And where will you be?” Denise inquired.

After some consideration, Adrian said, “I need out for a while too, and I think we tend to do better in large groups. So if you're feeling even a little restless, please join. I'm not feeling up to being in charge of this scouting party, is the thing.” Her sleep deprivation was really starting to rear its ugly head, given the fact that her brain had been running

nonstop since she'd seen Lucy eating a cheeseburger. She was beginning to feel foggy, and (even though she knew it wouldn't help) just wanted to curl up on the floor and go to sleep.

In the end, it ended up being a group with Adrian, Karl, Denise, and Nancy, again leaving four people in the office and Adrian once again forced to consider how quickly their numbers were diminishing. So few of the employees had believed her when she said what was going on and then they'd lost two.

“Get over it, Chase,” she whispered to herself, gripping the coins in her hands even tighter. It hardly took any time at all for a group of zombies to sniff them out, causing those still alive to start throwing coins before the undead could start attacking. They quickly discovered that the “shoot for the head” thing was legit but it really worked best if they were nailed directly in the forehead.

Within minutes, there was a stack of (hopefully) actual corpses in the middle of the hallway, which the team carefully stepped over, unsure of what to do next.