

MALADIE SANS NOM

A man stumbled into the Hôpital Bichat Claude-Bernard, in Paris, unaware of the chaos he was soon to cause. His heart was beating rapidly, and his body temperature was far below 35 degrees Celsius. His breathing was incredibly fast, and he was so incredibly nauseas that he was nearly green. He reached a bin and heaved the contents of his stomach into it. A doctor and two nurses rushed to help him. They were infected nearly instantly. Everyone that made physical contact with their skin would suffer the same fate. A quarantine would soon be placed over the hospital, but it would be too late. Within a month, the whole country will have gone into lockdown. They'd serve as a precautionary story, what happens when you don't act fast enough. Less than two weeks after the nationwide lockdown was instituted, communication cut off. There had been news that the hospitals were overwhelmed, the helpline received millions of calls, and suddenly, it all ended.

“Officials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have now confirmed that the highly infectious “maladie sans nom” has spread through mainland Denmark, and the 5.8 million occupants have been confirmed dead. The plague -like infection has now spread through over 180 countries. The first case was recorded only a year ago, in France. From there, it travelled through Andorra, Monaco, and Spain. Some countries have managed to slow the spread of the disease, but this pandemic is unstoppable. The disease causes rapid sepsis, and multi -organ failure, within just two hours. The first symptoms are extreme fever or hypothermia, rapid or unusually slow pulse, tachypnea or bradypnea, and nausea. Some patients may experience dizziness, or fainting spells. In most cases, symptoms do not show until the treatment period has passed. There is a 5% chance of survival if caught in time.” The news broadcast droned on, bringing with it the bleak reality of the outside world. The four in the bunker tried to ignore the presenter’s voice drilling into their heads. They needed to get back to work, and focus, if they wanted any chance of stopping complete world annihilation.

The first case in Andorra was discovered one week before the French Lockdown was introduced. Desperate to avoid following in France's footsteps, a lockdown was introduced within the first hundred cases. These restrictions were enforced strongly.

Lukas walked along his street, marveling at how quiet it was. There were only two other people outside, and they were walking in the other direction. Each had a facemask on, identical to his own, and one wore gloves. Both were roughly seven or eight feet apart, and they were on the other side of the pavement. There were no cars on the road. It had been like this for a couple of weeks. Every so often, you'd hear coughing, or sobbing. The city was dying, and all that Lukas wanted was to get bread and milk for his mother. They were only allowed out for essentials, and food was an essential. He walked along to the local shop, keeping an eye out for other people. The lockdown had started a few weeks earlier, and now the most common occurrence was seeing bodies being wheeled out of houses on gurneys. Full buildings were completely quarantined. It was the strangest thing he'd ever experienced, but now.... It felt so normal. The lockdown had been going on for less than a month, and Lukas hadn't talked to anyone out with his family in that time. He'd texted friends, of course, but... most communication was cut off. Signal was poor everywhere, there had been such a large increase in the home usage.

Lukas reached the shop, and cued outside. Everyone had to stand on a specific line. There were only two or three people, and he didn't have to wait very long. The whole situation would have been surreal to anyone who was experiencing this for the first time, but to Lukas, it was normal.

Samantha Wilson knew (as soon as she heard that Denmark had fallen) that her parents were dead. They were visiting her grandparents. She felt as though she may burst into tears but knew with absolute certainty that she would have to wait to mourn her loss. She would do so silently, and in private. When a solitary tear rolled down her cheek, she simply brushed it away, took a deep breath, and washed her hands so that she could get back to work. There were over seven billion, five million dead. There was no time for hysterics. Especially not when the global population was so low.

Albania had the sense to start a travel ban before the fifth case had been discovered in the country. When the fiftieth case was recorded, a nationwide lockdown was instituted.

Everyone was to be at home unless they were an emergency or health worker.

Blerta had been at home for weeks. She was missing her friends. Schools had closed a week before lockdown began. That was the last time she'd seen her best friend. Within a week, she had died. Her brother had been stuck out of the country, and no one had heard from him for two weeks.

Blerta's dad had begun to display symptoms, leaving her only to go shopping for essential items. The protocols in place meant that it took far longer to prepare for going out the door than it would in any other circumstance. Facemask, gloves, sanitize.

Walking down the street, she couldn't believe how empty it was. Even on stormy days, children's laughter could usually be heard, music would play loudly, kids would play hopscotch on the street. Now, there wasn't any cars, there were no people, and everything was silent. It was like the city was dead. She found herself thinking that she had to turn back, that she needed to go back, that if she continued, something bad would happen. She nearly turned around but forced herself to continue. They were nearly out of food, and the shop wasn't that far away. Two minutes, and she'd be there. She could hear coughing in an alleyway as she passed it, and forced herself to speed up.

Blerta tried to slow her breathing. She was fine. She had her mask on. She just needed to go to the shop. Her dad didn't have much time, and she didn't want him to be alone... Not now. She didn't want him to be alone when he...

Aleksander Nowak didn't have much time. He had to find this cure, to save his dad. It was well known that Poland was surrounded by fallen countries, but what wasn't known was that Alek's ojciec was in Poland. He was in Skierniewice. Somehow, Poland had managed to avoid the virus, they'd been smart about it. Their borders shut before France fell, and there was a cull on anyone who showed symptoms. It meant that while they may have a high death toll, it was low in comparison to... well, nearly everywhere else. His dad just happened to have been unlucky enough to travel simply two weeks before the outbreak, and was now stuck.

Germany had failed to act as quickly as they should have. The only governmental advice was simply “wash your hands”. The case total multiplied at an alarming rate, and hospitals quickly became overwhelmed. Households reported an increasing number of deaths. The government finally shut schools, and began to enforce a lockdown, but the total dead had already reached forty million. For most, it was already too late.

Dominik was under a strict quarantine, having been rushed to hospital two nights earlier. He’d been struggling to breathe, and was to be kept under constant surveillance. If everything went smoothly, if he survived the next 24 hours, he’d be the only member of his family left alive. If he didn’t, he’d would join his family in death. The night before, he’d struggled to breathe, temperature hitting nearly forty degrees. He’d been outside for his allocated exercise time, when things went bad, and he passed out on the street. He had woken up that morning in an isolated room alone, with a canula in his hand, connected to a drip. How long had he been out? He was told that, at the rate the disease was progressing, either he’d be better in forty -eight hours, or dead. After the forty -eight hours passed, he’d be stuck in the room, to ensure he was no longer infectious. Dominik was unsure of which would be worse, being stuck alone for ninety -six hours, or death... He had already lost everyone who had ever been important to him, and couldn’t see anything else that he could possibly lose.

It felt as though there was a storm, a really bad storm, and Dominik was floating through the clouds. No more bad could touch him, and all that was left was death, or a bleak survival. A lonely future was all that lay ahead of him, and he was unsure of whether living to see it would be worth it.

Olivia Williams didn’t even flinch at the news of Denmark’s fate. Why should it matter to her? She wasn’t Danish, nor did she know anyone in Denmark. Her family were in Northern Ireland, so if maladie sans nom didn’t make it there, and if they were able to discover and distribute the cure, they’d be fine. The UK had already closed their borders—not that many would be traveling anyway, and they weren’t getting any imported goods. But that also meant that food was going to start running out soon... They HAD to find the cure.

The news in America was filled with false information. There was a sudden rise in cleaning product related deaths – despite the household products having no effect on the spread of the

disease. The majority of the American public seemed to believe anything they were told, and with the price of healthcare being so steep, it was killing people. There were over two hundred million dead, and the number kept rising. Many towns were like ghost towns, and cities were not better.

Elizabeth worked at a hospital, as part of the cleaning staff, and they had seen an alarming spike in missing cleaning products, while the morgue had seen a similar spike in deaths by bleach. Due to this, the staff had to check the cleaning cupboards every hour, to ensure nothing was missing.

Elizabeth had just started her shift, and was already excited for the prospect of a break. She was stationed at accident and emergency, constantly clearing everything. While sanitation products had no effect on the virus once already in contact with someone, they did have an effect on it when it was on objects. That meant that she was to clean down twice after any patient had contact. The doors were automated, or she'd probably have to wipe those too.

Due to her job, Elizabeth was to wear personal protective equipment (PPE). They were already running low on cleaning staff, and safety procedures increased. She was to wear a facemask at all times, and surgical gloves were provided. It could have been worse. The news reported that most hospitals didn't have enough PPE for nurses and doctors, she was lucky enough that there was plenty at the hospital.

After finishing cleaning another stretcher down, Elizabeth had to quickly step back. Someone was rushed into the area, coughing. She pulled the cart away as quickly as she could, but... it was probably too late. They'd been warned that the mask wouldn't protect them completely, and any contact with patients...

Nathan Hill didn't have much to care about, except himself. He was, and always would be, the most important person in his life. His mum abandoned him when he was a child, and he had no siblings. His dad died when he was 20. It was just him left, but that was all that he needed. He was smart, he'd gotten through university and the selection process for the Scottish group designated to finding the cure.

Things in Canada had gotten increasingly bad, and despite lockdown measures being introduced, people failed to listen to them, and to fully follow them. The country already had

a high toll of suspected cases, but a low death toll – most cases were unconfirmed, and therefore, didn't contribute to the toll.

Thomas was one of few who the lockdown measures didn't apply to – not most of them. He was unable to work from home, and had to be outside for more than thirty minutes daily. His job was one of the worst that he could have currently. Everything seemed to escalate at an incredibly fast pace. One second, he'd be asking someone to return to their home, the next, he was having to take out his service weapon.

Thomas was a police officer, and everyone seemed to hate police officers at the moment. He'd be walking, patrolling the streets, and someone would approach him, just to cough in his face. It had been deemed unnecessary for police to have PPE that would help protect against the spread of *maladie sans nom*, which meant that he had to keep himself completely isolated from his family. They would be tested every two, or three weeks, and directly after results he would be able to see and talk to his family. During the testing period, everyone was isolated to prevent changing test results. If you came clear, you got one family day, before you were back on the shift pattern. If you tested positive... You probably didn't last long enough to find out your results. You could only call in sick if you had two or more symptoms.

Thomas had not yet taken a sick day, but... he was considering calling in unwell. He heard footsteps behind him, and turned, only to be met with...

“Can we turn that off, or at least, mute it?” Samantha snapped, heading back towards the lab section of the bunker. The other three members of SAD (Scientists Against Disease) were sat in the lounge area, watching the tv, or at least listening, to the devastating news. They didn't seem to have the ability to grasp just how much more devastating it was for Samantha. The news continued to drone on, the broadcast repeating itself.

“Why? You're leaving anyway, Sammy.” Nathan called back, both him and Olivia bursting into laughter. After all, she hadn't told them her family was in Denmark, that they'd travelled because of an ill relative, only for that to be their downfall. He wasn't aware that the only reason “Sammy” has snapped was because she'd just gotten the news that her family was dead. Alek scrambled to his feet, and went in pursuit of Samantha.

“Samantha!” He followed her into the entrance of the lab, which was where their gear was stored. It was enclosed by two thick doors, preventing any contamination. They both stood in silence, preparing to go into the lab. Samantha tied her hair up in a high bun, before putting on her safety goggles, and Aleksander struggled with getting his arm through the sleeve of the lab coat. Right before Sam pressed the button, releasing the airlock and allowing them into the lab, Alek stopped her. “Samantha, you seem upset.” She didn’t answer, pushing the button and walking into the lab. Alek followed her in, and they started preparing materials.

There had been a very sudden spike in cases of *maladie sans nom* in Australia. Things were not going well. The cases rose from ten to over two thousand in the course of twenty -four hours. The heat was doing nothing but increase, and hospitals were being overwhelmed very quickly by heatstroke and suspected cases of the disease. Within a week of the spike, the country was in complete quarantine. Borders, schools, and most workplaces had been shut... Most workplaces anyway.

With the sudden heatwave, bushfires had come. Entire forests were burning up daily, and Abby had seen far too much damage caused already. Animal control was with them as much as possible, in an attempt to get the poor creatures affected rescued and rehabilitated, but at the same time, they were having to take things slowly.

A scream off to her left caught Abby off guard, and she took off running in the direction it had come from. The fire had surrounded one of her colleagues, Matthew, and he was on the ground, struggling to breathe. His oxygen tank had fallen off, and she assumed he’d tripped. The tank was at the other side of (what appeared to be) a screen of flames. He couldn’t get it, no one could. Unless... “HELP!”

Another of her colleagues should have been at the other side of him, but... no response. Abby spotted a gap in the flames, and darted through, dropping to her knees next to Matthew. She took a deep breath, and pulled her oxygen mask off of her face. She held the mask against Matthew’s face, and waited for him to take a couple of breaths. “We’ll get out of this, okay? Trust me.” How they were going to escape, when the gap had closed up, she had absolutely no idea. But positivity, and the shared use of her mask is all that would keep them alive.

In the lab, they had managed to get a copy of someone's DNA after they had been infected, and were working to reverse the alterations. They'd used PCR to amplify the DNA, so that they'd be able to use it for testing without fear of running out. Samantha pulled a pair of gloves onto her hands, and took a sample out of the refrigerator, one of the few samples on a petri dish. She placed it under the microscope. Alek attempted to stay silent, not wanting to distract her, despite his curiosity. He pulled on a pair of gloves, ensuring that it was impossible for him to get infected. They both had on surgical masks, so that, in the event of a spill, they'd be able to exit the room before the sterilization process would begin. Alek started working on a theory he had, for the cure.

Italy had handled the disease incredibly well, managing to keep their case number lower, and their death toll at the same level. When the citizens were told to stay inside, they listened. When they were told not to visit family or friends out with their households, they listened. All nonessential workplaces were shut, classes were moved online. People were advised to stay at home, especially if they exhibited even one symptom.

"We've got a report of a young child, struggling to breathe. She's an asthmatic. Can we get a unit to this address?" A voice came over the radio in the ambulance Alessandro was driving. Giulia picked up the radio, pressing the button to speak.

"Responding." Her voice was completely calm, as if this was all in normal situations. We'd have to sort PPE as soon as we got to the address, and then they'd bring some equipment into the girl's house. They were to avoid bringing people into hospital unless absolutely necessary, which meant paramedics were to stitch up wounds, give oxygen... Heart attack patients were an exception. They needed monitored, in case of recurring incidents, or damage to the heart. Nearly all surgical procedures were, however, cancelled.

Alessandro turned a corner, and parked the ambulance in front of a house. Giulia climbed through to the back of the ambulance, to begin putting on her PPE, and he followed suit. They climbed out of the back of the ambulance, bringing out a few pieces of equipment. A man rushed out of the house, and she assumed that it was the girl's father. The pair of paramedics greeted him, before following him into the building, to help his daughter. Walking into the house, the first thing Alessandro noticed was the mess. It was as though

someone had taken a sledgehammer to all the inhabitants' belongings. The next thing was the look on the young girl's face, as though she was being caught in a lie. Finally, the man's apparent light-headedness. This was not an asthma attack.

Olivia and Nathan had stayed in the lounge, and the news broadcast was now repeating itself. "Breaking News, there have now been over 20 million cases on maladie sans nom in Poland. Those who have relatives or friends in Poland are advised to contact them as, as the infection is expected to spread to the rest of the population by the end of the month." A counter appears on the screen, the scale in millions. Olivia watched in shock as the number climbed past 25. Poland's case toll. It was climbing every minute. She got up and headed to the lab. Alek had to know. There was an intercom system in the lab, the button was just outside the airlock. Olivia pressed it.

"Alek, come here. Poland's on the news." Alek's heart dropped what felt like 100 feet. His body felt numb. He looked out to Olivia, and shook his head.

"Not right now, I must keep working." Once he let go of the button, he looked to Samantha. "Your family was in Denmark, weren't they?" He didn't get a response, but the silence was enough. "I'm sorry." He turned back to the formula collecting the ingredients he needed before he began to add each part together. He wrote down exactly how he was going to create the solution.

The shop staff in New Zealand had never been appreciated, and had always been treated as sub-human, second rate citizens. However, when a nationwide lockdown was enforced, and people could only be outdoors for either an hour of exercise or to go shopping for essential items, shop workers were seen as heroes for dealing with all that was going on, for being some of the only people who were able to go to their job – who had to go to their jobs.

Amelia was eighteen. She'd only been working at the store to save up enough money that she could move out after school. Suddenly, she was in a pandemic, and her job was one of few keeping the country together. NO member of staff had been given a facemask, only gloves. They were to attempt keeping a two meter distance between themselves and any customers,

but with customers being increasingly rude, it was rather hard. Amelia found herself wanting to scream at various points throughout her shift.

She had been told that if she phoned in ill, she would lose her job unless a doctor could confirm her illness. With daily shifts, there was no time for her to see a doctor, so sick days were definitely a thing of the past. Everyone did a weekly applause for the healthcare workers, many of whom were dying, but no one cared to make nice gestures for people working in shops. In fact, the only niceness that they received was online, in person, they were insulted and treated like trash. Not just by customers, but my management too.

Amelia requested to get put on tills, simply due to the divider between customers and staff, after one particularly bad incident with a customer, where they fake coughed in her face, when she politely informed them that a certain object was out of stock.

Nathan continued watching the counter rise, until it hit 25 million. He stood up, and headed towards the lab, figuring that he may as well see what was going on. He found Olivia at the intercom button, both Alek and Sam working. He pressed the button to enter the airlock, and geared up. Lab coat, goggles, surgical mask, gloves. Olivia followed suit.

Belgium had employed over a hundred new carers when a spike in cases of *maladie sans nom* appeared. The spike was followed by a similarly large spike in disease related deaths. The newly employed carers were expected to be able to look after high profile cases. With a sudden rise in deaths among carers and other healthcare staff, resources and staff were spread thin. A tissue would have been thicker. Over seven million cases were confirmed, and over six and a half million of those had resulted in a fatality.

Louis had worked as a carer for over ten years, and usually had a regular set of people to look after, but had recently been given a fresh set, despite his protests that it would cause unnecessary disruptions to them.

The government had wanted someone more experienced to be handling the highest profile cases, believing that he would somehow be equipped to bring someone back from the brink of death, without causing himself to suffer the same fate. "Louis, you have the right experience. Think of it as a promotion," he had been told. "We'll give you a raise and you'll get

recognition for all the work you'll be doing." Less than a week after his transfer had been authorized, none of these things had actually happened.

Louis was suddenly seeing more of his patients dying than he had throughout the rest of his career. He had a maximum of three patients currently, which was a decrease from the five that he usually looked after. They were now only lasting one or two weeks, a few days for most. Once they were a confirmed case, most people only lasted a few days. The strong ones, the survivors, would last a week and they'd be in recovery. He would stay with them a week longer to make sure all was okay.

Alek finished his solution, and brought it across to Samantha, with a dropper. She moved aside to allow him to add the solution to the sample, before checking how it had affected the DNA. She gasped aloud, "hold da helt ferie!" She gestured at Nathan for him to come across. He peered through the lens of the microscope, noting the easily visible changes in the DNA. The pathogens were changing. He moved away, and Samantha checked again. The pathogens had reverted back to their original state. She sighed loudly, shaking her head.

The schools in the Netherlands had shut less than a week after the first case was discovered in the country. The number increased slowly, due to the quarantine protocols that were instantly put into place. Life got incredibly boring, incredibly fast. You could only leave your house for essential items. Classes were all transferred online, so learning could continue. Teaching staff were put under an immense pressure, and classes were continuing until the beginning of summer. There was a large chance that a lockdown would still be in place after the lockdown.

Julia Visser was a teacher at Scholengemeenschap De Rietlanden, and had suddenly been given an intense, overwhelming workload. The school expected them to be able to transfer all planned work online, organise tests that could be monitored to prevent cheating, and be able to still keep all classes on track for passing, despite the sudden change to everyone's lives. "School must go on," everyone insisted. Five of Julia's students had died so far, far more were seriously ill. They were expected to do classwork, expected to join any group calls, and still ask questions. She was expected to keep a record of attendance in classes: this was where she drew the line. There was no way that she was going to mark students down for not

joining a call, when she knew that, with everything that was going on in the world, they were stressed, they were likely to be ill...

Over ten million people were currently infected, there was no “continuing as normal”. There was simply trying to continue. If that meant reduced schoolwork in her classes, if that meant ignoring attendance records, then so be it. Julia didn’t want her students, these poor kids who were already dealing with so much, so be worrying about classes, and work, and other trivial matters. School wasn’t the most important thing, not ever, and certainly not now.

The news was droning on in the living room. The first case of maladie sans nom had been discovered in the UK. A case counter appeared below Poland’s. The number continued to climb, hundreds at a time, which gave an idea of just how invasive maladie sans nom was. The group were unaware of the growing problem outside of their bunker. And they would have stayed blissfully unaware, had Alek not gone to check what was going on with Poland.

Mason Smith was a politician and wasn’t worried about maladie sans nom affecting him. He had one of the best paying jobs in the country, and he was certainly not going to risk his life for something as simple as a disease. If you wash your hands, it won’t affect you. Mason had a strong immune system, and no contact with anyone outside of his job. His family had gone into isolation, before the country officially declared that the country was to go into a lockdown. He wasn’t going to risk his family, nothing in the world could possibly convince him to do so.

He still went to work every day, despite it being unnecessary, because the rules didn’t apply to him. Mason Smith made the rules, and definitely did not follow them. He was above them.

Rules didn’t apply to people like him, rich people, powerful people. He held briefings on the disease, he travelled absolutely anywhere that he wanted. Mason Smith was powerful, unstoppable and respected.

“Hello, everyone. We’re here live for the daily briefing about maladie sans nom, infected and ways to stop the spread. Leading today’s conference is Mason Smith.”

Mason cleared his throat, standing in front of the room full of reporters. That was nerve racking, being in a full room, despite all warnings, in the middle of a pandemic, addressing his country. He must be looking like an absolute idiot, not following the recommended advice, but also... He would be looking important, as if he was the one who was completely in charge of running the country.

He had left all his lab stuff in the airlock, and barely caught the end of the news report on the UK. “The organisation SAD is looking for a cure, and are believed to be close, but until further news is received, please, stay at home – especially if you are experiencing symptoms of maladie sans nom.” Alek noticed the already high Poland infection toll and the quickly climbing British toll. They didn’t know how the infection had reached the UK.

Amy had been in the hospital, in an isolated room, for three days. She had begun to display symptoms of maladie sans nom, resulting in instant hospitalisation. She had been struggling to breathe, coughing, and had passed out before an ambulance arrived.

Amy was one of the first confirmed cases of maladie sans nom in the UK and would be known as the first fatality in the country. She lay in the hospital bed, legs feeling too heavy to move, brain pounding. It felt like someone had a jackhammer in her head, and her eyes ached. Every part of her hurt, like she was being stretched out. It felt like her ankles were tied to one wall, and her wrists to another, and the pain was far too much to bare. She felt like bursting into tears, like screaming, but her throat was so dry that she couldn’t make a sound. She tried to itch her arm, where a canula was in her elbow. Her eyes had frozen over like the surface of a winter puddle, robbing them of their usual warmth. Her dad watched from outside the room, as his daughter’s face grimaced, as tears rolled down her face. She was in there, he knew it, but it's like she just took a huge step back from life. He wanted to reach in and tell her it wasn't hopeless, but she wouldn't believe me.

Amy felt like someone was reaching inside of her and pulling out her guts. Sharp pain lanced through her head and colourful spots flashed in front of her eyes, it felt like her whole body had been beaten and every movement caused some muscle or bone to ache. She could hear a news broadcast droning on, somewhere in the room, but couldn’t force herself to turn her head and look. Searing fiery bursts pulsed around her body, intensifying with each breath,

jarring and brutal. With each breath the pain amplified, her muscles quivered, her consciousness ebbed. Black mists swirled at the edges of her mind drawing her into sweet oblivion. The heart monitor that Amy was hooked up to began to beep rapidly, and she was pronounced dead within the hour.

Adrenaline flooded Alek's system, pumping and beating like it was trying to escape this horrible, bleak reality. His eyes were wide with fear at the prospect of what would happen to his dad, whether his mum remained safe. His brain was screaming at him to hide, to run and get as far away from SAD as possible – if his family was already dead, what was the point of trying to develop this cure? He could feel the panic, beginning simply as a cluster of sparks in his abdomen. Tension grew in his face, and in his limbs. He began to hyperventilate. He called out, feeling increasingly dizzy, and hoped one of the others would hear. His thoughts were accelerating inside his head, and all he wanted was for them to slow so he could breathe. They wouldn't. His breaths were barely coming in gasps, and his heart was hammering inside his chest. The room was spinning, and he just wanted everything to slow, so his brain could cope. Instead, he felt his knees hit the floor, and heard footsteps behind him. The panic had started out as thin cellophane, something his fingers could pierce breathing holes in, but not even a minute later, it became a torrent of ice cold water, surrounding his every limb, and climbing higher until it passed his nose and mouth. That's when the panic had become absolute, and his body was shutting down as fast as pushing a biochemical reset button. He felt somebody's hand grab hold of his shoulder, perhaps Samantha, and could hear talking, which sounded incredibly distant. He could make out some words, but the talking wasn't the most alarming thing. The silence that followed was. In that silence, he could feel the tension in the air.

Johnathon took a quick drink of water, before putting it down, where it'd be out of view by the camera. He cleared his throat and watched as the camera man counted down to one, from three. "Three, two..." He gave Johnathon a thumbs up sign, to let him know that they were now live.

"This is Johnathon Brown, and I'm outside the Royal London Hospital, where it has been reported that a fourteen year old girl has died from the disease 'maladie sans nom', which

translates to unnamed disease. The scientists who discovered the strain of this highly infectious and lethal disease didn't live long enough to name it. We're now receiving reports of fatalities all over the country, and it is suspected that the United Kingdom will soon go into a full scale lockdown. The number of suspected cases is increasing by more than tenfold every hour. We're expecting there to be a broadcast from the government within the hour, to inform the public about the new protocols which will be in place.

For now, we will remember Amy Williams, a young girl who lost her life too soon, and would have gone on to live a full, wonderful life. Amy had dreams of being a veterinarian. She had a keen interest in science, and how it related to art. The world truly has lost a bright spark... And its going to lose many more, if the spread of this disease is not stopped. Please, stay at home.” The camera man gave Johnathon a thumbs up – they were no longer on air. So many thoughts were rushing through his head. His daughter was the same age as the girl who died. If she had been in the same situation as Amy, he doubted that his family would've stayed as calm as hers did. Watching your child die, and not being able to help... must've been a horrible feeling. He couldn't imagine going through that pain.

The news report had poured gasoline onto their collective spark of fear, the fear of losing all they'd ever loved. They'd never felt so wrong, to have believed they could have saved the world, only to watch it go up in flames. Samantha's hand trembled, and Olivia clasped hers together to present an illusion of calmness. Nathan shoved his hands into his pockets, gaze firmly fixed on his shoes. Reality had smashed its way through the (apparently impenetrable) walls of the bunker, and all that was left was silence, and the noise of the news report which continued to play. Each second seemed to drone on forever, and with each passing second, the infection toll seemed to rise by a million. The British toll had already reached 30.

The fear had started as a contortion of Olivia's stomach, but had quickly become the feeling of being smothered, as if an invisible hand was blocking her airways. Her breathing had become rapid, erratic, and shallow. She tried to fight against the feeling as her body writhed, trying to escape the fear, the panic, else it would shut down entirely.

Everyone in Turkey had been infected, and as a result of the healthcare system being overwhelmed, it had resulted in a one hundred percent fatality rate. The streets were completely empty, no people remained. Wild animals roamed the streets, pets escaped houses. The entire country had been reclaimed by wildlife. A drone was flown over Ankara, and usable footage was broadcasted to all television screens across the world. Bodies lined the streets, buildings were already showing signs of duress.

A person was spotted, stumbling down the street. They were wailing loudly, as though they had been shot, or stabbed. The drone followed them, and upon hearing the noise, the person turned around. With each step their stomach tightened and ached all the more. They kept swallowing, and their throat kept clenching, but no matter what they could not stop the warm feeling rising through her chest. The person buckled over.

They were shivering violently, and when they looked up towards the camera, it was noticed that this person, this girl, had bright red, bloodshot eyes. Her eyes sunken, and her skin sallow, every movement ached. Tears streamed down her face, and her knees buckled underneath her. A small cry escaped her parched lips, voice abounding unusually harsh and painful. "Help, please," she begged. Her eyes rolled back in her head, completely white, and she fell to the ground. Her body stopped shivering. The drone moved closer to the girl's body, and those monitoring the video got an image of her, dead. Eyes glassy, body collapsed in on itself, a grey liquid leaking from her lips. It was a truly horrific image, that would forever be etched into the viewer's mind.

Samantha understood exactly how everyone felt, after all, she'd experienced the same thing just hours before. So, when Nathan, who was usually calm and collected, struggled to keep his breathing even, Samantha stayed silent. She saw a look pass across his face which she'd never seen before, he was genuinely scared.

Daniel had lived in the United Kingdom his entire life, and when *maladie sans nom* was discovered, he laughed at it, as if it was a joke. He had made jokes with his friends, mocked the pandemic announcement, and was now terrified. He was fifteen, how would he have known any better? Plenty of terrible things had already happened in the world, how do you tell what you can joke about?

When the entire world is full of bad news, sometimes the only way to keep going is by laughing, making jokes, sharing memes... That's exactly what Daniel had done, and now, he found himself filled with regret. His mother had fallen incredibly ill and was a suspected case of the horrific disease. He hadn't talked to his friends in days and had never felt so isolated. He wasn't allowed to come into contact with his mother, he had to leave food at her bedroom door, else he'd risk putting himself in the same position.. He had to stay well, he had to look after her.

It felt like the entire world was out to get him. He went to check on his mum, and found himself breaking down, sobbing. She was lying so perfectly still that something had to be wrong... She wasn't breathing. They couldn't call a doctor, but... his mum was dead. "Hello, 999, what's your emergency?"

Everything felt bleak, hopeless. The future had always been something to worry about, but now... there was no future left. Samantha had never truly given a thought to all of the time that enclosed her life, and how it was barely even a speck in a timeline. She'd had so much time, but now they all had so little. She'd let so much time slip by, like it was simply worthless, she'd watched it drain away like water after a bath and hadn't given it a second thought. So much had vanished, like a magician's assistant in a magic act. She'd stood, watching it fly away with the leaves in the wind. It was only now that she realised, she'd had so much time already, and completely wasted it. For most of the country, today would be their last tomorrow. And the time she'd wasted was something she could never get back.

"We're too late."