

CHAPTER ONE

“I’ve got zombitus,” Megan Murry said. Her new cell phone felt warm and heavy in her hand. She’d hoped to get a phone for her thirteenth birthday, but that wasn’t until next year. Getting the gift early was great, except that it was a pity present. Her parents felt sorry for her and wanted to do something “nice.”

Sighing, Megan leaned back into the pillows on her bed and told Rachel, “It’s a virus.”

“Impossible,” her best friend replied. “I’ve never heard of zombie-i-tus? I thought you had the flu.”

“So did I!” Megan exclaimed. “Turns out that when your knees lock straight and you start to moan uncontrollably, it’s not the flu at all. Mom and Dad took me to see a special doctor. Dr. Shelley did a bunch of tests and the results were all positive.”

“No way!” Rachel was shocked. “Hang on, I’m Googling it.” Megan could hear the clicking of Rachel’s keyboard. “Ha! I knew it. No such thing as zombie-i-tus.”

“Try again.” Megan said. “It’s not called zom-beeee-i-tus. Plain zombitus. As in ‘Bite us.’”

“Oh,” Rachel said as Google reloaded. “I see it now.” There was a long pause as Rachel read about the disease. Megan had already scanned through everything she could find online.

“Bummer,” Rachel said at last. “Especially that part about how if you get a head wound it’ll never heal. And that other part about how your skin might decay and fall off, that’s bad, too.”

“No kidding,” Megan agreed. “It’s totally gross. Dr. Shelley said that zombitus is going around, and it’s super-contagious,” Megan told Rachel. “All kids with the virus have to be quarantined in boarding schools. Apparently, there are Zombie Academy schools popping up all over the world. The doctor said I’m lucky there’s one within a few hours of here. I can stay in Southern California and don’t have to go to Australia. . . .” Her voice trailed off as she added, “Real lucky, I guess.”

“I guess,” Rachel echoed.