

Zombies

Grade 7-8

Alone, sleeping soundly, a young girl rested. Not far from her bed lay a broken clock, its screen smashed, and its plug pulled. Long hours the girl lay, sleeping soundly without the screaming of the little clock. All was quiet in her little house, silent without the voices and footsteps of her parents, who had left for their jobs long before. The girl didn't like it when her parents left; she felt alone.

Entertain yourself, her parents would say. But she knew the kind of entertainment her parents meant. The kind that started with a screen and ended with despair, detachment, and a pounding headache. She'd much rather explore, read, and create. Boredom was a more vigilant parent than those who had conceived her—boredom, at least, taught her lessons, and roused her creativity. *Why can't you be like the other children?* Her parents would ask. *They are all perfectly happy with their devices.* But the little girl didn't want to be like the other kids. She didn't want to be a zombie.

She stumbled down the stairs, rubbing sleep from her eyes. Her house was perfect: every surface was spotless, not a single thing out of place, as if no one lived in the house at all—which she sometimes felt was true. She grabbed her coat off the hanger, and stepped outside into the crisp, autumn air. She enjoyed the outdoors, to her parents' great displeasure. *You'll track mud through the house*, they would scold. *I know you like to go outside, but why don't you just watch a nature documentary instead?* The little girl didn't understand her parents, and they didn't understand her either.

She gazed at the trees lining their grassy field. She enjoyed the park, but it always pained her to see it. Every person sitting on the benches, enthralled in the virtual lives they desperately

threw themselves into. She would watch from afar, noticing little details. She was very good at that, noticing details. Her parents called it a nuisance, annoyed that she paid more attention to other people than her screen. *Your device teaches you things much more important than observation.*

The little girl disagreed.

She walked along the stream watching the ducks chase each other in circles, longing for the ignorant bliss she was sure they felt. Moving down the street, she entered a small cafe. The little girl always enjoyed the small cafe, drinking her tea out of mini teacups. While she waited in line, she observed the people in front of her. The one at the front seemed to have headphones on, bobbing his head to a bass beat audible ever so slightly to someone listening closely. No one but the little girl seemed to be listening closely, too entranced by their ex's new girlfriend, or, at least the girl sitting at a table nearby was. She scrolled and scrolled, her eyes narrowing every time her ex showed up on her feed. The little girl looked away. She knew when she was invading someone's privacy.

Finally, when it was her turn, she walked up to the cash register. She simply pointed at the menu, her finger barely reaching over the counter for the cashier to see. He nodded, slipping his eyes back to the computer screen in front of him.

After several moments, a young-looking boy in an apron handed over her mini teacup, and the little girl took a seat in the back. She liked the back of the little cafe—it gave her a clear shot of everyone in it. Once she was finished, she left out the door she came, flashing a rare smile at a woman on her way in. The woman was too busy with her screen to notice.

The little girl walked the inner streets of the city, her least favorite place to be. The sidewalks were teeming with people, but somehow it was the place she felt most alone. Everyone walking to and fro, head buried in their screens. The little girl was often knocked around by a

distracted pedestrian, too focused on their own virtual life to notice a lonely child. That's what got to her the most, the reason she was most tempted to pick up her screen and pretend to enjoy the despair and headache it brought her: the feeling of belonging, the feeling of acceptance in a society that would never otherwise accept her. *Those thoughts are much too grand for someone of your age*, her parents would complain. The little girl agreed.

She wandered alone through the city, tears marking the anguish she felt; alone, quiet, suffocated by the walking zombies surrounding her. Slaves to their own devices.