

AN ORIGINAL NOVEL

# PIGGY

INFECTED



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## CHAPTER ONE

**T**here had once been an island called Lucella. Far past Doveport and somewhere south of the North Sea, its outer edges were sprinkled with long beaches and stretches of picturesque mountains that led to a salting of dense forests. The breeze off the North Sea meant there was often a chill in the air. It wouldn't have been out of place to see the residents of the island bundled up in jackets or scarves on their way to the Metro station. But that was then. That was before the Infection. If there were stars in the sky above the city of Lucella this evening, you could not see them. A dense mist hung above the island, blanketing the entire city in a thick layer of fog. The wind tore through the



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trees, making a distinctive howling sound and causing Ben to pull his hoodie tighter around his shoulders. He considered calling it a night, then and there. These last couple of weeks, he'd had his fill of jump scares. To anyone else, the house in front of him was just like any other on the block—three levels, picket fence, a closely manicured lawn. To Ben, this was his best friend's house, and the last place Ollie had been seen.

Ben wondered if it was too late to turn back and go home. It wasn't as if there was much waiting for him there, either. He had lost track of his own family a while back. He hoped that they had made it off the island before it had locked down. There were dozens of safe spaces across the island, and Ben was confident that the grown-ups could take care of themselves. But Ollie . . . Ben was all Ollie had. Ben felt a rush of chills go down his spine, completely unrelated to the strange weather they



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were having. It seemed like just a few weeks ago, everything had been so normal, and now . . . Well, now this. Ben shook his head, clearing the spookier of his thoughts and steeling himself for the task at hand. The aging brown wood of the picket fence creaked eerily as Ben pushed his friend's gate open, walking purposefully toward the front door. He had made this journey a thousand times before; why did it seem so sinister tonight? Ben traipsed up the front steps, reaching out to knock gingerly on the mahogany front door, which loomed much larger than he seemed to remember. His knuckles rapped on the wood, the sound seeming to echo across the empty street. The hairs on the back of Ben's neck stood on end. He had gotten used to making as little noise as he could.

"Ollie?" Ben cried out in a half whisper, not wanting to attract any unwanted Infected attention and not sure himself if he was expecting an





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answer. “It’s Ben!” Again, this was silly. He had known Ollie since they were both in diapers. “No one’s seen you! With everything that’s going on . . . I’m worried about you.” No response. Ben jiggled the handle of the door in vain, but it was firmly locked. He couldn’t blame Ollie’s family. The more he heard about the infected citizens of Lucella, the more Ben wanted to lock his doors and hide, too. And if that was what they wanted to do, they were more than welcome to—as soon as Ben made sure that Ollie was safe. He cupped his hands and called his friend’s name. Again, no response. Ben sighed in resignation. This marked the beginning and end of his ideas. Surely if Ben could get inside, he would find some trace of Ollie, some clue as to where his friend had disappeared to. Of course, the front door wasn’t the only way to get inside the house.

Ollie’s house had always had the biggest windows in the neighborhood, and Ben was certain he had



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seen a good-sized rock on his way over here. Normally it was important to respect other people's property, but things hadn't been normal in Lucella for weeks. Skipping down the steps of the front porch, Ben made his way across Ollie's front lawn and down the street he had come from, back toward his own house. In another neighbor's yard, a collection of rocks led up to their front porch. Ben would only need to borrow one for this job. Pocketing a smooth stone, Ben made his way back up the street to Ollie's house. Ducking behind a parked car, Ben took in his surroundings, making sure that no one was around. The infected citizens of Lucella were one thing, but nosy neighbors were a whole other can of worms. The street was illuminated by only the dull, buzzing shine from the overhead streetlamps. Chills shot over his whole body again, nerves causing Ben's fingers to tremble. If Ben's parents had been around, they would have certainly disapproved of his plan. No, this wasn't just nerves. Ben couldn't shake the



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feeling that he was being watched. That was when he saw it.

Now that he had seen it, Ben was actually baffled that he had been on the lookout. It had snuck up on him, but it wasn't exactly inconspicuous. Twice his height and bearing down on him quickly was one of *the Infected*. Ben didn't know how to explain it, but the people of Lucella had started acting



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strangely recently. For what seemed like no reason at all, large swaths of the population had recently become violently ill, and the ones who recovered . . . they were different. People were saying it was a sickness, an Infection, but others weren't so sure. Whatever it was, it was turning the regular people of Lucella into monsters. The Infected weren't worried about manners or hygiene; they only obeyed their base instincts to feed and to attack. And now Ben was face-to-face with one.

The creature made a distinctive grunting sound as it raised its arms, brandishing a metal wrench. The Infected was at least eight feet tall, dressed in an ill-fitting tattered red shirt. Its skin was pale and swollen, like it had been left in an inflatable above-ground pool overnight, and it smelled like a breakfast restaurant's sink that hadn't been cleaned in weeks. Ben's every instinct screamed out at him to run, but his legs wouldn't listen, and he found himself paralyzed by fear. The infected Pig Creature roared again, its eyes bloodshot and



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glowing red, its smell almost overwhelming this close. Ben threw his hands up reflexively to defend himself, the rock skittering across the pavement. The noise distracted the Pig, and it turned its head to follow the new sound. This was Ben's chance. He couldn't overpower the infected Pig, but if he got away, maybe his search for his friend would not be over before it began. Ben tried to control his breath as he forced his legs to obey him this time. He scrambled to his feet, allowing himself a small whoop of victory. He couldn't believe he had managed to overcome his panic. Just one more thing he would have to tell his family and Ollie once he found them. If he could beat one of the Infected by himself, then he could—**THWACK!** Ben's reverie was interrupted by a single blow from the creature's wrench. Ben fell to the ground, his head spinning.

Ben didn't know how much time had passed when his eyes fluttered open. He groaned in response





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to the throbbing on the crest of his skull. Naps were not high on the list of things you should have after a head injury. The constant hum and broken-down fluorescence of the streetlights had been replaced by the warm glow of a table lamp, and the biting chill of the North Sea's wind on the street had been replaced by the warmth of . . . a home? Ben sat up, his head aching, almost as if to remind him that he had been assaulted by a wrench-wielding Pig. As if he needed reminding. Ben stood up carefully, regaining his footing. He had never been in such close contact with one of the Infected before. He hoped he would never have to be that close to one again. What in the world was that thing? It looked so familiar, and yet Ben had never seen anything like it before. But he had seen this furniture. This room. Ben had been in this house before. He groaned as he gingerly touched his fingers to the knot growing on his head. Ben had planned to use one of the stones from down the street to smash in a



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window, then crawl in and search the house from there. Aside from the massive splitting headache, getting pignapped had turned out to be a much simpler way to get inside Ollie's house. But why had the Pig Creature attacked him, and more importantly, how did the Pig Creature get inside? Ben had an idea, but he pushed it to the back of his mind. He didn't want to consider that right now. His head throbbed again in the spot where his skull had been introduced to the infected Pig's wrench. It certainly wasn't pleasant, but Ben figured he would be okay. He opened the bedroom door, peering down the hallway for any sign of the creature.

In a lounge chair in the middle of the living room, the Pig Creature slept soundly. At least, that's what it looked like to Ben. Its massive head hung over its chest as it took labored breaths. Ben had no idea how long he had been out, or even what time of day it was. Ben looked past the



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slumbering Pig Creature to the front door he had been on the other side of not so long ago. He could make a break for it right now. He might not have anything to show for it, but he would make it out with his life, and a story to tell. Across the hall, even closer than the front door, was Ollie's room. Ben weighed his options. He could run for the exit, head home, and try again some other time when he wasn't nursing a probable concussion. Then again, wasn't this why he had come here to begin with? Hadn't his goal been to find something in Ollie's house that would help him track down his friend? What if Ollie had left a note, a calendar date, anything? If there was even a chance that Ollie had left a clue, Ben couldn't risk missing out on something like that. Before all this, Ben's parents had always told him he was hardheaded, but even he didn't think his head could take any more whacks. It was now or never. Putting as little weight as he could on each foot, Ben tiptoed across the hallway, every step



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causing the floor of his friend's house to creak a little too loudly for Ben's liking. It was torturous. One wrong move could wake the infected Pig Creature, and Ben didn't know much, but he knew that he wasn't up for another bout with the Infected so quickly. After what seemed like an eternity of sneaking across the hall, Ben reached his friend's room and quietly turned the doorknob.

Ben sighed in relief as the latch clicked and the door gave way. He never thought that he would be thankful that his friends didn't lock their bedroom doors. Ben closed the door behind him, making sure the click of the latch was silent as his relief turned to sadness, now facing the fact that his friend might actually be gone. Or worse, maybe he was one of them. Ollie's room was exactly as Ben remembered it—the bed, dresser, and chairs arranged in the same way that they always had been. If Ben didn't know any better,



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he would have thought that it was just another day after school.

**KRRRSSH!**

A faint, sharp crackling sound pierced the silence of the room. Ben's heart dropped to his stomach, and he thought for a second that the Infected had woken from its sleep and found him. No—it was just one of Ollie's walkie-talkies. For a few months, it had been all he talked about, though, like many fascinations, it eventually fell to the wayside. Unless . . . Ben extended the antenna of the walkie-talkie, holding the transmission button and clearing his throat. "Ollie, are you there? This is Ben. Over." Ben screwed his eyes shut tightly as he released the transmission button. If Ollie left this walkie-talkie behind, it would make sense that he had taken the other one, right? Ben's mind raced with a thousand different scenarios as he waited for a response. He was greeted with





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nothing but the cold static of a dead line. Ben shoved the walkie-talkie into his pocket. Maybe his friend was just out of range. At the very least, maybe the batteries would come in handy later.

Ben stood, looking over Ollie's room once again for anything that could help lead him to his friend and anything he could use to get past the drowsy monster currently occupying Ollie's father's favorite armchair. Ben sighed. There was not much to go on in either department. His eyes flitted across the room, taking in as much detail as he could before a glint of metal caught his gaze. He crossed the room to the desk in the corner of Ollie's room, picking up the shining metal and holding it to the light. Ben would recognize that chain anywhere—he had seen it hanging off Ollie's backpack every day since they had been old enough to walk to school . . . Ollie's house keys. Why would he leave home without those?



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The walkie-talkie, the keys left behind . . . Everything that Ben found led only to more questions, no answers, and one very literal headache so far.

Ben wouldn't find any more clues here, he decided. He had been relatively lucky, but he was no detective. If he was going to find his friend, he would need help, and he would find no help here. He snuck out of Ollie's room, making sure that he had Ollie's keys and walkie-talkie before gingerly shutting the door and keeping an eye on where the infected Pig should have been. Should have been. Ollie's father's favorite armchair was now empty, the shape of the sleeping Pig still impressed in the upholstery. Ollie's father would not be pleased about that. Ben walked quickly toward the door, hoping to leave this place behind as quickly as he could. He would not be so lucky.



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Ben heard it before he saw it; the distinctive grunting sound it made was almost porcine in nature but somehow scarier by multitudes. The creature stiffly raised its arms, making Ben wonder how something so big and clumsy had ever managed to get the jump on him in the first place on an empty street with no obstacles. The creature swung its wrench like a club. It missed this time, taking a moment to steady itself as Ben ran the length of the living room to get around it. The infected Pig gave chase, one of its eyes glowing red against the darkness, focused only on Ben. It swung again as it moved closer, intent on relieving Ben of his consciousness once more. Another missed attack as Ben took cover around a corner.

The Infected roared, looking around wildly for Ben. The thing had seemed to lose sight of him. Confused, it lumbered around the room before exiting to the kitchen. This was Ben's chance. He darted for the front door, tearing it open. He was



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so thankful to be greeted by the cool rush of night wind, Ben almost did not notice that he had been spotted once again. The infected Pig moved toward Ben with a purpose—whatever the Infected were, they did not like losing sight of their prey. The Pig moved up on him, stiffly raising its wrench once more. The Infected were quicker than they looked, but then, they would have to be. Ben slammed the door in the creature's face, pulling Ollie's silver-ringed keys out of his hoodie pocket and thrusting them into the lock and twisting them. The infected Pig roared on the opposite side of the door, realizing what Ben had done, now trapped . . . Maybe some time alone with its thoughts would do the infected Pig well. The angry oinking on the other side of the door seemed to indicate that the creature disagreed, but Ben couldn't help but smile. He had escaped. Maybe he was kind of good at this. A loud thudding on the other side of the door brought him back to reality. The Pig Creature may not



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understand how a door worked, but it might figure out another way to get to him eventually. He scurried off Ollie's porch and back down the street.

Ben pulled the walkie-talkie out of his jacket pocket, trying the obsolete device a few more times as he walked down the street, going nowhere in particular. If this cheap plastic two-way radio was the only chance he had of finding his best friend, then he was going to keep trying until someone answered or the batteries gave out, whichever came first. "Ollie, this is Ben, come in," Ben groaned wearily into the mouthpiece. "Come in, Ollie, this is Ben. Over." The same unsettling static followed each of his attempts, punctuating his failures with a dull crinkle. Ben's legs felt as though he were dragging them through molasses. They were beginning to feel the effects of walking all over the city. Finding a nearby patch of grass, Ben sat down, just to rest for a





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moment. He let out a sigh of relief as he took his weight off his feet. It wasn't long before his eyelids were too heavy to keep open and they drifted shut. No, he couldn't be out like this at night. He had to keep moving, had to keep trying to reach Ollie. He ran his fingers over the cool surface of the walkie-talkie, remembering when Ollie had gotten these things. Ollie and Ben used to use the walkie-talkie and its twin when they would play outside. The two had a habit of straying from their homes when they played hide-and-seek or cops and robbers, using the walkie-talkies to stay in contact and to radio each other about make-believe crimes. Still, they never wandered too far away from each other. It was how Ben knew that Ollie hadn't wandered too far from him this time. Even with everything going on, Ollie was still Ben's partner.

Ben's eyes shot open and he bolted to his feet with a new idea. Cops and robbers, that was it! If



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anyone could help him, it would be the Lucella Police Department. Ben knew that there was a precinct around here, just a few blocks from where he was. He stuffed the walkie-talkie into his bag. Even if he was out of range now, it was sure to be useful eventually. Lucella was a big island, and Ben would search every inch of it twice if he had to. But with the Infection that turned even the most charming of citizens into violent monsters, Ben was hoping that he would not have to.

Ben ran the rest of the way toward the police station, his heart pounding in his chest and his lungs struggling to pull in as much air as they could. Finally someone who could help him. Ben wasn't a suspicious person by nature, but he slowed his gait as he approached the police station, feeling himself wondering why the lights were off at the precinct when there were still half a dozen cars in the parking lot. He pulled



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open the doors to the station, stepping into the lobby and flicking a nearby light switch. Fluorescent lights buzzed to life, humming steadily as they flooded the room with a sickly glow. The room was wide and rectangular, and blue strips bearing the insignia of the Lucella Police Department adorned the walls. Ben's shoes, squeaking against the black-and-white tile floor, went silent as he stepped onto the deep red carpet that lined the precinct . . . Ben knew that police stations were supposed to make people feel safe, but he couldn't help but feel ill at ease.

