

THE

# Courtesy Chair

Although surrounded by people, all the woman could hear was the dull beating of her heart and the pulse of infected blood being pushed through her body. She was sitting back in the chair, her head tilted forward, her eyes yellow and dull. The woman's baseball cap and glasses allowed her to blend in, but obscured her vision. She was seated in the middle of the eastern courtesy chair. On either side of the chair were large circular containers. Each container held three healthy green plants. The shopping centre looked clean and fresh. Dark patches were absent from the floor and the glass was crystal clear. She surveyed the shopping centre and her eye caught sight of a boy holding his mother's hand as they exited the shop with a trolley full of clean, white, plastic bags. The boy's brilliant white shirt captured the woman's attention. The stream of white light entering the windows above, reflected off his shirt into the woman's tired eyes making it excruciating to look at. He had blonde hair and looked toward his mother with eyes full of trust and respect. The woman began to cough uncontrollably, the taste of blood immediately present in her mouth.

Finding the bright light too intense, the woman now began to rise from the chair. She began to walk further into the shopping centre where the natural light would be less overwhelming. Her legs and feet were swollen and sore as blood began to pool low in her body. She concentrated on walking. She managed to take a step. As she moved painfully she noticed people on either side of the walkway, shopping in the centre. The woman saw the people in fragments, as though she was seeing sepia tinted slides flashing onto a screen; as though the people were frozen in the shopping centre and the woman an onlooker walking through. One of these slides showed a group of female teenagers inspecting a rack of clothes. One girl was now holding a shirt to her body and gathering the others to look at her. They looked up and immediately gave opinionated remarks. Her facial expression changed and she began putting the garment back on the rack.

Noticing the dull sound of the air conditioning, constantly circulated the air within the shopping centre, the woman looked up. Immediately she shielded her eyes as the brightness of the fluorescent lights hit her. The woman's nose began to bleed. She pulled a large blood stained cloth from her jacket and wiped her nose. An older couple, to her right, were looking at a stand at the front of a shop. The male rolled his eyes as his wife, already holding a handbag, rummaged through the stand of black and brown leather. She now looked at a brown bag and placed it over her shoulder, smiled as she inspected the price tag, then moved into the shop where the owner was standing happily awaiting the purchase.

Her irrepressible cough and painful mouth ulcers provided a constant reminder of her fatal disease. It had been just five days earlier when she first contracted the virus and now her body was slowly decaying. Her

dilapidated organs were beginning to bleed. A male staff member approached the woman noticing her run down appearance. He offered to get the woman a chair or drink. The woman refused and cursed the man telling him to leave her alone. Now at the food court people rushed frantically satisfying their exact tastes. A family of four were seated at a nearby table. The two children, a boy and girl, ate their lunch as mum and dad talked quietly in each other's ears. The family reminded the woman of her days at home, stressed to make enough money to feed the children but happy that they were all together. Now they had all been killed. Troops, trying to destroy the transport system, had bombed her home. There was nothing she could do. She felt isolated, unable to retaliate.

Then, as if by miracle, she met two men who offered her a means to strike back. They took advantage of her emotional state. They didn't care about her or her family; they just needed someone to do the dirty work. Her grief clouded her judgement and she agreed to be injected. Now, two weeks later, she is carrying out the most destructive terrorist event in world history. She continued to walk.

Her virus is called Ebula. It is spread through the air and can remain active for days. Her skin is becoming thin. Sores form and then bleed continually. Her vision is deteriorating. She would have been feeling sorry for herself but she had chosen this death, although now she is trying to convince herself that it was a good idea. Was it the right thing to do, killing innocent people? Will anyone know why she has even done this? It is too late now. She felt for the courtesy chair and lowered her aching body. In a few hours the virus will take her, infect every part of her body and slowly destroy the cells which allow her to function. Soon her breathing will become restricted, her kidneys will submit and her liver surrender. Her lungs and heart will be the last to succumb to the force and they will give in slowly. The cells will fight to the end but will undoubtedly be invaded and murdered.

The woman threw off her cap and glasses. In final desperation she reaches out to a passing shopper, a female. She starts to cry uncontrollably. She apologises and asks for forgiveness. The shopper is genuinely concerned and worried for the woman.

"You don't understand, they tricked me", she screams in hysterics as she falls to the ground. The last division of defence has given in. The virus has her.

The shopper feels for the woman's identification but instead finds a card which reads,

'We have the cure, do you have the money?'