

## **CHAPTER 4**

The pandemic was stabilizing, although very little by little. The mutants, increasing in numbers, were becoming the majority. And after the first altercations, and once the perimeter was hermetically closed, the population began to take control, knowing that they were not going to receive help from outside, except for basic supplies.

A governing board was formed, the forces of order were reactivated, the distribution of basic supplies, the hospitals worked again, the basic infrastructures worked again... Of course, the mutated and the unmutated were forced to coexist, knowing that the mutation was going to reach 100% of the population in a matter of time.

At the beginning of the confinement there was a big indignation, and the government was widely criticized for leaving such a large population to their fate. Practically doomed to mutate, but in reality, the ignorance of mutations was so big, that this measure was justified in view of a possible greater evil. These "sacrifices" were not forgotten, and huge amounts of humanitarian aid were sent in order to keep the infrastructure working within the perimeter.

Thanks to international aid, the entire state began day by day to recover a certain normality, always conditioned to the new life that the mutant people had to live.

The days passed and Eva secretly devoured all the news that came from Minnesota. A multitude of scientific studies tried to find the origin of the mutation, the way in which it was spread, what was the transmission vector (was it the air, food, body fluids...?) Nothing made sense.

Although little by little, results were found based on a multitude of studies and trials of dubious legality, testing different compounds that altered certain genetic aspects in stem cells, so that almost by chance they began to find a way to reduce the transmissibility percentage of the mutation.

However, the mutation was still totally irreversible, and furthermore, completely chaotic and without any known pattern. There was still a lot to study.

The scientist Edward Gregen jumped to the front pages of the newspapers when he published his study on a test that could measure the transmission capacity of the mutation. In this way, with a complex DNA analysis, he could predict the existence of a specific gene. According to statistics, if the person had it, it meant that in a period of two or three weeks, the probability of spontaneous mutation was high. In this way, through this analysis, it was possible to predict (with a still very high margin of error) if the subject, even without mutating, could do so in a short period of time.

But normality began to establish as more days passed, other current affairs covered the front pages, and Minnesota began to fade into the background as the mutated people already reached a certain self-sufficiency.

Stores were already open, businesses were running, they were self-sufficient in power and water, and they received large amounts of supplies. The exports passed through a quarantine, but they also started to work. Most of the infrastructures began to adapt to mutated bodies (stairs, furniture, transport, etc...) so a large number of companies appeared dedicated to adapting everything for mutated people.

The economic boom, mainly the result of donations and government aid, made the population (almost 100% mutated) assume their new situation with better spirits.

And so a year passed, a year in which Eva followed the news very closely. She continued searching the forums with new captures, and kept in touch with Alex, who from time to time "sent" her those images that she so appreciated. This led to endless animated conversations about mutated bodies that they both enjoyed so much. Eva tried to discover where the images come from, but Alejandro could not reveal his sources. Perhaps he would put himself in danger, Eva thought, so better not insist.

Eva's passion for new forms, fantasizing about how it would be to be mutated like this, even role-playing mutated characters in a thousand different ways, were just some of the things that Eva secretly shared with Alex. And sometimes she even doubted if he was even more obsessed with the "multi" than she was.

And so time went on. Eva combined her normal life with her secret life, while another year passed by.

Two years after the start of the outbreak, the situation was more than normal. Minnesota wasn't in the news any more. Other news had much more interest at that time, political crises, threats of trade embargoes, fuel shortages, deterioration of certain sectors of the economy... But one day, Minnesota returned to the front pages when in a special council of the United Nations, after much negotiation, it was approved the creation of a new independent state, based on the old state of Minnesota. New Minnesota was born as the first independent state with all its non-human population at 100%. A population composed of pure mutants. The economy had grown, they exported high-quality products, the factories flourished under the protection of both economic and fiscal aid.

Although attempts were made to avoid the creation of tax havens, many companies installed their headquarters there, controlled by mutants, in order to save costs. All this situation encouraged the entire population to hold an independence referendum, which was endorsed by the rest of the country.

The researchers were more successful, and thanks to new processes and a lot of work, it was possible to refine the Gregen method much better, so that the possible transmissibility of the mutagen could be verified with an error of 5%. This invited the possibility, two years later, of being able to open the borders and allow free movement in the close future. However, there was still a lot to do before that. Mainly because of the fear that the majority of the population still had in front of being "infected".

Numerous studies were carried out all over the world, trying to find out what caused the mutations, and more importantly, how to control them. There was a ruthless race to discover this, and numerous pharmaceutical companies and private laboratories spent huge amounts of money to be the first to be able to "tame" the mutagen. Many even resorted to illegal practices. Sometimes an outbreak was detected in a sector of the population on the other side of the world. The authorities violently isolated it, preventing further spread. While the origin of these outbreaks was officially random and spontaneous, it was an open secret that shadowy companies were testing altered mutagen serums to illegally test their reactions on innocent people. Although this was impossible to prove.

In any case, a controlled mutation was never achieved. On the contrary, they were chaotic and violent mutations, with a high degree of transmissibility.

Other times, eccentric millionaires paid millions of dollars for a mutagenic serum that, in theory, should transform him into something he had ordered. But it was never like that. The mutation was 100% random, despite the fact that some scientists claimed otherwise. Still, many rich people were tempted by an eccentric life as a mutant. The problem was that

sometimes, her mutation got out of hand and was highly contagious. And in that moment, the authorities applied the quarantine protocol, which left no stone unturned in order to contain the outbreak.

These outbreaks made Eva excited again. What if it happens near here? Maybe she could be infected! she thought to herself. She even discussed it with Alex, who thought that one thing is to enjoy the mutations of others, and other different to mutate oneself. He argued that because of the randomness of the mutations, the risk of ending up with a body you don't like is very high. He preferred not to take the risk, but she was clear about it. Yes, she wanted to.

Then, just one day after this conversation, a case was detected in her own city!