

## Elegy for the Undead: A Novella

**Matthew Vesely**

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Young husbands learn to say goodbye in *Elegy for the Undead*, the sweetest zombie story you'll ever read.

Jude and Lyle met in high school, when Lyle was out and Jude was not. They reconnected over a quiet walk through the woods during college. Falling in love involved some miscommunication, but they worked their way through to flowering intimacy and a backyard proposal. They're building their dream life together when news of a virus filters through: half a world away, it reanimates the infected, who rush to feed on other humans.

In their happy neighborhood with its accepting neighbors, Jude and Lyle hope they'll be safe. But the blight reaches Philadelphia, decimating its residents. In one bloody, horrible day, Lyle and Jude lose their friends, are cornered with other survivors, and flee. In a sentimental spot, before Jude can reach him: Lyle is bitten. He's given antivirals, but they're a bandage, not a cure: Lyle and Jude have only a few months left before Lyle is wholly lost.

The narrative juxtaposes details of domestic tranquility with its zombie horrors well, as when Jude returns to a destroyed neighborhood with a fellow survivor: it "was almost the American dream: perfect and quiet and wholesome. But everyone on the street was dead." But though there are cinematic scenes of Philadelphia's outbreak, including blazing guns and rushed attacks, Lyle and Jude's love story dominates. Each man shares their perspective in retrospect, lamenting errors and preserving perfect moments in turn. Their young love is affecting, and their devotion to each other transcends the inevitable. Lyle gives his mourning husband the most human gift he can: encouragement to keep on living.

True love can't stop a zombie takeover, though it is a welcome balm, in the bittersweet and restrained novel *Elegy for the Undead*.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2020)

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