



Robert C. O'Brien

# 1 for Zachariah

Ann thought she was  
the only one left alive.  
She was wrong.

"A haunting, fascinating book . . ."—*New York Times*

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# ONE

*May 20*

I am afraid.

Someone is coming.

That is, I think someone is coming, though I am not sure, and I pray that I am wrong. I went into the church and prayed all this morning. I sprinkled water in front of the altar, and put some flowers on it, violets and dog-wood.

But there is smoke. For three days there has been smoke, not like the time before. That time, last year, it rose in a great cloud a long way away, and stayed in the sky for two weeks. A forest fire in the dead woods, and



then it rained and the smoke stopped. But this time it is a thin column, like a pole, not very high.

And the column has come three times, each time in the late afternoon. At night I cannot see it, and in the morning it is gone. But each afternoon it comes again, and it is nearer. At first it was behind Claypole Ridge, and I could see only the top of it, the smallest smudge. I thought it was a cloud, except that it was too gray, the wrong color, and then I thought: there are no clouds anywhere else. I got the binoculars and saw that it was narrow and straight; it was smoke from a small fire. When we used to go in the truck, Claypole Ridge was fifteen miles, though it looks closer, and the smoke was coming from behind that.

Beyond Claypole Ridge there is Ogdentown, about ten miles farther. But there is no one left alive in Ogdentown.

I know, because after the war ended, and all the telephones went dead, my father, my brother Joseph and Cousin David went in the truck to find out what was happening, and the first place they went was Ogdentown. They went early in the morning; Joseph and David were really excited, but Father looked serious.

When they came back, it was dark. Mother had been worrying—they took so long—so we were glad to see the truck lights finally coming over Burden Hill, two miles away. They looked like beacons. They were the only lights anywhere, except in the house—no other cars

had come down all day. We knew it was the truck because one of the lights, the left one, always blinked when it went over a bump. It came up to the house, and they got out; the boys weren't excited anymore. They looked scared, and my father looked sick. Maybe he was beginning to be sick, but mainly I think he was distressed.

My mother looked up at him as he climbed down.

"What did you find?"

He said: "Bodies. Just dead bodies. They're all dead."

"All?"

We went inside the house where the lamps were lit, the two boys following, not saying anything. My father sat down. "Terrible," he said, and again, "terrible, terrible. We drove around, looking. We blew the horn. Then we went to the church and rang the bell. You can hear it five miles away. We waited two hours, but nobody came. I went in a couple of houses—the Johnsons', the Peters'—they were all in there, all dead. There were dead birds all over the streets."

My brother Joseph began to cry. He was fourteen. I think I had not heard him cry for six years.

### *May 21*

It is coming closer. Today it was almost on top of the ridge, though not quite, because when I looked with the binoculars I could not see the flame, but still only the smoke—rising very fast, not far above the fire. I know where it is: at the crossroads. Just on the other side of



# IS ANYONE out there?

Ann Burden is sixteen years old and completely alone. The world as she once knew it is gone, ravaged by a nuclear war that has taken everyone from her. For the past year, she has lived in a remote valley with no evidence of any other survivors.

But the smoke from a distant campfire shatters Ann's solitude. Someone else is still alive and making his way toward the valley. Who is this man? What does he want? Can he be trusted? Both excited and terrified, Ann soon realizes there may be worse things than being the last person on Earth.



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