

# Dead South

The Zombie Apocalypse in London

David Brinson

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For the three most amazing people in my life. My wife, my mum and my sister.

## *Acknowledgments*

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## *Chapter 1*

My day started with a jolt when Troy, my fawn greyhound, licked me awake. It was seven am and he wanted his breakfast. I'd had a bad night's sleep and was still pretty tired, but thanks to his prompting I managed to extract myself from my warm bed and lumber into the kitchen. He waited impatiently by his bowl as I prepared his food, and then he forgot all about me as he set about devouring it. My hot shower livened me up a little, which was lucky, as Troy was back on my case the second that I was dressed. It was seven-thirty am and he wanted his walk.

We walked down the two flights of stairs to the block's entry hall, where I was confronted by a God-awful smell. Now one of the problems with living in a block of flats is that you can have some seriously strange people as your neighbours. My block was no different and our resident crackpot was a middle-aged gentleman called Mr Trotter, and God-awful smells emanating from his flat were, sadly for us, nothing new. So I didn't really pay it much attention as I left the block.

It was a beautiful November morning. It was crisp and fresh and there was not a hint of moisture in the air. Thinking about it now, it may not have been that fresh but anything would have been bliss compared to the stench that was coming from Mr Trotter's.

When we got back to the block's front door I held my breath as I ran past Mr Trotter's and up to our own flat on the second floor. As we entered the flat my wife, Sarah, was emerging from the bedroom. Sarah is quite simply stunning; I love her long brown hair and her beautiful brown eyes. Troy walked over to her and licked her hand to say hello. She rubbed his face for a few seconds before he forgot about us both, went to his bed in the living room and passed out.

"Worn him out again, have you?" she said to me with a smile.

I just nodded and shrugged my shoulders. "You know what he is like, anything more than a five minute stroll and he is exhausted!"

I approached to give her a kiss and a cuddle goodbye, she sniffed the air. "What is that?"

"Trotter."

"That explains it," she said, laughing. She gave me a huge hug, kissed me on the lips and I left for work.

As I was getting into my car I saw one of my neighbours from the other block, Mrs Johnson, coming out of her garage. Mrs Johnson is in her forties and is usually dressed immaculately,

however, this morning she looked dishevelled as she stumbled out towards me. I thought it was best to leave her be, so I just waved as I drove out of the large communal car park.

My drive to work is a short one really; it only takes about fifteen minutes to get to Lewisham. I put my car radio on and tuned into The Breakfast Show on Talk Sport. Now the show is usually full of high jinks, and concentrates on the previous day's sporting headlines. But today was very different; instead they were talking about a killing spree that was carried out on the Kent coast in Margate. Scores of men, women and children had been found dead in a part of the town that had a high proportion of Eastern European immigrants and the attack was thought to be race-related.

I listened intently, sickened by the grim nature of the crime. I even stayed in my car when I got to work because I wanted to hear more. In fact it was only the high pitched whine of my mobile phone that made me turn it off.

I checked the screen and saw it was my brother.

"Morning, Steve, is everything alright?" I asked.

"It's all good, thanks. Just wondering whether you'd heard the news about Margate?"

"I'm just listening to it. Unbelievable."

"To think Mum used to take us down there every summer."

"I know. What's the world coming to?"

"Well it's a bloody cesspit, isn't it? Let's just hope they catch whoever did it soon."

"I'm sure they will. You can't get away with that sort of thing in this day and age."

I ended the call as I got out of the car. My short walk to the office was interrupted by my friend Phil skipping towards me clutching a pink piece of paper. "Top of the morning to you, Dean."

"I see your Irish accent becomes more prominent when you're in a good mood."

"And I still see that you're trying to hang on to your youth by driving a ten-year-old red sports car."

"Tut, tut, Phil. You know better than to try and knock the Celica. And anyway I hardly think that thirty-two is old."

He dusted some imaginary lint from the shoulder of his black jacket and fixed me with a cheesy grin. "I wasn't knocking the Celica!"

I laughed as I looked him up and down. His grey quiff was looking particularly perky. "That's rich, considering you've got to be about twenty years older than me!"

"Age is just a number. You're only as old as you feel."

I pointed at the piece of paper in his hand and slowly started to nod. "Anyway, your happiness to cockiness ratio can only mean one thing. You had a winner last night, didn't you?"

"I might have. Maybe a rather large accumulator came in. Let's just say that Arsenal, West Brom and Nottingham Forest all winning went down particularly well for me."

"Good for you, mate. How much did you win?"

He theatrically looked over both of his shoulders and took a step closer to me. "About three grand."

My eyes nearly burst out of their sockets. "Three grand!"

"Carla practically wet herself when I told her!"

"Wow! That's—"

"What are you two whispering about?" I heard a familiar voice say.

I turned to see Colin Bishop, the Council's Health and Safety Manager, walking towards us.

"Nothing much," I said.

Colin was a nice guy whose heart was in the right place, but he was a serious pedant with probably the most monotonous voice you could ever hear. "Why aren't you two wearing your high-visibility vests?"

Phil winked at me. "Well you know, Colin; we were just looking for you. We seem to have misplaced them. Any chance that we could borrow one of yours?"

I suppressed a grin as Colin tugged the bottom of his high-vis vest. It was his most cherished possession. He was so attached to it that he would even wear it down the pub after work. He ran his fingers over his bald head and took a deep breath. "That's very—"

His sentence was interrupted by a loud crash.



Colin nearly jumped out of his skin. "Blimey! What was that?"

A group of about six dustmen ran through the car park and charged past us. They were a blur of blue uniforms and yellow high-visibility vests. I don't know what came over the three of us, but we followed them. We ran along the concrete path and headed towards the front gate. A crowd of dustman had already gathered outside the depot. I couldn't see what was going on, so I worked my way through the bodies.

Phil got to the front before me. "Holy Mary Mother of God!"

Even now I still can't believe what I saw. One of the big blue twenty-six tonne dustcarts had ploughed into a house on the road outside of the depot. A girl in a McDonald's uniform was crushed between the truck and the house.

"Call 999!" I screamed.

I ran towards the trapped girl. Before I could get there the truck door flew open and the driver jumped out of the vehicle and in front of me.

"Don't go anywhere near her!" he shrieked in a Jamaican accent.

"What the fuck are you saying? You've probably killed her!" I shouted.

"Man, she crazy. She try to get in the cab and eat Jermaine!"

Another two dustman, one of whom I assumed was Jermaine, exited from the cab and shouted in a heavy south London accent, "It's fucking true. The crazy bitch scratched my face and then tried to bite me up. I'd be dead if Lionel hadn't run the slag down!" He looked at the final member of his crew. "Tell him, Sid. Tell him!"

Before Sid could say a word, a man in a McDonald's uniform with five stars on his badge came up behind Jermaine. He lunged at Jermaine's back and pushed him to the ground. Within the blink of an eye, Five Star bit into the back of his neck. Time seemed to stand still as Jermaine howled with pain.

Sid bent down and tried to pull Five Star off him. He was a big strong lad, but he couldn't shift him. Lionel pulled a fire extinguisher out of the dustcart and started beating it against Five Star's body. The body blows got Five Star's attention and he turned to Lionel. Five Star leapt at him, but before he could reach him, Sid clubbed his head with a stray brick that had come loose from the house. Five Star did not have a chance to react. I will never forget the truly horrific sound that the brick made against his head. His skull collapsed before my eyes and he dropped to the ground.

I'm ashamed to say it; but seeing Jermaine's blood trickle out of Five Star's mouth paralysed me with fear. Before you judge me and say that I should have helped stop Five Star, let me explain something to you. In my old life I had always seen myself as a lover not a fighter. I had never been in a fight and the closest I ever came to one was when a couple of my school friends got into a punch-up behind the school bike sheds. And let me tell you, that is no preparation for seeing one man try and eat another.

God knows how much time had passed, but I finally pulled myself together when I saw that Jermaine was still breathing. I threw my bag to the ground, turned around and looked at the stunned crowd. I fixed my gaze upon Colin Bishop.

"Take off your vest."

"What?"

"Colin, give me your high-vis vest!"

He looked at me blankly, but the force of my stare compelled him to take it off and give it to me. I rolled it up into a ball and stuffed it at the back of Jermaine's neck. More garments were thrown at me and I managed to reduce the bleeding to a trickle. I stayed with him until the paramedics arrived and then I just sat on the floor covered in his blood. Whilst the paramedics attempted to save his life, I chastised myself for not helping sooner. I made a promise to myself that I would never freeze again.

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Thirty minutes or so later I stared at myself in the large mirror that dominated the Gents toilets. The harsh fluorescent lighting did me absolutely no favours. My thick brown hair was all over the place and Jermaine's blood had dried all over my face. I looked a mess.

Phil put his hand on my shoulder. "You'd better clean yourself up."

I nodded.

My coat was okay, but my shirt was ruined. Trust me to wear a white shirt on the day that I was going to try and stop somebody from bleeding to death. I took it off and reluctantly dumped it in the bin.

“Don’t worry about the shirt. Sanjay’s going to bring you something to hide your modesty.”

“Thanks.”

I scrubbed Jermaine’s blood off my face, hands and forearms. Red water splashed all over the mirror and a red film covered the white porcelain sink. I used my hands to try and wipe it off, but I just made it worse.

“Don’t worry, Dean. That’s not your job.”

Sanjay appeared in the doorway and handed me a blue t-shirt. “Cover yourself up, mate.”

I smiled weakly at him. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome,” he said, stroking his beard.

“Do you know if Jermaine is going to be okay?”

Sanjay’s eyes darted between Phil and me. “Well, the paramedics managed to stabilise him, but he did lose a lot of blood. It’s touch and go.”

I looked at the floor and pinched the bridge of my nose. “Yeah, I thought so.”

“Dean,” Phil said. “He would be dead already if you didn’t act.”

I nodded. “You know what, guys; I’m not really in the mood for work now. I think I’m just going to head home.”

“Yeah, yeah of course. I will square it away with the boss.”

“Thanks. Oh, and if you hear anything about Jermaine, can you let me know? If not, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“No problem.”

A large group of onlookers had gathered outside of the depot. People from the local community and officers of the Council gawked side by side at the crashed dustcart. It took me a good few minutes to try and manoeuvre the car around it all and when I did, I saw Sid and Lionel sitting on a wall about fifty metres away talking to a female PCSO, who was writing in her notebook.

I couldn’t help myself, I had to pull over and find out what was going on.

Sid noticed me as I approached them. "He's the one who tried to save Jermaine. He saw it all too."

The PCSO turned to me and looked at her notes. She was tall and thin and must have been over six foot, because she towered over me. "You're Dean Baker."

"Yes I am."

Her skin was pale and her features were very severe. "Someone will be in touch with you for a formal statement over the next few days."

"Is that all?"

She ignored me and looked at Sid and Lionel. "Thank you for your time, gentleman. I hope your friend is okay."

She walked off in a hurry, leaving the three of us together.

"That was odd," I said.

Lionel started to fiddle with one of his dreadlocks. "Rather a quick five minutes, than have to go down to the police station."

"Five minutes!" I said. "She took both your statements down in five minutes?"

Sid put his giant hand on my shoulder. "As Lionel just said, better than having to go down to the station."

"Was she the only person that spoke to you about it?"

Sid nodded his large head.

"But she was only a PCSO. What's that all about?"

"I'm not a copper, son, how am I supposed to know?"

"And she didn't once mention going down to the station?"

"She said it was clearly self-defence."

I looked back at where the dustcart had crushed the woman against the house. Her body was no longer there, but the vehicle still was. "No offence, lads, but how was that self-defence?"

"Believe me, Dean. It was self-defence."

Lionel got up from the wall. "Look, Dean. Me thankful for what you did for Jermaine and all, but me no want to talk about it no more."

"Sorry, guys, it's not that I don't believe you or anything. I'm just a bit shocked really. Two people are dead and another person is in critical condition and the police don't seem too worried by it."

Lionel shrugged his large shoulders.

I shook my head. "Real police work isn't anything like they show on the telly, is it?"

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I am a happy-go-lucky kind of guy and I rarely let life get me down, so I found it quite easy to put the strangeness of the morning to one side as I drove home with Green Day blaring out of the speakers. I actually started to feel pretty good about saving Jermaine's life by the time I got back to the block. Not even the smell emanating from Mr Trotter's flat could put me off. I held my breath as I ran up the stairs and opened my front door.

Troy raced up to me as soon as I stepped over the threshold. I could hear Sarah pottering around in the kitchen.

"I need to speak to Mr Trotter about the smell," I said. "I think it's getting worse."

"You're home early," she said as she walked towards me. "What the hell has happened to you?"

"It's a long story."

We moved into the living room and sat on our plush brown leather sofa. Troy lay by my feet on the thick dark rug. "I don't know where to start."

Sarah pushed a lock of her long brown hair behind her ear and smiled at me. "Why don't you try the beginning?"

I laughed. "Yeah, good idea. Well I was talking to Phil and Colin in the car park and we heard a loud crash. We ran to see what was going on and we saw a woman crushed between one of our dustcarts and a house."

"Oh my God! What did you do?"

“Well, I tried to help her, but the dustmen stopped me. And before I knew it another man was attacking this guy Jermaine, who was one of the dustmen that stopped me.”

Sarah took a deep intake of breath and covered her mouth with her hand. “Why?”

“I have no idea. He just started biting him. He was like an animal. They tried to pull him off and they ended up killing him.”

“They really killed him?”

“Yeah, right in front of my eyes.”

“Then what happened?”

“Jermaine was bleeding really badly from his neck, so I tried to help him. I managed to stop the bleeding and then the paramedics took over.”

“Oh my God! Oh my God! Are you okay?”

“I think so. I was a bit shaken by it, that’s why I left work early. But I think I’m alright.”

She hugged me. “Okay, good. I’m glad... What did the police say?”

“The police said it was self-defence. They said that I might need to make a statement at some point. But it looks like the case is closed.”

“Really?”

I nodded.

“Well as long as you’re okay, then that’s all I care about.”

“Yeah, I’ll be fine. I just hope that Jermaine is okay. Phil said he’d call if he hears anything about him. But whatever happens, I’m sure I’ll find out tomorrow.”

Sarah got up from the sofa and gave me a kiss on the cheek. “I’m going to do a bit of lunch. Just try and relax.”

I put my feet up on the sofa and put the TV on. Every channel had the Margate killing spree on as the lead story; I flicked through all of the stations and finally settled on the BBC as it had a breaking story.

“Sarah, come and see this.”

She came into the room just as the seasoned newscaster came back on. He dominated the screen in his black suit and red tie, and his solid Home Counties accent radiated professionalism.

“The BBC has obtained footage from a local resident of this morning’s events in Margate. Please be warned that the upcoming images are quite disturbing and they are not suitable for children or anyone of a sensitive disposition.”

A grainy image of the inside of a window filled the screen. The picture was not steady and it was clear that the person recording it was shaking. The camera juddered across the street to a row of red brick terraced houses. The image suddenly blurred and refocused on a half-naked man in an apron running along the pavement. He jumped onto the back of another man in chef whites. The picture zoomed in on the half-naked man and I clearly saw him bite into the chef’s neck.

I pointed at the screen. “That’s just what happened to Jermaine!”

The chef fell to his knees and the half-naked man moved on to someone else. If I was engrossed by the radio, I was bloody well mesmerised by the TV and the images that were unfolding on it. It was like something out of a horror film. It didn’t matter how bad the footage got, I just could not look away.

Eventually the clip ended and the screen was replaced by a very solemn-looking newscaster. “We can now go straight to Margate for a live press conference with Cyrus Green, the Chief Superintendent of Kent County Constabulary.”

The newsman was replaced by a very serious looking police officer. He was dressed in full uniform and had short grey hair. He addressed the assorted press from a wooden podium.

He pointed into the audience and spoke in a crisp, clear voice. “Go ahead.”

“Thank you, Chief Superintendent. Tom Sharp, Thanet Times. Can you assure the people of Margate that they are safe?”

The police officer fixed the room with a stern look. “Of course they are safe. This was a one-off crime that was perpetrated by a madman. Whom, I hasten to add, we have already apprehended.”

“Do you know what caused him to do it?”

“I’m just a policeman, not a psychiatrist. It’s not for me to speculate. What I can say is that drugs may have been involved. We have him in custody, and the only thing that is for certain is that he can’t hurt anybody else.”

“Niall Phillips, BBC. Judging by the footage that we have all now seen, it is clear that he was under the influence of something. Are the rumours of him perhaps taking a new amphetamine true?”

“It’s too early to speculate.”

“But, is it not true that you likened him to the Miami Face Eater in your team briefing earlier?”

The policeman’s brow furrowed. “Where did you hear that?”

“You know I can’t reveal a source.”

The policeman sighed. “We are looking into that possibility. It could have been an extreme allergic reaction to a new amphetamine. The reaction causes a substantial increase in body temperature.”

“Would this explain why the attacker was half-naked?”

“We believe so. The individual literally feels like they are burning from the inside and this can lead them to take off some of their clothes. The drug essentially combines all of the worst attributes of meth, cocaine, PCP and LSD.”

“But why did he try to eat the other man?”

The chief superintendent looked like a rabbit in the headlights. He glanced at his unseen entourage, but nobody came to his aid.

“Chief Superintendent?”

“We have not worked that out yet. The man is now undertaking a psychiatric evaluation.”

“Do you know where this drug has originated from?”

“We have located the drugs and they are no longer in circulation.”

“But what about the other drugs that were sold—”

Finally a press officer in a blue and white pinstriped suit ran to the podium and whispered into the chief superintendent’s ear. The chief superintendent rushed off the stage, leaving the press officer at the podium. “The chief superintendent has been called away to an urgent matter. I am afraid that we can take no further questions.”

I looked at Sarah. “I’m telling you that was just what happened to Jermaine!”



“I can’t believe that those drugs can make people eat each other.”

“Well I suppose that adds a whole new meaning to having the munchies!”

Sarah shook her head and allowed herself a small giggle. “Dean, that is awful!”

## *Chapter 2*

After a restless night I got out of bed at around six am with a banging headache. I went into the kitchen and headed straight to the medicine drawer. I dry-swallowed a couple of painkillers and made myself a cup of tea. Troy seemed to be a bit confused when I barged into his bedroom (our living room) an hour earlier than he had anticipated. After a good ten minutes the tablets managed to take care of my headache.

I ate a little breakfast and passed out on the sofa next to Troy. I only woke up when Sarah came into the room two hours later.

“Are you okay?” she asked me.

“Yeah, I just didn’t get much sleep. Yesterday must have got to me more than I thought.”

“Don’t go into work, if you’re not up to it. I’m sure they will understand.”

“No, I’ll be fine.”

I ran into the bathroom and literally got through the Three S’s (Shit, Shave and Shower) in record time and was out the door in fifteen minutes flat. I flew down the stairs and exited the building. As soon as the door closed behind me I remembered that I wanted a word with Mr Trotter. So I went back inside, held my breath and gently tapped on his door. My gentle tap nudged his door open a crack.

I pushed the door with a little more force and it creaked as it opened. I took one step into the hall and gently called out, “Mr Trotter, it’s Dean from upstairs. The door’s unlocked, are you okay?”

I heard nothing, so I took a few more steps into the flat. All of the doors leading off from the hallway were closed. The place was filthy, the walls had marks all over them and the hallway was filled with items of old electrical equipment and bags of fetid potatoes (an odd combination, I know). Imagine the worst smell you have ever smelt and double it, no scrap that, triple it. It was as if someone had eaten a rancid doner kebab, thrown it up, taken a dump on it and then left it to stew in the sun for a year.

I stood outside the door for what I assumed was the master bedroom and listened. I couldn’t hear anything. I lightly tapped on the door. There was no answer. I tapped again with a little bit more force. No answer again. I gently turned the knob and slowly opened the door. I took a single step in and looked around. The room was filled with dirty old clothes and had a filthy mattress

tucked up against the wall. I couldn't believe the amount of clothing that he had in there and then I couldn't believe that he seemed to always wear the same things every day. I stepped out of the room and closed the door behind me.

I walked across the hallway, navigated a heavy looking VCR player and stopped outside the bathroom. I tapped on the door once, then twice. Nothing. I turned the knob, opened the door and looked in the room. There was just a dirty bathroom suite and about two hundred rolls of toilet paper. I suppose you can say what you want about Mr Trotter but at least he wiped his bum.

After coming up blank twice I didn't bother to knock on the living room door. I just turned the knob and pushed it open. The stench instantly cranked up a few more notches and I started to gag. The room was filled with junk. Stuff was piled so high, it was as if he had constructed a corridor within the room and within half a second I had seen several newspaper mountains, stacks of old cathode-ray TVs and piles of rusty old tin cans. But what was truly nasty, and what I thought was probably the cause of the foul smell, was that every empty bit of floor space and every miniscule surface was covered with half-eaten, decomposing fast food—pizza, KFC, McDonalds. Name a fast food chain and there was food from them in that room. Maggots were everywhere. I felt dirty just standing in the place. I ventured into the corridor, took a couple of turns and then I saw him. Mr Trotter was standing in a small clearing beside a particularly tall stack of pizza boxes. He had his back to me but it looked like he was furiously eating something.

"Mr Trotter, sorry to bother you, it's Dean from upstairs. The door was ajar and—"

He turned around. He looked awful. His skin was grey and mottled and his nose and mouth were covered in blood. It looked like he'd gone a few rounds with Lennox Lewis. But as bad as he looked, he still had his favourite Thomas the Tank Engine baseball cap on at the exact same jaunty angle that it always was.

"Blimey! Mr Trotter, are you okay?"

He started to moan.

"Obviously not! Let me call you an ambulance."

I pulled out my mobile phone and he started shuffling towards me. "It's alright, Mr Trotter, they won't be long." I looked at my phone and started to dial '999'. "Oh bugger. I don't have any reception. I will just go upstairs and make the call for you. Okay?"

I put my phone back in my pocket and casually looked up at him. He was now less than a metre away and coming dangerously close to entering my personal space. "I'll be quick, Mr Trotter. I promise."

He bared his teeth at me and took another step closer. It was then that I noticed that his eyes were completely black. There was something really wrong with him. "Back in a tick."

He didn't say anything; he just continued to moan, so I took a step backwards. He mirrored my step backwards with a step forward of his own. He was a small man and could easily navigate this junkyard maze. I'm not a particularly big man myself. I'm only five foot ten inches and weigh about twelve stone. But that was too big for me to turn around without entering the small clearing first and getting closer to him, and to be fair I wasn't going to do that. I didn't want to catch anything. So, if I wanted to go back through the corridor, I needed to shift my arse into reverse. I went to take another step back but my left foot had kind of stuck to a congealed Big Mac, which was itself stuck to the maggot-infested carpet.

"Ah that's disgusting."

He moaned this time even louder, stopping me in my tracks. I looked up and I saw his blood-stained mouth wide open and his outstretched arms trying to grab me. Now, it's not that I froze, it's more that it took my mind a second or two to process what was happening. He got hold of my jacket and tried to pull me towards him.

"What the fuck!" I shouted as he tried to bite into my neck.

I pushed him off me as I yanked my foot up off the Big Mac and I ended up stumbling into a newspaper tower. Mr Trotter wasn't deterred by my push and he came straight back at me. I regained my footing and kept my back against the wall; I moved crab-like along the makeshift corridor and stumbled back into the turn behind me. I looked over my shoulder and could see that I was nearly in the hall.

I was going to get out, I was home free, but then I slipped. I slipped on a fucking banana skin. If I didn't think I was going to die, I might have laughed. I mean what a cliché; I slipped on the only bit of fruit this geezer had ever eaten. He turned the corner and was now only a few feet away from me. I scooted backwards, dragging my backside on the floor. I felt rancid food go up my shirt and maggots fall down into my jeans. It felt like I was in Hell. My back bashed into the door, I turned onto my hands and knees and crawled out of the room.

He never stopped, he kept on coming.

I just wanted to get out of the flat, shut the door behind me and go upstairs as quickly as I could. As I said earlier, I'm a lover not a fighter.

I lost another second as I bumped into the wall trying to get back onto my feet. And he was now gaining on me. He was that close that I'm sure I could feel his putrid breath on the back of my neck. I lurched forward and just missed a stack of TVs. I eyed a seventeen-inch Panasonic one as I went past and I was suddenly overcome by some kind of primordial urge. The TV was at waist height and perfect for me to pick up. I stopped in my tracks, lifted it and turned around to face him. He didn't stop coming so I raised the TV as high as I could. As he took another step forward I smashed it over the crown of his head. But it didn't stop him and although he could no longer see me, he still tried to grab me.

I looked around the room and noticed the stray VCR player from earlier. I quickly picked up the heavy machine and launched it right into his left knee. The impact must have shattered his kneecap into a thousand pieces as it gave way from under him and he clattered to the ground. As he hit the deck, the TV fell off his head, but his beloved baseball cap somehow stayed in place. Thick bloody goo started to ooze out of his neck, but it didn't stop him and he kept on crawling towards me. I was shaking, adrenaline surging through my body; I picked up the VCR player again and I smashed it into his skull. Two times, three times, again and again and again and finally his skull caved in. His body went limp.

I staggered out of the flat, I was covered in filth and I was still shaking. My head felt light and I vomited all over the communal entrance. I walked up the stairs and stood outside my flat. I couldn't steady my hand to put the key in the lock. I banged on the door and called for Sarah. A moment passed before the door opened. She looked at me. I was crying uncontrollably and tears were streaming down my cheeks.

Her face contorted as she said, "Dean, what's happened?"

I just stood in the hallway sobbing. Sarah dragged me inside the flat and Troy came trotting into the hall to investigate. I was covered in a foul combination of rotten food, maggots and blood. I must have stunk. I wanted so badly to explain what had happened but I couldn't get the words out. Sarah was panicking, but in fairness she managed to hold it together. She looked me in the eyes.

"Dean, are you hurt?"

I shook my head.

It might have taken a few seconds, but I slowly started to regain my composure. When I did I realised that I didn't know how to explain what had just happened. I mean, how do you tell your wife that you just killed your next door neighbour?

"I killed him," I finally managed to say.

"What?"

"But I don't think it was him."

"You're not making any sense."

"I went in his flat to talk to him about the smell. But he came after me."

"What?"

"I smashed his head in."

She gasped.

"I had to. It was either him or me."

She was stunned. Plain and simple. But as she stood there dumbfounded, it all started to make sense to me. "He was already dead."

"How can you kill someone who is already dead? He was either dead or he wasn't!"

"I think he was a zombie."

"What?"

"His eyes were black, his skin was grey and his face was covered in blood."

"Dean. You need to sit down. You're in shock."

"No I'm not... well, I might be. But I'm right. It all makes sense, especially after yesterday. The bloke from McDonald's biting Jermaine. Trotter just trying to eat me."

To Sarah's massive credit she didn't shout at me, she didn't slap me round the face and tell me to get a hold of myself, nor did she make an immediate call to the men in white coats to have me taken away. She just stood there staring at me. "Was it self-defence?"

"Of course it was. He tried to rip my neck out with his teeth!"

She nodded. "Okay, you need to call the police and explain exactly what has happened."

"They will never believe me."

"It doesn't matter if they believe he was a zombie or not, does it? They just need to believe that you were in danger and protecting yourself. Like the two dustman yesterday. Remember?"

"You're right," I said, walking into the living room to make the call.

"Stay there. I'll get the phone. You're not taking another step in here covered in that filth."

Sarah came back clutching the phone and as I took a step forward to meet her, I felt a clump of squashed maggots and congealed meat fall from my bum cheek and slide down my leg. My throat instantly filled with bile. With a concerted effort I managed to swallow it down as she handed the phone to me. I dialled '999' and waited. After three rings my call was answered. I was connected to a recorded message.

A lady's voice simply stated, "All operators are busy at present, please try again later."

"Holy shit!"

"What?"

"It's a recorded message. A bloody recorded message!"

"Try again. It must be a mistake or something."

I did as she asked and again the phone rang through to the recorded message. This time I held it to her ear. "Oh my God! What's going on?"

"Zombies, Sarah! It's got to be. Think about it. Think about what's just happened."

"I don't know. It all seems a little farfetched."

"I know it does."

"Anything could have happened. It could be a terrorist attack or something."

"If Mr Trotter hadn't just tried to eat me, I would probably agree. But I'm telling you that he did and I'm lucky to be alive."

She didn't respond, she just looked at me. I mean really looked at me. Did she think I was mad? Maybe I was. Eventually she nodded. "Okay, let's say it's zombies. What are we going to do?"

“We need to warn as many people as we can. Call your mum and dad and make sure they’re okay. I’ll call my side of the family.”

I frantically tried to call my mum, but I couldn’t get through to her. I also tried my brothers, Pete and Steve, and my sister, Emma. But I had no joy with any of them. I didn’t give up and after a good ten minutes of trying I eventually got through to my mum.

“Dean, is that you?”

“Oh thank God. I’ve been trying to call you for ages. I think there’s something wrong with the phones.”

“It must be your one. I’ve got full reception.”

“Well anyway, don’t worry about that now. You’ve got to listen to me.”

“You sound panicked, Dean. What’s wrong?”

“Mum, something really bad is happening.” I paused a second. Would she believe me if I told her what I thought was really going on? “Look, I can’t really explain it. But people are attacking each other for no reason and I don’t want anything happening to you. Promise me that you won’t go out today.”

“Okay, no problem.”

“That’s great, Mum. Just sit tight.”

“I’ll just pop out to the Co-op to get a chicken for dinner and then I’ll be right back.”

“Mum, please! I need you to take this seriously. Bad stuff is happening out there. Someone I know just got attacked.”

“Are they okay?”

“Just; but they nearly weren’t. Please listen to me about this.”

“Okay. Well I suppose Graeme can make do with pork chops.”

“Good. Good. Tell Graeme to go and get Nan.”

“You just said to not go outside.”

“Mum, she only lives next door. Just tell him to be quick and not to speak to anyone.”



“What about Emma and your brothers?”

“I’ve been trying to call them as well. They need to stay home too.”

“They’ve probably all left for work already.”

“Perhaps. But we still need to warn them. Can you try too? One of us should be able to get through to them. And anyway Pete and Steve are more likely to listen to you than they are to me.”

“If you really think it’s necessary. Of course I will. Now try and relax. I promise that we won’t go anywhere.”

I breathed a huge sigh of relief as I ended the call. Speaking to Mum had really put my mind at ease. I looked over at Sarah to see how she was getting on. “Have you got through to them yet?”

“No, it’s still not connecting. What are we going to do?”

“It’s okay. Just keep trying. Don’t give up. I’m going to try Emma again. It will be okay.”

I scrolled to my sister’s number in my mobile phone and hit the call button. I impatiently tapped my right foot as I waited for it to connect. It took about twenty seconds but eventually the phone started to ring.

“Morning, Dean. This is early.”

“Where are you? Are you and Jeff okay?”

“We’re both at the bank, just waiting for a meeting to start. What’s wrong? You don’t sound yourself.”

“I know this might sound a bit weird, but something strange is going on. How is everything where you are?”

“Everything’s fine.”

“Thank God.”

“Although thinking about it, it is a little odd around here. There aren’t that many people in yet and my meeting is running about twenty minutes behind schedule. This place is usually full of people by now and things do normally run like clockwork around here.”

“Shit. It sounds like something’s wrong where you are too.”

“Dean, what do you mean?”

“Okay,” I said, blowing out my cheeks. “I got attacked earlier.”

“Oh my God! Are you okay?”

“I am. But I nearly wasn’t.”

“Do you know who did it?”

“Kind of... you know Mr Trotter, don’t you?”

“What, the smelly little man who lives downstairs to you?”

“Well it was him, but it wasn’t him.”

“What does that mean?”

“I know that this is going to sound crazy, but I think he was a zombie.”

“Dean, is this some kind of a wind-up?”

“I promise you that I am telling the truth, okay. He tried to eat me, for God’s sake.”

“Like what happened to the people in Margate?”

“Yes exactly, it was just like that. I need you two to leave work as soon as you can. Come straight to mine. It isn’t safe to be out.”

After a few seconds she started to laugh. “You nearly had me. Very good. You know we can’t leave work. It’s not like working for the Council up here, you know.”

“For fuck’s sake, Emma, this isn’t a joke! Just leave and get to me as quickly as you can. Don’t go on the train, just jump in a black cab and come now. It will be quicker for you to come to me from London Bridge than it will be for you to go all the way home.”

“Dean, are you being serious?”

“Of course I am. I’ve never been more serious in all my life. This isn’t a wind-up and I’m not bull-shitting you. Please listen to me, okay?”

“Okay, okay. I believe you. We’re leaving now.”

“Thank you. Just be careful. Don’t hang around, and get straight into a cab.”

I got off the phone at the same time that Sarah finally managed to get through to her parents. Relief instantly cascaded all over her face, but it didn't take long for it to be replaced by dread.

"Dean! Dean!"

"What's wrong?"

"Dad's just said that some strange people are trying to get into the house."

Without thinking I said, "Tell him to lock the doors and shut the windows. I'm on my way."