

ZOMB
FAMILY
DARRREN
SHAN

SIMON AND SCHUSTER

ZOM-B

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ZOMB
FAMILY
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SIMON AND SCHUSTER

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For:

BOS – welcome to the Family!

OBE (Order of the Bloody Entrails) to:

Becky Peacock – for braving warehouse hell.

Every. Single. Time.

My Family of editors:

Venetia Gosling

Elv Moody

Kate Sullivan

Christopher Little Agency – we are Family!

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THEN . . .

Becky Smith's father was a bullying racist. For the sake of a quiet life, she never challenged him. But when he made her sacrifice a black boy at her school to a pack of zombies, she finally rebelled and severed the ties between them.

B was turned into a zombie shortly after fleeing from her father. Several months later she recovered her senses in an underground facility, where she was held prisoner with the zom heads, a pack of conscious zombies. A soldier called Josh Massoglia was in command until the complex was invaded by a crazy clown and his army of mutants. The psychotic Mr Dowling set B free, then went on his merry way.

After another run-in with the clown on the streets of London, in which he again saved her life, B joined the Angels, a group of revitalised teenagers working under the guidance of the century-old Dr Oystein to defeat Mr Dowling and restore order to the world. After an uncomfortable period of adjustment, she started to get along with the Angels, except for Rage, a cynical hulk with selfish, murderous tendencies. She could never bring herself to trust Rage, but tolerated him because Dr Oystein saw promise in the brute.

Dr Oystein wasn't the only person trying to restore control. The members of the Board – a collection of billionaires and politicians – were trying to establish a new order in which they could rule over the living survivors. B got on the wrong side of one of them, the despicable Dan-Dan, a giggling, child-killing monster. He was in league with the mysterious Owl Man, an ex-associate of Dr Oystein's, and the pair were backed by a menacing offshoot of the Ku Klux Klan.

B and Rage captured Dan-Dan, but Owl Man was holding B's best friend, Vinyl, hostage, along with a group of prisoners from a town called New Kirkham. They agreed to swap Dan-Dan for Vinyl and, if possible, the other hostages, and Rage set off on Dr Oystein's orders to Battersea Power Station, where the Klanners were based. Two other Angels went with him, but B was told to remain in County Hall, since Owl Man was able to control her mind and might turn her against her comrades.

B disobeyed that command and trailed the others to the Power Station. There, as the swap was about to be made, Rage slaughtered the unsuspecting pair of Angels and betrayed B. A delighted Dan-Dan told his troops to open fire and finish her off. That should have been the end of B Smith, but then an unexpected figure burst from the ranks of the hood-wearing KKK and demanded mercy. To B's amazement, it was her father, alive and well and as racist as ever, coming to her rescue.

NOW . . .

ONE

The guy who handcuffs me is wearing gloves so thick that you could safely handle radioactive material with them. Even so, he sweats buckets until the cuffs snap shut and he's able to withdraw. He knows I'm undead and one tiny scratch from me is all it would take to end his life.

Meek as a lamb, I let myself be led inside the converted Power Station. I'm in total shock. I've thought about Dad and Mum often since I recovered my senses, wondered what happened to them, if they got out of London, if they were alive or dead. For Mum's sake, I'd hoped they'd made it to a compound or one of the zombie-free islands. But secretly I thought they were both goners.

Now Dad has popped up out of nowhere, in the middle of my enemies, to save me from what would have otherwise been certain death. I don't know how to react, whether to feel grateful or hateful.

Things were always weird between us. I loved him so much. He was clever and funny, thoughtful and protective, in some ways a perfect father. He provided for me and Mum, fought for us when he had to, gave us all that he could. When he heard about the zombies, his first instinct was to rescue me. He risked his life for mine.

At the same time he was a racist bully. He beat Mum and me regularly, usually for no good reason. He told me to hate anyone of a different colour or creed. He tried to turn me into a mirror image of him, a creature of bigotry and loathing.

I didn't want to grow up like my dad, but I never stood up to him. I chuckled at his insulting jokes. I read the hate lit that he stacked our bookshelves with. I pretended to share his twisted beliefs. Over time, the act became reality and, to my shame and horror, I began behaving like him. I think, given a few more years, I might have turned into a daughter he could have been truly proud of.

Vinyl used to warn me about the dangers of putting on an act. He was my best mate, but we had to keep our friendship secret or my dad would have hit the roof. Vinyl often urged me to take a stand. But I couldn't. I was too afraid.

I look around for the first time as I'm hustled through a series of rooms in the massive building. Most are loaded with supplies — food, drink, weapons. No beds. I guess the sleeping quarters are located on the upper levels.

All of the external windows are bricked up. Through the internal windows I can see into a courtyard. Glimpses of cages and hundreds of blacks, Arabs and Asians huddled together miserably, soldiers and hooded Klanners keeping watch over their prisoners.

My dad's marching beside me. He looks at me every so often and smiles. His fingers twitch and I know he wants to reach out and hug me, or at least stroke my hair. But then he clocks the hole in my chest where my heart should be, green moss growing thickly around it, and he reminds himself that he can never touch me again.

Dan-Dan is on my other side. He's beaming like a child at Christmas. He keeps shaking his head

and giggling. He wanted to bring me in, torture me, experiment on me and treat me to a long, slow, drawn-out death. Owl Man wouldn't play ball. When I begged him to let me die with dignity rather than be taken into custody, he insisted on a swift execution.

Dad's unexpected appearance changed all that. I surrendered instead of fighting to the death. I think Owl Man saw that as a chance to save me. For some bizarre reason, he doesn't want me dead. But Dan-Dan does and, as far as that filthy child-killer is concerned, he has me where he wants me, under his wing, at his mercy, ripe for the plucking.

I can't see Owl Man, but I can hear the clatter of his dog's paws on the floor behind me, so I'm guessing he's back there with Sakarias, his mutant hound. I'm betting Rage is with him, but I don't want to think about that back-stabbing bastard, so I deliberately tune him out of my thoughts.

We enter the courtyard and I squint against the sunlight — if there was a roof over this place before it's been removed, leaving the yard open to the elements. I left my hat and glasses outside. I didn't think I'd need them any more when I took them off. Now I wish I'd paused to pick them up. The light is blinding for a zombie like me.

'Are you uncomfortable, poor little dead girl?' Dan-Dan simpers. 'Would you like me to fetch a hat for you, or call Coley and borrow a pair of his oh-so-trendy shades?'

'All I want you to do, fat man,' I growl, 'is stick your head up your arse and eat yourself from the inside out.'

'What a delightfully horrible thing to say,' Dan-Dan cries, clapping his hands in admiration. 'You raised a real beast, Tom.'

'Todd,' Dad corrects him quietly. He winces at having to speak back. He was always subdued around powerful people.

I was expecting a stench from the cages, but the air is thick with the smell of disinfectant. I spot teams of cleaners scrubbing down the ground around the prisoners. Then I remember that humans can't afford to leave a mess. Waste attracts flies and other insects, which can spread the zombie gene.

The people in the cages don't pay much attention to me, but the soldiers and Klanners are fascinated. They follow my every footstep. Some call out insults, but most just watch warily.

I'm led across the courtyard and into the structure on the opposite side. I glance up at the famous chimneys before I pass into the gloom. They're an impressive sight. I wonder if this is the last time I'll ever see them.

Then we're marching through another series of rooms. The walls here have been reinforced with metal sheets bolted into place. The doors are thick steel. We stop at one which is locked and a soldier hurries to open it. He steps out of the way and nods for me to enter.

'Wait a minute,' somebody calls out before I step in, and a figure from my past comes strolling towards me.

'Josh Massoglia,' I sneer. 'Why am I not surprised?'

Josh is smiling. The soldier looks as handsome and well-groomed as he did back in the underground complex, where he was the boss along with a scientist called Dr Cerveris. His charms were always on me — I never had much time for pretty boys — but Cathy, a fellow zom head, used to go weak at the knees whenever he walked into a room, and I think most girls would be the same.

'It's been a long time, Becky,' he greets me.

'Not long enough,' I grunt.

'As charming as ever,' he grins, coming to a stop a metre from me. He's dressed in his army uniform and is clean-shaven, reeking of what was no doubt an expensive cologne back when money meant something. He looks over my head and his face darkens. I guess he's spotted Rage.

'No need to say anything,' Rage says brightly. 'I can tell you're overwhelmed to see me again.'

'That was a strange scene outside,' Josh murmurs distastefully. 'It takes a special breed of person

turn on his own without even a flicker of guilt.'

'What can I say?' Rage laughs. 'I was born blessed.'

Josh's eyes are hard, but he leaves it there and returns his attention to me. He studies my wrists, cuffed behind my back. 'I can have those removed if you promise to behave.'

'Like hell you will,' Dan-Dan barks. 'She'd go for us in the blink of an eye.'

'Not me,' I say sweetly. 'I'm a good girl, I am.' Then I gnash my teeth at Josh and make a growling noise.

Josh shrugs. 'Have it your way. I just wanted to help.'

'You don't have to do anything for me,' I tell him, stepping into the room and facing the door, waiting for it to slam shut. 'I don't need creature comforts. Just a coffin when Dan-Dan's done with me.'

'Oh, I don't think that will be necessary,' Dan-Dan purrs as the door starts to swing closed. 'There won't be enough left to warrant a coffin by the time I'm finished.' He blows me a kiss. 'Sweet dream my darling.'

TWO

Dan-Dan's parting shot is ironical. He knows I can't sleep. The undead are denied that simple pleasure.

The room is small, no more than three metres by three. There's a metal bench bolted firmly to one wall, but that's it as far as luxuries go. Steel plates cover the walls and ceiling, fixed tightly into place. Dim, artificial light seeps through a series of cracks in the plates overhead.

I stand by the door for ages, thinking about what has happened, marvelling at the fact that Dad is alive, wondering if Mum is with him. I also ask myself if it's pure coincidence that he was here in Battersea, waiting for me. Owl Man knew who he was before he removed his hood. Has the creep with the large eyes been pulling strings, or did he just recognise my father's voice?

When no one comes to interrogate me, I sit on the bench and stare off into space. I can't see any CCTV cameras, but I'm sure I'm being filmed. I'd flick the voyeurs the finger if I could, but my hands are bound securely behind my back.

A cold ball of fire burns in my stomach as I remember what Rage did to Pearse and Conall. I warned everyone not to trust him. He's a sly, savage, self-serving creep. He almost had me fooled. I started to doubt my instincts, to accept him as a well-meaning Angel.

The most frustrating part is that Rage was honest with me. He told me he was looking for action and adventure. He stuck with us as long as he did because he had nothing better to do with his time. When Dan-Dan came along with offers of power and life on a paradise island . . . Well, leopards don't change their spots.

I should have *known*. I feel responsible for what happened to Conall and Pearse. I could have rammed an ice pick through Rage's head long ago. I let Dr Oystein talk me out of tackling him. I should have listened to my gut, taken my punishment if the doc had condemned me. Too bloody nice that's my problem!

Time drags. I'm used to that – life's a bitch when you can't sleep – but it's harder when I can't see the sun or moon. No way to judge if it's day or night, or how long I've been here. The last time I was this removed from the daily routines of the outside world was in the underground complex.

Later, as I'm still brooding about Rage, the door opens and Dad enters. I spot soldiers in the corridor, armed with rifles and flame-throwers. Josh is behind my father. 'You're sure you want to do this?' he asks.

Dad nods. 'She's my daughter. She won't hurt me.'

'You've more faith in her than I have,' Josh grunts, but steps aside and lets a guard bring a chair into the room. The soldiers exit and close the door. Dad sits down across from me.

'How are you doing?'

'Better than you,' I mutter. He looks about thirty years older than when I last saw him. Hair

streaked with grey. Face lined with wrinkles. There's a tremor in his hands which he can't control.

'I guess I'm a sight,' he says wearily. 'It hasn't been easy. The undead are better off in lots of ways. There have been plenty of times when I wished I hadn't made it out alive.'

'Me too,' I grin viciously.

Dad cocks his head, not sure if I'm joking or serious.

'Mum?' I whisper.

Dad pretends he hasn't heard. Instead he pulls out a hand grenade from a pocket and plays with it. 'I'll carry this with me wherever I go,' he says, staring transfixed at the grenade as if it's a holy relic. 'I took it from a corpse a long time ago, the day London fell. Or maybe it was a few days later. I'm not sure. My brain goes a bit wonky whenever I think back that far.'



'This is how I want to go when my time comes,' he continues, tugging gently at the pin, enough to disturb it slightly but not pull it out. 'When those brain-munching bastards finally catch up, I'll set

this off and take a few of them to Hell with me. Quick and messy, that's the way to sign off. I don't want to become a walking abomination like . . . ' He pauses.

' . . . me?' I finish.

'Yeah.' Dad smiles sadly and puts the grenade away. 'You hurt me, Becky. You shouldn't have run away. I loved you and risked everything for you. When you turned your back on me, it was like you'd stabbed me through the heart.'

'You made me kill Tyler,' I retort stiffly.

'He didn't matter,' Dad says.

'Because he was black?' I sneer.

'Yeah.' Dad's eyes never leave mine. 'Life's a battle. It's what I tried to teach you since you were born. We all belong to a side. You have to stick with your own and make sure your enemies never gain enough power to drive you under. You think your black friend wouldn't have thrown you to the monsters if the shoe had been on the other foot?'

'You're sick,' I snarl. 'With all that's happened, you're lost in the past, a relic of a time that doesn't exist any more.'

'Oh, it exists,' Dad says. 'Nothing has changed fundamentally. It's still us against them.'

'What about the zombies?' I challenge him.

'They're irrelevant,' he says and I gawp at him with astonishment.

'How the hell can you say that?' I cry.

'Because it's true,' he replies. 'They're dangerous, yeah, a threat that we have to eliminate. But they're not a thinking, scheming menace. We'll get rid of them eventually, wipe the planet clean of their stain. But the blacks will still be here. The Muslims and their Taliban pit bulls. The Chinese and Russians and Indians, empire-builders with their dreams of ruling the roost and crushing the rest of us under their heels.'

'The zombies are an opportunity,' Dad says. 'Society has been reset. The first nation out of the blocks will have an advantage over the others. This is a time to cull, to set out our stall and make this country great again. We'll deal with our problems, come through the war with the undead pure and united, then take on the rest of the world and turn it into a place we can be proud of.'

'You're crazy,' I jeer. 'Mankind has been reduced to its bare bones. The living are an endangered species. Race and religion should mean less now than they ever did. You all need to band together if you're going to recover.'

He shakes his head. 'We don't see it that way. We see this as a blessing, a time for the strong and pure to stand up and be counted. This is our chance to rid ourselves of those who've been dragging us down, who hate us just as much as we hate them, who would wipe us out if they ever got the chance.'

I stare at him helplessly. 'But you need them. When I was trying to get out of my school, I needed the help of other kids, black, Asian, whatever.'

'That's where you're wrong,' he says. 'If you'd thrown those kids to the zombies, you would have had a better chance of getting out. The zombies would have lost interest in you if you'd given them others to rip apart and eat.'

'So, what, you plan to sacrifice everyone who isn't white? Let the zombies eat them all?'

'Yeah,' he says calmly.

'You're crazy,' I tell him again. 'There won't be enough of you left to win the war with the undead. You'll be destroyed.'

'No,' he says. 'There are enough of us. You've seen our troops here, and there are lots more in other cities and bases around the country. We're a genuine force, growing all the time as more and more survivors – *our* kind of survivors – throw their support behind us. This used to be our world, and it always should have been. We're taking it back.'

‘No,’ I say. ‘What you’re doing is turning it into a hellhole.’

‘Hell for anyone we don’t like,’ Dad smirks. ‘Heaven for those who are worthy of Heaven.’—

‘You’re scum,’ I whisper and look away. It pains me that this man is my father. I wish I could rid my body of every last gene that he passed on to me.

‘Watch your bloody language,’ Dad growls. ‘I’m your father. I’m due some respect.’

‘Not when you behave like this, you don’t.’

Dad clenches his hands angrily. Then he sighs and lets them relax. ‘I was so hurt when you betrayed me,’ he says, returning to what is obviously a sore point. ‘All the love and care I showered on you, and that was how you repaid me.’

‘What about all the times you hit me?’ I snap. ‘The times you used Mum and me as punchbags?’

‘It’s a hard world,’ he shrugs. ‘I was trying to toughen you up.’

I laugh sickly. ‘Well, it worked. Here I am, Dad, an undead killer. I hope you’re proud of me.’

‘I am actually,’ he says. ‘Lord Wood told me what you’ve been through. Most people would have crumbled long ago, given what you’ve had to deal with. I regret nothing about the way I brought you up. You’re a warrior, and a lot of that is down to how I raised you.’

‘Yeah, well, be careful what you create. If I treated you coldly, it’s your own fault for not teaching me to be more loving.’

‘There might be truth in that,’ Dad says thoughtfully. ‘I always adored you, but maybe I should have been more open about my feelings, told you more often that you meant the world to me, that I was only ever cruel because I wanted to be kind, because I feared losing you if you weren’t strong enough to make your own way in the world.’

I shift uneasily on the bench. This is what I always hated most about Dad, the way he could appear reasonable and vulnerable. If he’d been an unfeeling monster all the time, I could have simply loathed him. But right now I feel like *I’m* in the wrong, even though *he’s* the racist supremacist.

‘How’d you get out?’ I ask, trying to steer him on to a different topic.

‘It was difficult,’ he says, wincing at the memories. ‘I fought and killed, ran and struggled. I knew I had to get clear of London quickly. I realised the zombies didn’t like the sun. Once night fell, the city would go to hell. I darted home, picked up a few things that I needed, then hit the road on foot.’

‘What about Mum?’ I ask. ‘Was she one of the things you needed?’

Dad glares at me, then again acts as if I hadn’t asked about her.

‘I made it to the suburbs and holed up before sunset. A lot of people banded together, but I figured that would make them more of a target, so I kept to myself. The screams that first night . . .’ He shudders. ‘I wanted to creep out and let the bastards kill me, just to escape the screams. I still hear them when I dream. Sometimes when I’m awake too.’

His expression goes distant and there’s a short silence. Despite everything, I feel sorry for him and part of me wishes I could have been there with him to help share the pain.

‘I kept walking the next day,’ he continues. ‘I didn’t have a plan. It was total chaos. Nobody knew we could repel the zombies. We thought it might be the end of the world. I spent a few weeks wandering the countryside, keeping to open fields by day, locking myself into small buildings at night.’

‘Finally I joined one of the settlements that were springing up, a walled town. By sheer luck it was one of the first Klan-friendly towns. Smarter people than me had seen the opportunity immediately and set up a few whites-only towns where we could gather, recruit and grow strong.’

‘Sounds like you had a right jolly time.’

He nods slowly. ‘I loved it and I won’t pretend otherwise. It was hard, and we went through all kinds of hell, but I saw the seeds of a new society being sown. I came to see the downfall of the old society as something that had to happen. We couldn’t have thinned our ranks the way we needed to if not for the zombies. In a weird way, like I said before, they’ve been a blessing.’

I moan with horror. 'You're unbelievable.'

'Just being honest,' he says. 'I always played my cards straight. You knew where you stood with me from day one.'

'Yeah,' I mutter. 'And I've cursed myself more times than you can imagine for not crawling away from you on day two.'

Dad laughs heartily. 'That's my girl. Always with a quick, cutting comeback. I've missed that about you, B. That and a lot of other things.'

'Well, lap it up while you can,' I say sullenly. 'You won't have me for long.'

'What are you talking about?' he frowns.

'Dan-Dan will make short work of me.'

'Lord Wood?' Dad shakes his head. 'He's given me his word that he'll let you live if you cooperate with us. I know there's been bad blood between the two of you, but if you join us and work to help us grow even stronger than we already are, he'll put that behind him and let you be.'

'Bullshit,' I snort. 'He's a child-killing sicko who has it in for me. My days are numbered, and yours will be too if you get in his way.'

'No,' Dad says. 'You've got him wrong. He'll leave you alone if you treat him with the respect he deserves. This can be a new start for us. We can be a family again, carry on where we left off, make things right.'

'You're off your head,' I huff.

'I'm your father,' he thunders. 'Watch your tongue.'

'Or what?' I throw back at him.

He starts to get to his feet, hand swinging wide to slap me, old habits kicking in. Then he remembers what I am and stops, crestfallen.

'What's wrong, Daddy dearest?' I simper. 'Oh, that's right, you can't beat me up any more, can you? Unless you want to go get a plank to hammer me over the head with.'

'Don't say such things,' he croaks, sitting again, looking on the verge of tears.

'Why not?' I shout. 'You never gave a damn about me really. You only wanted me around so that you could turn me into a mini version of yourself. You want to start over? You care about family? My arse! You don't know what that means. What happened to Mum? You haven't mentioned her. If you're such a big family man, that's the first thing you would have told me. Go on, Dad, let me have it. Did you look for her? Did she even cross your mind?'

'Of course she did,' he yells. 'The flat was the first place I went after you left me in the lurch. I shouldn't have gone back. It made more sense to keep running. But I had to search for her. She was my wife. I loved her.'

'And?' I whisper when he doesn't continue, fearing the worst, sure he's going to tell me he couldn't find her or that she was dead when he got there. Instead he shocks me.

'She's here,' he mumbles.

'What?' I'm not sure I heard him right.

'She's here,' he says again, 'in a room a few corridors further along.'

'Mum's here?' I gasp, leaping to my feet, staring at him with eyes almost as wide as Owl Man's. 'Why didn't you bring her to see me?'

'It's not that simple,' he says, looking away shiftily.

'Why not?' I growl. Dad sighs and doesn't answer. 'Come on, tell me — why not?' I roar.

He looks up at me angrily, then spits on the floor and says petulantly, 'Because she's a bloody zombie.'

THREE

For a long time I'm too numb to say anything. When I can speak again, I tell Dad I want to see her. He says he doesn't think that's a good idea. I tell him I don't care what he thinks, that if he doesn't take me to her, I won't say another word. I'll just sit here in silence until they starve me or kill me. When he realises I'm serious, he says he'll ask for permission, but he can't promise anything.

I sit in a cold rage when Dad leaves, head whirring. I'm not sure how to react. My chat with Dad has left me bewildered. Part of me is glad he's alive, but another part wishes he had died rather than joined the KKK.

He's a hate-mongering, nasty piece of work, there's no getting away from that. But he's still my father. He risked his life (again) to save me today. He's eager to reconnect. He wants the best for me. How can I truly hate someone who loves me so much?

I get to my feet and march round the room, one lap after another, trying to distract myself by keeping active. I'm sorry now that I didn't agree to let them free my hands. My arms feel like dead weights behind my back.

Finally the door opens again. But it's not Dad who steps in this time. It's Dan-Dan. His loyal crony Coley is with him. The grinning guard in the stylish sunglasses nods at me in a friendly manner then trains a taser on me.

'If you move, I'll fry you,' Coley says.

'Yeah, yeah,' I yawn, focusing on the organ-grinder rather than the monkey.

'Have you missed me, little one?' Dan-Dan smirks.

'Like crazy,' I sneer. 'Come over here, nice and close, so I can kiss you.'

'I think not,' he chuckles, then raises an eyebrow. 'I hear you'd like to see your mother.' I glower at him silently. 'Well?' he sings when I don't respond. 'Do you want to see her or not?'

'Yeah,' I mumble.

'I'm the one who decides whether she can have visitors,' he says.

'So don't let me see her,' I sniff. 'Like I give a damn.'

'Oh, but I think you do,' he says. 'What caring daughter wouldn't? I'm not a heartless beast, Becky. I don't want to stand in the way of a touching reunion. But you'll have to do something for me first.'

'What?' I snap.

Dan-Dan smiles beatifically. 'Ask politely.'

I scowl at him. 'That's all? You don't want me to kill someone or dance on hot coals or tell you all my secrets?'

'Of course not. I simply want you to ask nicely, like a good girl.'

I don't want to give him the satisfaction. I want to tell him to get stuffed. But I'll gain nothing if I do that. This is one of those rare occasions where I have to bite my tongue and be diplomatic. That

doesn't come naturally to me, but I can do it when I need to. I think.

'Please let me see my mum,' I growl, the words like nails in my throat.

Dan-Dan glances at Coley. 'What do you think?'

'Pathetic,' Coley jeers.

'I agree.' Dan-Dan looks at me again. 'You can be sweeter than that, I'm sure.'

I mutter something foul under my breath, then force a sickly smile. 'Please let me go and see my mother.'

'That sounded almost human,' he laughs. 'But try it again, with more feeling.'

'Please –'

'Lord Wood,' he murmurs.

'Please, Lord Wood,' I say through gritted teeth, 'I'd like to visit my mother. Will you let me?'

'Good,' he nods. 'I could make you beg, but that's enough for now. Of course you can visit her. I'll lead you to her straight away. See? I can be the most helpful man in the world if you cooperate with me.'

'Thank you,' I croak.

Dan-Dan steps out into the corridor and I follow, Coley just behind me, prodding me with the tip of the taser. Dan-Dan guides me through a couple of similar corridors, then we come to a door much like the one to my room. Dad is standing outside. He smiles when he sees me.

'I told you she'd respond positively,' he says.

'You did indeed, Todd,' Dan-Dan booms. 'I stand corrected, and I'm glad to be wrong in this instance. Open the door and let us pass.'

There's a key in the lock. Dad turns it and pushes the door open. Dan-Dan enters the room, makes me wait a moment, then beckons me in. Dad comes too. And Coley, of course.

There's a steel bed in the middle of the room. Mum is lying spread-eagled on it. Her feet and hands are chained, holding her in place like a pinned insect. She's naked. There's a sheet lying on the floor to her left. Dan-Dan tuts, picks it up and covers her with it. 'Sorry you had to see that,' he whispers, but by the glint in his eyes I'm sure he's secretly ecstatic. He might even have come in here in advance and yanked it off her.

I stare at my mother with horror. She's in good condition. They must keep her fed. Her eyes are brighter than most reviveds' and her hair hasn't lost too much of its sheen. There are moss-encrusted scratches down her right arm, and I saw more across her thighs before Dan-Dan covered them. But the bones sticking out of her fingers and toes have been filed down, as have the fangs in her mouth.

'Mum?' I moan, stepping forward into view, hoping against hope that she'll recognise me and react.

The zombie stares at me, clocking me as one of her own, but only of her own species. She loses interest when she realises my brain is of no use to her. Instead she focuses on the humans and snarls, straining against the chains, trying to break free.

'When was she last fed?' Dan-Dan asks.



‘A few days ago,’ Dad says quietly.

‘Shall we top her up?’ he beams.

‘I don’t think we need to right now,’ Dad says miserably.

‘It would be cruel not to,’ Dan-Dan says. ‘She’s hungry, poor thing. We must treat our guests with all the kindness that we can.’

Dan-Dan nods at Coley. He passes the taser to Dan-Dan before fetching a bucket from a corner of the room. I catch the scent of fresh brains. Dan-Dan must have had them delivered ahead of our meeting. Coley pulls on heavy-duty gloves and a mask, then picks up a scrap of brain. He leans over my mother’s face and drops the sliver of brain into her mouth, like a bird feeding its chick. She makes a mewling sound and swallows eagerly. Coley drops in more of the grey chunks and she chews mechanically, her features relaxing. She doesn’t struggle to break free any more. When she’s had enough, Coley steps back and returns the bucket to its corner. He doesn’t remove the gloves or mask.

‘How long must we wait?’ Dan-Dan asks.

‘Less than a minute,’ Coley says.

~~A few seconds later Mum vomits over herself. Most zombies need to stick a finger down their throat to do that. Lacking the use of her hands, Mum must have developed a slicker method of riddin~~ her stomach of waste matter. She goes on vomiting until it’s all been forced up. Then she lies back, smiling softly, sated, covered in her own puke.

Coley hauls across another bucket, this one filled with water. He gets a brush and scrubs her down. The sheet is speckled with vomit. He removes it, balls it up and leaves her lying there, naked again.

‘Have you no other sheet to cover her with?’ Dan-Dan asks, feigning surprise.

‘Not at the moment, my Lord,’ Coley says, removing his mask and pushing up his sunglasses to wink at me.

‘What a pity,’ Dan-Dan sighs. He strolls round the bed, studying her. ‘She was a good-looking woman, wasn’t she?’

I don’t say anything. Neither does Dad. He’s staring at the floor, cheeks red, torn between shame and anger. He knows Dan-Dan is using Mum to hurt me. He doesn’t like it. But there’s nothing he can do. He’s chosen his masters, so he has to bend to their whims.

‘How did she end up here?’ I ask Dad.

‘She’d been turned when I got to the flat,’ he says. ‘She’d eaten the brain of one of our neighbours so she was docile. I tied her up before I left. I figured, if I didn’t, she’d wander off and I’d never be able to find her.’

‘Why didn’t you just bash her bloody head open and finish her off?’

He stares at me. ‘She’s my wife.’

‘Was,’ I correct him. ‘She’s a zombie now.’

‘So are you,’ he notes. ‘We might be able to cure her, the way you were cured.’

‘Impossible,’ I snap. ‘I revitalised because of the vaccine I was given when I was a child. You can’t give her that now — it wouldn’t do anything for her.’

‘I know,’ he says. ‘It’s been explained to me. But they might develop another vaccine, one that can restore the thought processes of those who’ve been infected.’

‘No way,’ I snort. ‘There’s no hope for a revived like her. It’s cruel, keeping her enslaved like this where the likes of these disgusting creeps can perv over her.’

‘*Moi?*’ Dan-Dan squeals, feigning shock.

‘I don’t see it that way,’ Dad says. ‘I returned to the flat when I came back to London. I told my superiors about her and they helped me transport her here.’

‘Owl Man’s work,’ Dan-Dan says. ‘I didn’t know about her or your father. He kept them a secret from me.’

‘Then he knew that you were here?’ I ask Dad.

He nods. ‘We didn’t talk much. He’s a busy man. But he’d seen me around and he was the one who approved Daisy’s transfer.’

Daisy. I’d almost forgotten Mum’s name.

‘I’d like to stay here with her,’ I tell them.

‘No,’ Dan-Dan says.

‘Why not?’ Dad frowns. ‘They’d be company for each other. Maybe Daisy will start recollecting things if they spend more time together.’

Dan-Dan cocks his head. ‘Are you challenging me, Todd?’

Dad flushes. ‘No, my Lord, of course not. I was just expressing an opinion. I’m sorry if I offended you.’

‘You didn’t,’ Dan-Dan smiles. ‘But, in answer to your question, we can’t leave your daughter here because I fear she would attack your wife. I’m right, aren’t I, Becky? You’d chew through to her brain.’

to set her shackled soul free, wouldn't you?'

I don't reply, but they can tell from my expression that Dan-Dan hit the nail smack on the head.

Dad's face darkens. 'You should be ashamed of yourself,' he growls.

'I'm ashamed of *you*,' I hit back. 'How can you let them degrade her like this? Do the right thing and execute her. Don't rob her of any more of her dignity.'

'We might be able to help her,' he insists.

'No,' I tell him. 'You can't even help yourself. You're a sad, pitiful creature, and you've dragged her down to your lousy level.'

Dad gawps at me, confused and hurt.

Dan-Dan laughs lightly. 'Such a way with words. You should have been a politician like our friend Vicky Wedge. Speaking of whom, come, my darling, you have so many people to catch up with. It's time for a tour. Isn't that exciting? I love showing newcomers around. It's such a pleasure to . . .'

I tune out Dan-Dan's prattle as he leads me from the room, focusing instead on my undead mother as the door closes on her, feeling more wretched than I have in a long time, wishing I could help, but knowing I'm in no better a position than she is. In fact I'm worse off. She can't sink any lower than she has. But under Dan-Dan's twisted guardianship, I probably have quite a way yet to fall.

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