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Opening extract from

Zom-B Family

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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 lost 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 to 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 dreams, my darling.'