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Opening extract from

The Dogs

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ONE

It's 10 p.m. Mom's at the living-room window staring at the car across the street. She's been there for an hour. Our lights are out so no one can see her.

I'm downstairs in the rec room playing Zombie Attack. No sound. I don't want Mom to know, although I'm pretty sure she guesses. The longer we're quiet in the dark, the creepier it gets.

Mom's imagining things.

But what if she isn't? I focus on the zombies. More silence.

'It's probably nothing,' I call up.

'Shh. Keep it down.'

'I'm in the basement, Mom. You think someone outside can hear me?'

'Stop it, Cameron. Turn off that game and go to bed.'

'Aw Mom—'

'Cameron.'

A zombie jumps from behind a tree and rips my head off. Thanks, Mom. Way to help me concentrate. I turn off the game and head up to the living room.

Mom's squeezing her cell phone. 'I'm calling the police.'

'Why?' I try to sound normal. 'They won't come for hours. By the time they do, whoever's there will be gone.'

'It's not "whoever". It's him. I know it.' She dials.

'Mom, it's a street. People park there.'

'Not in neighbourhoods where they don't belong. Not opposite the same house three nights in a row. And they don't stay in their car either. It's only a matter of time before he does something. Hello, police?'

I can't breathe. I go upstairs and brush my teeth while Mom gives her name and address to someone who's apparently deaf. The more they tell her to calm down, the angrier she gets.

Go to bed, everything's fine.

Mom's room is at the front of the house. I sneak to her window and peek down at the car. It's out of the light, in the shadow of the trees on the other side of the street. Is there really someone inside?

Even if there is, so what? They could be waiting for a friend.

All night?

It's not against the law to sit in a car.

That's not the point.

Stop it. Don't be like her.

The car drives off like it did last night and the night before that. I go to my room and crawl under the covers. Two hours later the cops arrive.

Mom's ballistic. 'I called hours ago. We could be dead.'

'Sorry, ma'am. It's been a busy night. Did you get the licence number?'

'No, I didn't get the licence number. He parks in the shadows. You want me to go out and check with him sitting there waiting for me?'

The cops ask more stupid questions. I stick my fingers in my ears and pray for everything to be over.

The cops leave. Mom slams the door. Next thing I know, she's sitting on the side of my bed, holding my hand. 'Cameron, honey. We have to go. Get your things.'

'Go? What? Now?'

'I don't know how long we've got.' She gets up and heads to her room. 'He could be anywhere, around the block, who knows. But he'll be back, you can count on it. And the police will be too late.'

'Mom—'

'There are things you don't understand, Cameron.'

Oh yeah? I understand lots, Mom. I understand I'm scared, for a start. But why? Because he's tracked us down? Or because you're crazy?

My clothes are already in a suitcase under my bed; Mom made me pack two days ago, just in case. There's room in the car for our bags, some coats, a box of dishes, some sheets and towels and the little TV. My grandparents will store the rest of our stuff in their basement; there isn't much; the places we rent come furnished. I wish we could go to Grandma and Grandpa's. Mom says we can't. She says that's the first place he'd look.

He – him – the guy in the car: Dad.

Mom backs the car onto the street. I look at the house. After a year, I was getting used to the place. This city too. I'd actually started making friends at school. So much for that.

We drive away slowly with the headlights off.