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opening extract from

Jimmy Coates: Killer

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JIMMY COATES: KILLER

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CHAPTER ONE - STRANGE TALENTS

JIMMY KNEW WHAT was coming, but he was too late to dodge out of the way. Georgie pounced on him and they both landed with a thump on the bed. She moved quickly, and easily locked her arm round Jimmy's neck. Then she dug her knuckles into the top of his head, kneeling over him. *Not again*, Jimmy thought. All these years he had never been able to escape his sister's hold.

"Looks like I'm still bigger than you!" Georgie jeered. It was true – Jimmy was waiting for a growth spurt. But he never gave in easily.

"I don't care! Get out my room!" he roared.

"I need your computer."

She released him and took a seat at Jimmy's

desk. Then she asked as casually as she could, "Is Westminster Bridge actually part of Westminster, or does it just go to Westminster?"

"Find a tramp at Westminster Bridge," Jimmy suggested, a huge smile on his face. "He'd tell you. And he'd probably smell like you too; you could be really good friends."

"That's it – you're done for." She was at him again. This time she pinned him down even harder and pulled his hair. Even though he knew she was just messing around, it still hurt.

"Mum!" Jimmy cried.

"I'm not doing anything!" Georgie shouted in response.

Jimmy flapped his arms about and slapped his sister on the back a couple of times, but it didn't do any good. Then they heard the familiar pounding on the wall from next door, followed by their father shouting up the stairs.

"Keep it down. You're disturbing Mr Higgins."

"I hate that old weirdo," muttered Georgie. It was remarkable how a next-door neighbour who claimed to be nearly deaf could have such sensitive hearing.

Jimmy was still struggling. But then, without knowing why, he stopped moving for a split second. Suddenly, his arm scooped up underneath his

sister's body as fast as it would move. She lost her balance and had to release Jimmy's head. But his arm kept going. Georgie flipped backwards into the air and landed on the bed with a splat, gawping straight up at the ceiling.

They were both stunned.

Jimmy stared at his hands. Then he laughed and straightened his hair.

Georgie was not impressed. "What was that?" she shouted, but before she could grab him, Jimmy had run out of the room and made it to the stairs. Halfway down, he started walking very sedately and caught his breath. In the living room, his parents were watching the news.

"What's all the noise about?" his father shouted to no one in particular.

Jimmy bounced on to the sofa feeling very pleased with himself.

"Your sister needs peace and quiet to work on her history project," his mother said sternly. Before Jimmy could think of the best way of answering, Georgie burst in.

"We were just messing around, but then he started fighting properly."

"That's a lie!" Jimmy was ready for action again, dying to have another go at what he'd managed

upstairs, but a chocolate wrapper hit him on the side of his head. He spun round to see his father watching the television, grinning. Jimmy knew he'd never be able to return fire without his mother noticing, so he turned back to the television.

"Oh forget it. I'll be in my room," announced Georgie, flustered and red in the face.

She wasn't really upset, was she, Jimmy wondered? Had he hurt her? He hadn't meant to. It was just satisfying to beat her for once. Jimmy told himself that maybe later he'd apologise. He wouldn't mind doing that – it might even be fun, apologising because he'd won for the first time.

Jimmy's parents ignored Georgie flouncing upstairs. They were concentrating on the news. On the screen were pictures of Ares Hollingdale, the Prime Minister, walking around Downing Street, and then another man who looked a bit scruffier, but a lot younger. Jimmy wasn't paying attention because he was so excited about getting the better of Georgie for once. Slowly, though, he started watching his parents. When this younger, scruffier man appeared on screen, they both shifted uneasily in their seats. Then Jimmy's father looked straight at Jimmy and spoke quietly, but seriously, back to being a grown-up.

"You should pay attention to this – instead of the rubbish you always watch. Someone might form an opposition to the government again."

He glared for a second at Jimmy's mother, who replied, frowning: "Nobody knows what's going to happen in this country."

Jimmy considered this for a second, and thought to himself that nobody knows what's going to happen in any country. It was a stupid thing to say – nobody could predict the future.

Just then, the doorbell rang. Jimmy's father pushed himself up with a sigh.

"You expecting someone?" asked his wife.

He stood for a long time scratching his ear, then just said, "No," and strode out to the front door.

Jimmy's father manufactured bottle tops for loads of different soft drinks and beers. He often saw clients at home, but it always took a long time and sometimes went on late into the night. Sometimes Jimmy heard shouting when he was in bed.

"You don't think…" started Jimmy's mother, but her husband had already left the room. She looked at Jimmy. "Go upstairs and get ready for bed," she said tenderly.

"What?" said Jimmy. "It's really early. And I've

decided to watch the news." His mother didn't answer. She turned off the television and they both started listening to what was going on at the front door.

"Oh, it's you," Jimmy's father said, "I didn't expect…"

"Can we come in, Ian?" It was a man's voice, deep and flat.

"Erm, of course. We weren't expecting you." His father sounded nervous, and the other man cut him off.

"Thanks," he said. There was a creaking of footsteps and then the living-room door was pushed open. The man who walked in was tall and broad, taller even than Jimmy's father and obviously in much better shape. He was tanned and good-looking, but only smiling with one half of his mouth, a small smile that scanned the room and found Jimmy.

"Hello, young man. You must be James." Before Jimmy could answer, his mother jumped up between them.

"Please," she said, with her hand out to distract the man's attention. "Sit down. Please sit down."

The man looked at Jimmy's mother and straightened his tie. It was a long black tie, thinner than the ones Jimmy's father wore for work, and

his suit was the same black. “Helen, how lovely to see you again,” he said, and sat where Jimmy’s father had been sitting.

“Jimmy, go upstairs,” said his father, who walked in and sat down awkwardly.

“No, he can stay, Ian,” said the man in the suit.

“You haven’t—” started Jimmy’s mother, but the man cut her off.

“We’ve come for the boy.”

There was silence.

Jimmy replayed in his mind what the man had just said: “We’ve come for the boy.” What? Did that mean him, Jimmy Coates? Jimmy quickly went through the last few days in his head, or as much as he could manage on the spot, trying to remember if he had done anything wrong. But he was panicking and couldn’t even think of what he’d done that morning, let alone yesterday or the day before. Then Jimmy suddenly noticed another man who was standing in the doorway. He was dressed the same way as the first man, but was not quite as tall or as tanned.

Jimmy’s father turned from one man to the other.

“You’re early,” he said, “We thought—”

“I know,” the man interrupted again. “This is the

new arrangement. We've come to get him." The man looked straight ahead, not round at Jimmy and not at either of his parents. He was waiting for something. Finally Jimmy's mother spoke – and it wasn't what the man was expecting.

"Run, Jimmy," she said, her voice almost a whisper. She clutched at her throat and then shouted, "JIMMY RUN!"

For a tiny moment Jimmy didn't move. Everyone's face was turned towards him. Jimmy looked at his father. He looked sad, but not scared like Jimmy's mother. The terror in her voice made its way into Jimmy's belly and connected with the confusion in his head. Then he was finally able to unfreeze his legs and throw himself towards the door.

The man standing there wasn't expecting such a burst of speed, and when Jimmy's full weight hit him he was winded. Jimmy pulled open the front door. But what if there were other men in suits waiting for him outside? Leaving the front door open, Jimmy bolted to the stairs instead, sprinting up two at a time. He reached the top out of breath, and dashed into his bedroom.

"Come to gloat?" Georgie grumbled from the computer, but Jimmy didn't answer. "Who was at

the door?" Jimmy could hardly hear her for all the blood rushing through his head. Then the regular beat of a big man pounding up the stairs hit him in the heart.

"Call the police!" Jimmy panted, diving under the bed.

"What?" gasped Georgie. Jimmy heard the door open and saw two sets of shiny black shoes pointing straight at him, like four vultures.

"Hey, who are you?" Georgie yelled. "Get out!"

"Take her downstairs," ordered one of the men.

"Police! Help!" Georgie's screams faded as she was carried away.

Then a face appeared next to Jimmy's, leering down under the bed. It was the taller of the two men. His huge hand grabbed Jimmy's shoulder and dragged him out. Jimmy stood rubbing his neck as the shorter man returned. There was no noise from downstairs. Why was everyone so quiet?

"Why do you want me?" he asked.

"Why are you running?" countered the taller man immediately.

"I don't know who you are," said Jimmy.

"You don't know who you are."

At first, Jimmy thought it was a slip of the tongue. Then he wasn't so sure.

"I'm Jimmy Coates. My name is Jimmy Coates and I'm just a kid."

"OK, Jimmy, I need you to come with us. You can trust me."

There is something very untrustworthy about a man who says "Trust me". This man's eyes were the colour of steel, and from the way his shirt pulled across his chest, it looked like he was built of the stuff too. Jimmy stared back as hard as he could and tried to look tough, but this wasn't a game. Jimmy's throat tightened and something behind his stomach stopped him breathing properly. It looked like he had no choice but to go with these men.

Maybe Jimmy hesitated just a little too long. The taller man dipped his hand into his jacket and Jimmy caught a glimpse of a pale leather holster. When the man's hand emerged, it was holding a gun.

"I just need you to come with us," he stated coldly, but Jimmy couldn't take his eyes off the gun. It was the first he had ever seen and it was pointed straight at him.

All of a sudden, utter fear behind his stomach turned into something else. Jimmy felt a surge of energy, as if some powerful piece of machinery had been turned on. It quickly spread through his whole

body. It was something he had never felt before and he didn't know whether he liked it. In another moment, it bolted up the right side of Jimmy's neck and wrapped itself around his head. At that moment he stopped thinking. His mind cleared and the feeling inside started acting for him. He dipped his body to one side and sprang forward. He was out of the line of fire now, and before the man could adjust, Jimmy put one hand on the gun and the other on the man's wrist. With a firm twist, he pushed the barrel up towards the ceiling and leant down on the man's hand. There was a loud crack. The gun dropped to the floor and the man clasped his trigger finger in pain.

Jimmy had moved so fast that the shorter man hadn't had time to react, but now he leapt forward. Jimmy darted away from his desperate grasp, then kicked the gun under the bed. He looked towards the door, but both men stood in his way; even though one was hurt, he was still ready to act. His half-smile had turned into a grimace.

Jimmy was acting automatically – by instinct, not by thought. It was like watching someone in a movie. He saw the men move and could predict exactly where they were going to go by the way their weight shifted across the floorboards. As they

lumbered towards him, Jimmy took a light step to the side and leapt backwards.

He coiled his body into a ball and shut his eyes tight. The two men were stunned as Jimmy smashed through the window. Glass shattered everywhere and Jimmy felt it falling with him. The air was suddenly cold. He screwed his eyes shut harder and waited to hit the ground.

As he fell like a lump of stone, Jimmy's brain crept back on. He had enough time for one thought to go through his head – why had he jumped out of the window? There was a paved drive below, and now he was probably going to die, or at least break every bone in his body.

Then he hit the concrete.