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Opening extract from

ZOM-B Mission

Written by

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ONE

I'm in Timothy's gallery, the Old Truman Brewery, on Brick Lane. It's quiet and cool. Daylight filters through the cracks in the boards covering the windows.

The last thing Timothy asked, before he was killed by a mob of zombies, was that I take care of his paintings. He thought he had been given a commission by God, that it was his duty to record the downfall of London, so that future generations could study his pictures of this terrible time and learn from them.

Timothy was mad as a hatter but he was a nice guy. I feel like I owe him, since I was the one who set free the grisly baby who called the zombies down upon him, so I've come here several times since he died, to dump the food he had stocked up, wash the bloodstains from the floor and generally make sure that everything is in order.

There are hundreds of paintings stacked against the walls, spread throughout the various rooms. Some are hanging too. I rotate the pictures on display whenever I come, swapping them round, choosing new examples from the many on offer. I think Timothy would have liked that.

I'm holding one of the paintings, studying it critically, trying to decide whether or not it deserves a spot on the wall. It's a painting of a zombie tucking into the skull of a dead woman. It must have been dangerous for Timothy, getting that close, but he was always reckless. Anything to get a good angle.

A wild flower sprouts from a crack in the pavement close to the dead woman's head. It's more brightly coloured than the corpse or the zombie, its



petals painted in glorious yellows and pinks. The flower makes this painting stand out, but at the same time it makes it look a bit arty-farty. I'm sure the flower was real – Timothy only painted what he saw – but because of the way he's highlighted it, it doesn't *look* real.

I know I'm being silly, hesitating like this. Nobody's going to pass through here any time soon. I'm Timothy's only audience, and probably will continue to be for many years to come. It makes no difference whether I give this pride of place on a wall or jam it behind a load of other paintings.

Still, it matters to me. I never paid much attention to art when I was alive, but I've been getting into it since I settled in at County Hall. I've spent much of my free time scouring galleries and reading about the history of art. It's become an interesting hobby, a way of keeping boredom at bay when I'm not training with the other Angels.

I've no artistic talent, but arranging Timothy's paintings is a way for me to creatively express myself. So I study the painting with the flower one last time,

forehead creased as if I'm attempting to crack a difficult puzzle. Finally I snort and return it to the pile, at least for the time being. I might grant it wall space in the future, but not today.

As I'm carefully slotting the painting back into place, there's a loud thumping sound on the staircase behind me.

I whirl and adopt a defensive position. I flex my fingers, getting ready to slash with the bones sticking out of them if I'm attacked. I don't have a heart, not since it was ripped from my chest, but my mind remembers what anxiety was like when I was alive, and I imagine the sound of my quickening heartbeat inside my head.

I don't call out. I don't move. I just stand silently and wait.

There's another thumping noise, this time closer to the top of the stairs. I grit my teeth and suppress a shiver. Zombies don't scare me. Nor do the living. But this could be Mr Dowling, Owl Man or that nightmarish baby. Maybe it sniffed me out and returned to finish the job. It let me go when it was

here before. Maybe it changed its mind and came back to send me the way of poor Timothy.

Another thump, this one almost at the very top stair. I frown. By now I should be able to see whoever is making the noise. But there's no sign of anyone.

The silence stretches out. Then someone moans my name.

'*Beckyyyyyy . . .*'

I growl softly and relax. 'You think you're clever, don't you?'

'I don't think it,' comes the cheerful response. 'I know it!'

Then Rage stands up from where he had been lying on the stairs and grins at me. I shoot him the finger and go back to appraising the paintings, trying to act as if the annoying hulk isn't here, hiding my relief, not wanting him to know that he really did spook me. Admit to being scared? Not in this unlife! And definitely not to a cynical, bullying piece of trash like Rage. I'd rather claw out my own eyes than give that creep the satisfaction of knowing how close he'd come to making a dead girl shiver.