



CHAPTER 2

THE FACE IN THE DOORWAY

By lunchtime Liam was seriously freaking out. What was it with today? Yes, he'd been teased about his outburst during the register. He couldn't blame Chris. That's what you did – take the mickey out of your mates. Liam could cope with that.

It was the other stuff that bothered him. The stuff he couldn't explain.

The stuff about Billy.

He heard the name everywhere he went. Whispered as he barged his way down the

corridor. Shouted across the playground. Snatches of conversations.

Billy Button.

Billy Button.

The same everywhere Liam went. That stupid, childish name over and over again.

Billy Button.

Billy Button.

It didn't make any sense. He'd never talked to anyone about Billy. Not even Chris. Not because he'd been embarrassed. It wasn't that. Billy just wasn't important any more.

Billy Button.

Billy Button.

Things got worse when he made his way to Geography, the last lesson before lunch. He was





CHAPTER 5

THE EVIDENCE

“Let’s show Mr McGregor,” said Sarah. “He’ll have to admit it’s weird.”

We were sitting at the back of the library the following lunchtime. Sarah was rubbing her wrist, which was covered in sore, red circles where Dave had grabbed it.

We were watching the footage of Dave and his chanting disciples on my phone.

“It’ll be the same as when we spoke to Mr Baxter,” I said. “Brilliant grades, model students, blah blah blah. So what if they chant like devil

worshippers every evening? It’s a small price to pay.”

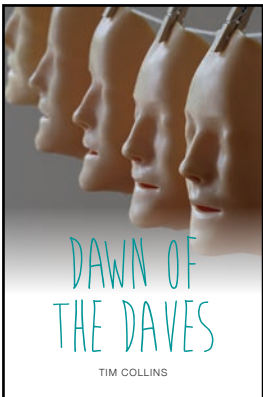
“If Mr McGregor doesn’t want to listen, we can stick it on YouTube,” said Sarah. “The whole school will be closed down if it goes viral.”

We crept out of the library. A group of Daves, two male and two female, stared at us as we passed.

We made our way down the corridor. Another Dave was gazing at us from inside the music room. I think it was Kieran Jones from year ten, but it was hard to tell. They were all starting to look alike with their blazers, floppy blond hair and fixed grins.

We knocked on Mr McGregor’s door. I’d never been inside the headmaster’s office before, which made me even more nervous.

“Come in.”





CHAPTER 2

CONTRACT

The man pushed me into a chair at a table near the back of the pub and sat opposite me. Smoothing down his blue work-overalls, he grabbed a small glass containing a sparkling, reddish drink and downed it in one go. Then he glared at me with dark eyes.

“You certainly know how to cause a scene.”

I glanced over my shoulder to where my Aunt Anna was almost in tears; some of her husband’s blood had spattered onto the white fur of her ridiculously expensive coat. “He deserved it,” I grunted. “And a lot more besides.”

“A lot of people deserve a lot of things,” the man said.

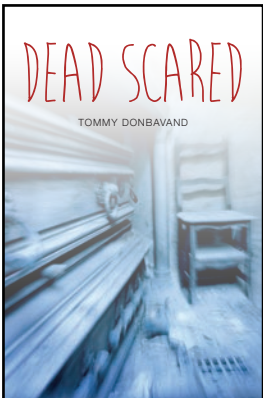
I looked this weirdo up and down. What on earth was he talking about now? “Listen, mate,” I said, starting to get up, “it’s been a long and particularly rubbish day, so if you don’t mind...”

The guy reached across the table and pushed me back into my seat. Then he grabbed his tiny glass and raised it to his lips again. That was odd. I could have sworn that glass was empty a few seconds ago.

“I’m Nick,” he said, necking the auburn-coloured liquid. “And I meant what I said – I can bring your mum back...”

For the second time in five minutes, I felt my hand tighten into a fist. “You what?!”

Nick didn’t shift his gaze. He stared me straight in the eyes as he pulled a piece of old, yellowing paper from inside his overalls and slid it across the table to me.





CHAPTER 3

The three friends didn't have much time to talk about their discovery. Hildy's mum arrived home and started making tea – the signal for Luca and Ry to head home. She looked at the three in concern and suspicion, commenting that they all looked like they'd seen a ghost.

But they still had lots of questions:

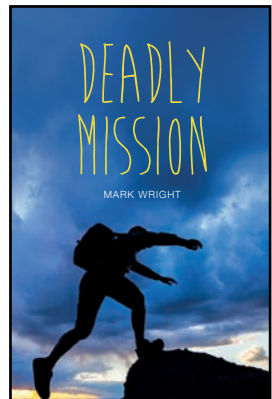
- 1 What was the circuit for?
- 2 Where was the map reference?
- 3 Who wanted it; and why was it urgent?
- 4 Who had left the package in Hildy's bag?
(This last one had left Hildy with a sick feeling.)

Ryan was the sensible one for a change – he suggested they kept hold of the package and handed it to Mrs Albiston, the headteacher, in the morning. Job done. They split up for the evening, agreeing this was probably the best plan.

But Hildy couldn't let go of the feeling that something was very wrong. The circuit had been left there on purpose and she was meant to find it.

That night she helped her mum with some chores and made plans with her dad for their orienteering trip to the nature reserve on Saturday. She tried to be chatty and upbeat, but the word URGENT! kept flashing in front of her eyes.

She sat at the desk in her room for what seemed like hours, turning the circuit over in her hand. The green gem reflected the light of her lamp, casting emerald patterns around her room. Even in bed, Hildy couldn't leave it alone, sitting up in bed.





CHAPTER 2

The Jigsaw Lady wasn't some kind of horror story aimed at scaring children; she was a real person, one who lived in the broken-down old house at the top of Stone Hill. Ever since he'd been a small child, Billy had heard the stories about the Jigsaw Lady. Some said she was a lonely old woman who spent her days putting jigsaw puzzles together, but others said darker things: that she was a witch; that she'd been alive for hundreds of years; that she stayed young by drinking the blood of teenage boys; and how children, cats and dogs had mysteriously disappeared when walking through her gardens.

Billy didn't know which of the stories were true, but the one thing he did know was that the last thing he wanted to do was be anywhere near the Jigsaw Lady's house at eight o'clock at night. But here he was, at five minutes to eight, standing at the end of Stone Hill, waiting for Rickey and Dave to turn up.

It was another ten minutes before they arrived, and Billy thought he saw a slight trace of fear in their faces as they walked up to him.

"You made it then," Dave said as he stopped. Billy nodded.

"Why are we here?" he asked.

Rickey grinned, the fear disappearing from his face for the first time. "To have some fun," he said, opening the gate and entering the Jigsaw Lady's garden. "Come on."

Dave looked at Billy. Billy looked back at Dave.

JIGSAW LADY

TONY LEE



CHAPTER 4

HELP COMES TO CALL

Alice screamed as her dad grabbed at her, fingers closing tight around her arm. No, not fingers – claws. She pulled away, dragging her arm from his grip.

Pain shot up her arm. She cried out, stumbling back against the wall. She looked down at her arm. An ugly scratch ran from her wrist to her elbow. It wasn't deep, but it already stung dreadfully.

Alice's dad stumbled back, staring at her arm.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "Sorry, sorry, sorry."

He looked so pathetic, cringing against the remains of his bed. Holding her arm, Alice backed quickly out of the room and slammed the door.

The scratch burned beneath her skin. Enough was enough. She'd played by his rules ever since the accident, but no more.

The doorbell rang again, followed by a sharp rap against the door.

Alice ran down the stairs, nearly slipping as she reached the bottom step. She crossed over to the door and pulled it open.

A familiar face stood on the other side. A tall man with a bald head and a broad smile. One of Dad's workmates, Steve.

His grin faded as he took in how Alice looked.

"You OK, pet?" he asked, worry lines creasing his forehead. "I just popped around to see your dad."





CHAPTER 2

For the rest of the day, Aashif worried about the strange ‘friend’ request he had received several times, and the secret from his past that everyone had seen on their computer screens. Luckily, it was taken more as a joke played on Aashif than as a truth revealed to the world, but it was enough to worry him. After all, what if this person knew other secrets about him?

He was so distracted in Chemistry that Mr Wallace asked him a question three times before Aashif even realised he was being spoken to. As the rest of the class sniggered, Aashif was sure

that he saw Keeley James peering under his stool to see if he’d ‘had an accident’ while the others on her bench sniggered.

At lunch time Aashif didn’t really want to hang out with anyone, still shaken from the computer messages, so he left the school grounds, walking up Bishop Street to the local chip shop. Outside the shop was one of his classmates, Kyle Walters, currently complaining about his smartphone’s camera app, and Aashif talked to him about it for a couple of minutes before going inside.

Grabbing a small portion of chips, he sat on the bench over the road, staring across the park and playground to his right. No matter how hard he tried to remember, he couldn’t think of anyone he might have told his bed-wetting secret to. It wasn’t the sort of thing you did. All he could think was that somehow his mother had stupidly blurted it out somewhere. But she was at work and he wouldn’t know until he saw her at the end of the day.





CHAPTER 4

TROLL

“Your dad never wanted a child,” said the troll. “You were nothing more than a burden to him. I’m amazed he stuck around as long as he did. But still you make demands on the poor man. You’re so needy, so desperate to be loved. He complains to Janet every time you text him.”

Alice’s mind was racing. How could the monster possibly know the name of her dad’s new girlfriend? And if it was right about Janet’s name, could it be right about her dad? He always said he was pleased to see her, but he’d go days without replying to her texts. And he changed

the subject whenever she asked if she could come and stay.

Alice’s eyes were stinging. She blinked, and a hot tear ran down her cheek.

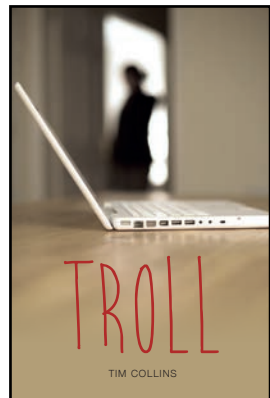
The creature reached out and scraped it away. Its rough skin felt like sandpaper on Alice’s face.

The troll sniffed his finger and grinned. “Excellent,” he said. “I knew it would be.”

Chris murmured from the other pillar and the troll wandered over to him.

Alice remembered what the troll had said about her mum and she felt her cheeks flushing. What right did this stupid beast have to judge her mum? She was a good person, and she’d always been there for Alice.

She tried to stop herself. She needed to forget the troll’s words and think straight. The creature had ranted at her until she’d started crying. Why was it so keen to upset her?





CHAPTER 2

On the edge of Oakshot Wood, opposite Joe's house, a group of kids from the nearby primary school was gathered. Joe paid them no attention at first. Then he overheard what they were saying.

"Eugh, that's gross!"

"It must have been dead for days!"

Puzzled, he crossed the grass and approached them. "What's up?" he asked.

The kids parted to reveal a stinking carcass.

It was a large, ginger cat. It had been ripped open from neck to tail. Most of its innards had gone. Its eyes stared glassily and its mouth hung open.

"Oh yuk!" cried Joe. "Where did that come from?"

"Samson dragged it out of the wood!" said one of the kids. A border collie sat panting at the boy's feet. "He didn't kill it, he just found it. Where do you think its guts have gone?"

"Maybe a badger ate them," said Joe, wrinkling his nose. He turned away from the blood and the smell and went home.

The dead cat stayed on his mind all evening. What would have slashed the poor creature like that? It looked as if it had been opened up like a school lunchbox!

*

Mark could hear the porter's shuffling footsteps accompanying the dodgy wheel. The bed was almost here. The bed that, when it had left the ward not long after lunchtime, had contained a patient. An older guy, called Jack. The guy who was suffering with a hernia. The guy who didn't have any family to visit him when the doors to Ward 13 were opened to the public every night.

Jack had been the ringleader of the group he jokingly called 'The Loners'. He had been the one to notice that Mark also sat alone during visiting hours, his head buried in his video game. On Mark's third evening, he had limped across the ward to join him.

"Visiting time again, huh?"

Mark had nodded, barely looking up from his game.

Jack hadn't been put off. "You expecting anyone tonight? Mum, or dad?"

Mark had shaken his head. "Don't have parents."

"Oh, I'm sorry..."

"Don't be," said Mark, looking up at Jack properly for the first time. He glanced at the Royal Navy tattoo on the man's forearm. "I'm not sorry. You don't miss what you've never had."

"I guess not," Jack had said. "No other family, then?"

Another shake of the head. "I live in Keating House."

"The children's home? Down by the High Street?"

"Yep."

"But you must have carers there?"

Mark had nodded. "They can't leave the other kids to come and sit with me, though. We're short-staffed most of the time."

