



CHAPTER 1

HOME ALONE

Lee first saw the face through the front door.
A nose pressed against the frosted glass.
A steamy smear spread from the lips. Dark eyes
peered in. Blinking. Staring. Scary.

Lee threw himself on the floor and lay still. His
heart was thumping like mad. No one ever
called at their house. Mum always told him not
to answer the door to strangers. He'd never felt
so scared. Not in his own home. He just hoped
the eyes hadn't seen him.

Being alone had never been a problem before.
Lee was used to it. Until now. He'd always liked

being in the house on his own. It was the only time he could do what he liked. No one to nag or fuss. But all of a sudden it felt different. Who could he call for help? No one was next door – they were away. It was already getting dark.

The phone was just out of reach. Lee grabbed a leg of the wobbly hall table. It shook and crashed down on him. The phone, note pad, pens and a pot plant fell on top of him. As he lay at the foot of the stairs, he wished he hadn't snapped at his mum at breakfast.

“Of course I'll be all right here by myself. I'm fourteen. I like being on my own. Why do you treat me like a helpless zombie?”

But now he couldn't manage – and he knew it.

There was nothing Lee could do. The dark shape through the glass was pushing a key in the lock. It jangled and clicked as Lee pulled himself across the floor towards the door. He'd try to fix the chain before the door could open. He might

even reach the catch on the lock. That would stop the man getting in. That's if Lee's legs didn't give way. But he didn't have time to find out. Just as he crawled to the door, it opened and pushed towards him with a thud.

Lee fell back and stared up at a man standing over him. The door slammed shut, followed by a scary silence. They were alone in the house. Both sweating and breathless, they stared into each other's eyes.

It was Lee who spoke first. He was surprised at how calm he managed to sound.

“Before you kill me, there's something you should know.” He held up his phone.

“I've filmed you breaking in. I've just sent it to my mum's phone. The police will know who you are from your eyes. They can read them like fingerprints. So now you know.”

The man stood very still for a few seconds. He seemed lost for words. Slowly he pulled the hood from his head and took off his gloves. He knelt down beside Lee and held out his hand. “I’m really sorry,” he said softly. “I’m sorry you fell. I’m sorry I broke in. I’m sorry I scared you. But it was the only way. You are a brave boy.”

Lee’s heart was still thumping. He tried to make sense of this man with jet-black hair and staring brown eyes. Quite young – with a soft voice – foreign.

“We haven’t got anything,” Lee told him.
“There’s no money in the house. Mum doesn’t get paid much and I haven’t got a dad living here. I’ve only got a few quid in a tin upstairs. You can have it. But if you must rob us, don’t smash things up. Please. Mum gets upset and stressed. She hasn’t been well, you see, and...”

The man put a finger to his lips. “Shhh. I am not here to hurt you. I am not a robber. I’m a friend. I want you to be my friend.”