

JIGSAW LADY

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CHAPTER 1

From the moment that Rickey Randall arrived at the school he had ‘bully’ stamped all over his face.

He was a good foot in height taller than everyone else in year nine, and everyone in class had heard a story from a friend, who had heard it from their brother, who had been told it in a bowling alley, about why Rickey had been expelled from his previous schools. Some said it was gang related. Some said he had almost killed a year seven while ramming his head down a toilet, but all said the same thing: Rickey Randall was bad news.

And for Billy Pearce and the other students like him, Rickey Randall was the Devil who had come to Ramsay High.

Billy was a small boy. He didn't really like his lessons, but he knew that if he wanted to be a postman like his father he had to learn his words and pass his tests. And he'd tried to keep out of trouble, making friends with the quieter boys in the class, Graham King and Martin Reilly. They'd spend their break times by the music block, playing handball against the sports' hall wall.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long until Rickey and his follower Dave Chapman found them. And, once he did, he decided to make their lives hell.

At first it was small things. During PE, Rickey would line the 'weedy' boys against the wall, using a tennis racquet to hammer balls at them. If they were hit they were allowed to leave. But Rickey would deliberately miss, building up the fear in the same way that a horror movie does.

The longer Billy stood there waiting to be hit, the more scared of being hit he became. It was torture.

From that, Rickey moved up to bigger games. When changing after PE he would steal Billy's clothes while Billy was in the shower and throw them in with him, soaking them. Or, worse, he would hide them so Billy had to run around naked looking for them. Usually he'd give them to the girls next door.

But the day that Rickey Randall pushed Billy out of the first floor window during French, holding him by his feet as Billy dangled in fear, was the day that Billy realised that he had to do something about this. The teachers didn't care, they were as scared of Rickey as he was and they were powerless to do anything. The only way that Billy was going to survive until year ten was to become a follower, like Dave Chapman.

Graham, however, didn't understand.

“You’re joining the enemy!” he complained during Physics.

“No, I’m surviving,” Billy said. “What would have happened in French if my shoe had slipped off? I’d have fallen! It wouldn’t have been like a tennis ball hitting me! It would have been a dozen times worse! I might have broken something, even died!”

“I’d rather die than suck up to Rickey the Thicky,” Graham muttered.

“I’m sorry,” Billy said, “but I have to do something.”

“If you do this, then our friendship is over.” Graham sat back, folding his arms, and for a single moment Billy felt anger at his best friend.

“You’re just worried that if I join Rickey, then I won’t be the top of his hit list!” he snapped. “You’re just worried that you’ll be next! Some friend you are! Maybe we shouldn’t be friends!”

And with that, Billy turned and stormed back to his desk, glaring at his one-time friend for the remainder of the lesson. But, deep down, Billy knew that Graham was right. If it had been the other way round, Billy would have said the same thing.

But he'd burned his bridges now and the only way to go was forwards. Straight towards Rickey Randall.

*

It was after Maths that Billy found Rickey and Dave behind the school canteen, slouching moodily against the wall, hands in pockets. Nervously, he walked over to them, expecting Rickey to leap up and attack him. Instead, Rickey just looked at him, his face becoming a sneer.

“What do you want?” he asked.

“I... I want to be part of your gang,” Billy stammered nervously. Rickey looked over to Dave, who smiled.

“Why?” Rickey asked. Billy fought back the urge to reply *because that way you won't beat me up or throw tennis balls at me or strip me naked and make me run around...*

“Because I want to be cool,” he lied.

Rickey laughed, pushing away from the canteen wall and leering at Billy. As Billy flinched back, Rickey placed an arm around his shoulder.

“You wanna join us?” he said. “You gotta prove it. You need to leave your old friends behind. You do that – you're in.”

“I can do that,” Billy said, already feeling guilty. Dave took a step towards Billy and gave him a hard stare.

“Let's see you do it then,” he smiled. “Come on Rickey, let's go pay Billy's mates a visit.”

Billy felt his stomach flip-flop as he followed the two bullies towards the music block. He wanted to turn around, to run away, but he found his feet following theirs, knowing that he was too scared to leave. As they turned into the small open area where Billy used to play handball, he saw with a sickening lurch of his guts that there was only one other student there.

Graham.

Standing still, a tennis ball in his hand, Graham had probably been playing handball alone, hitting the ball against the wall until someone turned up to play. Now he stood like a rabbit caught in the car headlights.

Rickey walked over to Graham, taking the tennis ball from his hand.

“Move,” he ordered, pointing at the wall. Without even asking why, Graham quietly walked to the wall, facing the two bullies and Billy. Rickey gave Billy the ball.

“Throw it at him,” he ordered.

Billy looked at Graham, seeing the hurt, anger and shame in his ex-friend’s eyes.

“If you do, we’re definitely no longer friends,” Graham said softly. But Billy knew it was already too late. Shutting his eyes, Billy threw the ball, hearing the *ka-duk* of the ball missing Graham, hitting the wall and bouncing back. Picking it up, Rickey passed it back to Billy.

“Again,” he said.

Three times Billy threw the ball; three times it missed, but the fourth time, the fourth terrible time, it flew straight at Graham’s face, hitting his nose and drawing blood. As Graham ran off in tears, Rickey and Dave laughed, slapping Billy on the back. Billy felt sick. But at the same time, there was a small amount of hope that now he would no longer be bullied.

“Nice one,” Rickey said. “You’re almost there.”

“Almost?” Billy looked from Rickey to Dave.

“There’s more?”

“Oh yes,” Rickey grinned. “That was the proof. Now we need the initiation.”

“What do you mean?” Billy wanted to leave. Dave leaned in close.

“We mean a test, something bigger than this.

Tonight you join us on a mission,” he said.

“Tonight we meet the *Jigsaw Lady*.”

Billy felt a shiver of fear run down his spine. He knew the stories about the Jigsaw Lady, and he wanted more than anything in the world never to visit her house. But he knew that whether he went that night would be based on who he feared more... the Jigsaw Lady... or Rickey Randall?