

YOUR FREE SAMPLE CHAPTER

THE ZOMBIE DIALOGUES

Grubby Angel

Billy had a vague thought that it might be his birthday, but instead of cake he'd treat himself to a little extra dog food instead. Something to look forward to, he thought.

He awoke slowly, almost reluctantly; his skinny arms still wrapped protectively around his little sister.

The city was waking up from the long, dark night and an insipid light was filtering into their hiding place.

He lay perfectly still, listening as the collapsed building creaked and groaned around them as it warmed up. The hole they were in was barely big enough for the both of them and the entrance was a tight squeeze even for a couple of small children, but at least they were reasonably safe from the infected.

He opened one eye and watched as a dust mote danced in a thin beam of light, like a dancer on a stage. Molly stirred and moaned softly.

"Shhhh," he said stroking her hair. She seemed to settle down a little. He felt tears well up in his eyes; he needed to be brave like daddy said, but a single tear escaped and ran down his grimy cheek.

Billy sat up in the tiny cave rubbing sleep from his eyes and rummaged through their meagre possessions. They had a quarter of a tin of dog food left, a little water and a tin of something he'd found a few days back. He didn't know what it was, there was no label on its rusty exterior and he'd lost the can opener when they'd had to run from a swarm of the infected.

The dog food was going black and dry on top and didn't smell very nice, but it was all there was to eat. He'd have to work out a way to open the other can soon.

He checked Molly for any new injuries, tearing of a bit more off his shirt and binding the cuts and abrasions from the previous day. Then after rinsing his mouth with some of the water to get rid of the taste of the rancid dog food, he spat some onto a rag and tried to clean her grubby face as best he could.

"Hold still," he said as he wiped away some of the grime. "Mummy said I had to look after you and she'd be mad if she saw how messy you were now."

She stood as if in a daze, still hugging a battered dolly that was missing its head and one arm, but she didn't seem to mind. She was in one of her unresponsive moods, but at least she'll be quiet, thought Billy. He wrapped some rags around his feet and

tied a couple of old plastic shopping bags over the top, it wouldn't last long, but at least he'd have dry feet for a little while.

His filthy jacket had been his fathers and was several sizes too big, but that was a blessing in disguise as it served as a crude sleeping bag for the both of them when they stopped for the night. It reeked of sweat, fear and urine. Sometimes their hiding place was very cramped and it was too dangerous to go outside and he often he was forced to lie sopping in his own piss.

After a while he didn't care anymore, the painful rash caused by the uric acid on his upper legs and crotch soon melded with all the other discomforts and hurts.

He tied up the few things they had in an old flour sack and checked his father's revolver the way he had been shown. It had just three rounds left, but the action was still smooth despite the early stages of rust.

Billy picked up the bag, the string he used as a strap digging into his bony shoulder. "C'mon Molly, we have to go... we need to find the good guys." He said softly before crawling through the hole. She hesitated for a second before scrambling after him on her hands and knees and out into the weak dawn light.

She tottered after him, the remains of her nappy sagging almost to her knees, arms outstretched toward Billy as he looked up and down the street checking for any signs of danger. Apart from one of the infected lurching away from them at the far end of the street, it seemed safe enough.

He looked down at her and shook his head. "I'm sorry Molly, I can't carry you, you're too heavy now." As he headed off down the street she gave a little sigh and followed him as fast as her little legs could carry her, her arms still outstretched hopefully.

The early morning dew sparkled as the sun came up and Billy paused to lick the moisture off the windscreen of a wrecked car, the driver glaring at him through empty eye sockets. It wasn't much, but it eased his thirst a little.

Molly bumped into him and began tugging at his jacket.

"Stop that," he said irritably. "Or I'll tell mummy you've been a bad girl."

She seemed to think about that for a few seconds, and then reached toward him again.

He felt the tears start again. "Molly, I know you miss mommy and daddy. I miss them too, but they can't be here," he regarded his little sister sadly. "You're too young to understand." Billy sighed and trudged tiredly down the road, followed closely by Molly.

They walked for a few hours until they reached a bus lying on its side. Billy crawled inside, but there was nothing worth taking. No food or water at any rate, just old sale receipts scattered around the wreck.

He felt faint and his hunger pangs were now a constant torment. A jagged piece of metal gave him an idea and Billy reached into his bag and took out the rusty can. It made a gentle sloshing noise as he hefted it in his hand. He aimed carefully and slammed it down onto the pointed edge.

Pain shot through his arm and all he'd succeeded in doing was to dent the can, leaving a bright scar where the rust had been scraped off. He rubbed his wrist and gently pushed his sister away.

"Please Molly, I have to try to open this."

He brought the can down again, harder this time and brown liquid squirted out over his hand. He hungrily licked his fingers, then gagged and spat on the ground.

"Paint." He said in a barely audible voice and slumped against the wreck, this time letting the tears flow.

"It's not fair... it's just not fair," he sobbed picking up the can and throwing it as hard as he could across the road. Molly looked up at him, clutching at his clothing.

"Go 'way Molly," he said and roughly shoved her away. She fell flat on her bottom, sitting in the road for a few seconds before getting up and toddling back over to him holding her arms out.

Billy stroked her hair as she tried to climb onto his lap. "I'm sorry," he said wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. "I just wish mommy and daddy were here."

He looked down the road as a movement caught his eye; there he saw two roughly dressed bearded men. Raiders. They had encountered them before, brutal men and women who, since the fall of civilization, lived a savage life of murder, rape and theft.

One of them pointed and yelled. "There, I tole ya I heard sumthin"

Billy was on his feet in a second, scooping up Molly and running as fast as he could away from the men. He heard a shouted curse and the sound of boots pounding on the cracked roadway.

"Hey kid, stop. We ain't gonna hurt ya," one of them shouted.

Billy ran on even faster, Molly clinging to him, her face buried in his neck. He was tiring fast and the two men were gaining on him. He looked around desperately for a hiding place and as he rounded a corner, he saw a half burnt out house.

Billy scrambled over a collapsed wall, ignoring the pain as he cut his feet on the rubble and broken glass, some of the floorboards had been burnt away and sobbing with fear he squeezed into the gap, dragging Molly in after him.

There was only just enough room between the floor and ash-blackened ground for the two children and Billy lay flat on his stomach like a lizard in a crevice, desperately trying to control his panicked breathing.

He pointed the pistol at the opening. He had three bullets left, one for the first raider unlucky enough to discover them and one each for Molly and himself. He'd decided a while ago that he wouldn't let them be taken alive.

This wasn't the first time he'd encountered raiders. A gang had almost caught them a few weeks back and he remembered the cold brutality in their faces and how they'd killed the dog that had befriended the two children.

He'd hidden in terror in the boot of a wrecked car with Molly, while the group of men and women shouted to each other as they tried to find them.

They didn't just kill the dog, they'd hurt it for the fun of it, laughing as it whined and yelped in pain, its eyes bright with fear and betrayal. Billy had put his hands over his ears and squeezed his eyes shut until it was over.

And in a sudden flush of shame, he remembered how his mouth had watered when the smell of roasting meat had wafted over them in their hiding place as the raiders had cooked the dog.

For a minute he heard nothing, then there was the unmistakable sound of boots moving stealthily over the wooden boards.

"I'm sure the little fuckers came in here," whispered a voice.

"Yeah, mebbe," came another low voice.

Billy was shaking uncontrollably as he listened to the men talking as they searched for them, desperately trying not to cough.

After a while one of the men grunted, "Fuck this shit, they ain't here."

He lay still, holding Molly close for a long time after they'd left. When he finally thought it was safe he crawled out and walked a few steps, leaving bloody footprints before collapsing in pain from his injured feet.

Molly toddled up to him and plucked gently at his clothing as he sat pulling some pieces of glass from his foot. He almost smiled. She was still wearing the remains of her ragged pink party dress, complete with the battered and bent fairy wings she'd resisted any attempt to remove. In the failing light, she almost looked like a grubby little angel.

He looked around and saw a cupboard in the remains of the wrecked kitchen, it was as good a place as any to hide and he wasn't going to be able to walk very far anyway. He climbed inside and as Molly crawled in after him, he pulled the door closed.

He was so very tired, but Molly continued to fidget, tugging at his clothing and nuzzling his neck. In the end he pulled the stump of a candle from his pocket and lit it.

"You want me to read you a story?"

He pulled a damp damaged and dog-eared book from his bag and began to read. As he did Molly began to calm down and finally lay still.

The book was 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar,' one of her favourites.

He paused as outside one of the infected howled in the night. He read on, but the images of food were more than he could stand.

Billy stopped reading. He was so hungry. He finally fell asleep dreaming of chocolate cake.

In the morning, he strained some water from a puddle through a rag and called that breakfast. He was very weak, but he bandaged his feet as best he could and limped down the road, Molly toddled after him her arms outstretched as usual.

"I can't carry you Molly," he said looking back at her "And we have to find the good guys, like daddy said."

The pistol was heavy, so he tied a bit of string to the trigger guard and hung it around his neck. A few hours later with the last of the water long since finished, Billy was beginning to feel dizzy and his vision began to blur.

"Are we there yet?" he mumbled to himself and concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other.

"You're almost there, sweetheart".

"Mommy?"

"I'm very proud of you Billy, we both are."

"I'm really, really tired mommy and I'm so hungry."

"I know sweetheart, but it's not far now and you've looked after your little sister just like we asked."

“Mommy?” He began to cry again. “Please don't leave us again.”

“I'm so sorry Billy, but you have to be brave just a little while longer.”

“Mommy... I can't... I can't do this anymore,” he sobbed and staggered to a stop.

As Molly bumped into him he looked up and through his tears he could see a wall with a large gate in front of them. He could make out the words *Flint's Outpost* crudely painted on the crossbar.

“Jesus Christ!” Said a voice and Billy came out of his daze. Several men and women were standing by the gate, a couple had weapons pointed at them.

Billy backed away a few steps, pushing Molly behind him and brought the pistol up.

“He's got a gun,” yelled one of them and the others brought their rifles to bear.

“Stand down,” boomed a voice and the guards reluctantly lowered their weapons but remained wary.

Corporal ‘Cannibal’ Johnson strode forward and stopped a few feet from the two children.

“Where you headed to soldier?” He asked Billy gently, and then on impulse, he saluted the small boy.

Billy was completely taken aback, but after a short pause he lowered the pistol and awkwardly returned the salute. His eyes wide open in awe of the giant in front of him. He was nothing like the raiders; for one he was relatively well dressed and radiated a calm friendliness.

“A-are you th-the good guys?” Billy stammered.

The big man grinned and rubbed the stubble on his chin, “Yeah, I reckon we're the good guys. And who's this? He said nodding toward Molly.

“That's my little sister Molly. Mommy said I had to look after her.”

“Well, you've done a hell of a job soldier, I could use a man like you in my platoon,” said Johnson.

“Really?” Billy smiled for the first time in a long time.

“Max.”

“Corporal?” Replied one of the guards.

“Go get Sally the head nurse... on the double.”

“Yes Corp.”

As the man sprinted back through the gate Johnson turned back to Billy and watched uneasily as the boy put his arm protectively around his sister. A minute later Sally ran up, her medical bag bouncing against her hip.

“Hi Canni, What’s up?” Her hand flew up to her mouth when she saw the two children “... Oh god.”

The young boy was almost skeletal, and bloody rags covered his feet. Starvation had left his skin almost translucent and his eyes and teeth looked too big for his skull.

“This is Billy.” Said Johnson softly. “When he gets a bit bigger, he’s going to be a member of my squad... isn’t that right son?”

“Yes sir.” Said Billy giving the big guardsman another salute.

“Hello Billy,” said Sally, tears pricking her eyes. “You’re safe now, and we’re going to look after you OK?”

“Kay, but my little sister is sick... I promised mommy I’d look after her.”

Sally looked at Molly. Her skin was grey and the remains of a bloody pink party dress hung off her tiny body. Duct tape was wrapped around her head, covering her mouth and jaw and her dead white eyes seemed to see everything... and nothing.

The bite mark on her arm said it all. Infected.

“We’ll take care of you both sweetheart,” said Sally her voice breaking and held out her hand to the young boy.

Molly let out a soft moan and reached her arms up toward Billy. He gave her one last hug, brushing her tangled hair from her face and then took Sally’s hand.

Sally nodded to a grim faced Johnson. He watched as she took the young boy into the compound and turned to the little girl.

“Max, your machete.”

“Jesus, I can't kill her Corporal, she’s just a kid.”

“I'm not asking you to... I'll do it.”

Max drew the blade and handed it to Johnson.

Molly looked up at the big guardsman and toddled toward him, her arms outstretched as if she wanted to be picked up. The machete came down with a crack and she lay still.

For a long minute Johnson stood staring down at the little body, the fairy wings fluttering gently in the breeze.

Then he threw the weapon as far as he could and stalked back into the outpost, the other guards parting as he walked through them. No one wanted to look into his eyes.

Sally picked Billy up and carried him toward the infirmary, dismayed at how little he weighed. He clung to her and she felt his hot tears on her neck.

“Is she with the angels now?” asked Billy in a small voice.

“Yes baby,” whispered Sally choking back her own tears. “She's with the angels now.”

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