

## Zombie Series – Chapter Two

### **11 years ago**

July 7<sup>th</sup>. I was at work when the first zombies clawed their way out of their graves. Immune to pain and with the patience of the dead, they broke through the lids of coffins and burrowed out of the ground; splinters of wood, fiberglass, scraps of linen liner and dirt impacted under their fingernails.

They rose with a single desire, the most basic need of any organism; to feed.

The first reports of something crazy going on started rolling in mid-morning. All kinds of rumors were flying. Was it some sort of terrorist attack? Was it some gang, strung out on drugs, attacking people at random? As the day went on, we realized it was just a local thing; it was happening all over the country. It took a long time before anyone was willing to voice what seemed like a ludicrous idea; the dead were rising.

From my office window, life looked normal. Of course, you're not going to find a cemetery in too many downtown areas. It was the suburbs that got hit first.

When the news first started trickling in, I called my wife to make sure things were okay at home. She and Angie, my daughter, were getting ready to go see a matinee showing of the latest Disney flick. Nothing unusual, she said, though she did turn on the news and decide to stay home from the show.

At the first reports of it being some kind of Zombie apocalypse, I rushed from the office, trying to call the house and Susan's cell while speeding home. I couldn't get a hold of her. All I could think about was how it had taken me more than two weeks to convince her, nine years ago, that the house we were considering as the one to start our family in was everything we were looking for and a great investment, despite the fact that it was next to a graveyard.

Once I was off the E-way, I noticed the streets were pretty deserted. As I swung into our neighborhood, my heart sank. You know that old movie where the kid says he sees dead people? Well, that's what I was

seeing. A few groups and a few lone wanderers were shuffling along the streets and through the yards. Some just stood around, like they were waiting for a bus or something.

As I turned the corner on to my street, tires screeching in protest at how fast I was taking the turn, I never had a chance to avoid the guy in the road. There was a sickening thump and a blur as the body hit my windshield, spidering it, and then flipped over the top of my car. I slammed on the brakes and jumped from the car, feeling like I was going to vomit and wondering how many years I was going to get for vehicular manslaughter. The fact that I had just seen zombies walking the streets and my concern for my wife and daughter were out of my head just like that. It's funny how the mind can do that sort of shit. Running to the back of the car, all I could do was pray over and over that I didn't kill whoever it was and pray a little extra that it wasn't a kid.

The guy looked like a crumpled marionette, limbs going in all the wrong directions, body broken in half. Dead for sure. My heart fell so hard and fast into my stomach that I felt it hit the bottom. I hurled my breakfast all over the blacktop.

Oh God, Oh God, I kept repeating, falling to my knees, the smell of the recycled breakfast burrito floating up and tempting my stomach to evacuate whatever else was left in there. Then I heard him moan.

Alive? I didn't see how it could be possible. I started crawling toward the body. He turned his head toward me; *it* did. That's something I learned pretty fast. They're not *him* or *her*, they're *it*.

I was snapped back into the believability of the day. The flesh missing from one side of the face, the exposed skull beneath, the dead, empty eyes; it was one of the zombies. Despite the extent of the injuries, which I wasn't entirely sure were all freshly caused by my driving, it was still trying to lunge toward me.

I remember looking around for help, not because I was afraid the thing could get me – it could barely move – but because it still seemed that I should be trying to assist the guy I just plowed into with car. I

guess I couldn't wrap my head around the idea of the dead having come back to life, not completely anyway. I suppose most people felt the same way and it probably cost a lot of them their lives.

I left it lying there, jumping back into my car and continuing to my house. As I got closer and closer to home, I noticed that there were less and less people around. Dead ones or otherwise. For a second that gave me hope but then, as I screeched to a stop half in the street and half on the lawn that I been trying to get to grow just half worth a fuck all summer, that same stomach dropping feeling hit me again.

You know how a hurricane works? Or a tornado...I hear it's the same thing. Right in the center of the storm, in the eye, everything is all calm and peaceful and quiet. Spreading out from the eye, it's all about high wind, crazy rain, hail and blown up trailer parks. My house was in the eye of the storm. You see, we lived right next to a cemetery. By the time I arrived, there were no zombies to be seen.

I stood for a minute, maybe two...maybe a half hour. Fuck, I don't know. I stood on my lawn and stared at the cemetery next door. Freshly turned sod bore testament to the fact that the dead had risen from their graves. Not every plot was disturbed (I would later learn that the reanimation process was a very hit and miss sort of thing) but enough of them were to provoke an image in my mind of a horde of shambling corpses. I could only imagine what my wife, my daughter, would have seen looking out our windows.

As I said, I'm not really sure how long I stood there. I think it was less the awe I might have felt at the sight of the gaping holes in the earth of the cemetery and more the fear I felt about what might be waiting for me inside. It might have been the sight of the broken picture window or the splintered door jamb that brought me back to the moment. Regardless, I tore into the house yelling for my wife and daughter. It was a stupid thing to do really. There could have been zombies all over the place but you don't think about things like that, at least I didn't then. Nowadays, I also think about stuff like that. It's one of the reasons why I'm about the best around at what I do. I'm careful, cautious, deliberate. Well,

there's that and the fact that I don't much give a fuck about anything other than killing the sons of bitches.

You see, what I found wasn't a mass of dead but walking, groaning bodies. It wasn't even a stray creeper. And it wasn't the mutilated bodies of family which, I sometimes think, might have been the much better 'cause then I could have just done myself in right there and then and put an end to it all. No, what I found was broken teddy bear figurines that my wife collected, overturned chairs, mud and blood stains throughout the main floor and, in the kitchen, lying forlornly on the tile floor, a Winnie the Pooh doll that my little girl had had since she was born. It was her favorite, most treasured possession in the world and it lay, blood stained, staring up at me, accusingly asking just what the fuck had took me so long and why hadn't I been there to protect her like I always promised I would be.

I dropped to the floor, cradled the doll tight to my chest and buried my face against it. I could smell the coppery scent of blood on it but, beyond that, I could smell my Samantha. I could smell the Ivory soap and no tears shampoo. I could smell the cherry flavored lip gloss that made her feel like a big girl. I could smell the fresh, innocent smell of a child.

I cried for a long time, sitting there in the middle of the kitchen with Winnie the Pooh in my hands and when I smelled my salty tears I held the doll away from me so that the stink of me wouldn't corrupt it. And I stared at it through eyes that I never thought would be clear again.

My tears did stop, though. I decided to hang on to the belief that they may have somehow managed to escape. I suppose it's what most people would do, wish for the best no matter how unlikely. And I decided that, until I knew for sure, I would stop at nothing to find them and, along the way, I was going to kill every Goddamn zombie piece of shit I could find.

I had a good number of weapons in my basement. I was a hunter...well, I suppose I still am. I also enjoyed target shooting. I gathered up my few pistols, a shotgun and a rifle. I slung my crossbow over my back. One pistol I stuck in the waistband of my jeans and the others I threw into a duffel bag, along with

the rifle and all the rounds of ammunition I could find. I loaded the shotgun, chambered a round and headed out of the house. I've never been back. I didn't take anything but my weapons and the clothes on my back, my purpose was single minded. The lone memento I bothered with was strapped to the thigh of my leg with one of my old belts; a small, yellow, blood stained teddy bear.

I'll be honest, that hope I started out with hasn't been much more than a tiny glimmer that keeps me from eating a bullet each day in a long, long time. But I'm still looking and, despite how they may have changed and what might be considered right, wrong or indifferent, I'm still killing every fucking corpse that I come across or track down that didn't have the good Goddamn sense to stay dead in the first place. I still have that bear and, if I really concentrate, I can still smell Samantha on it.