

# DEAD END by Trevor Denyer

**Dave Simpson fled from the drunken mob.** They'd seen him kill the old man and now their derision lacerated him. They didn't understand. He hadn't wanted to kill the stupid bastard, just teach him a lesson.

Dave had wanted his money but the old man was stubborn, raising his arms and shouting abuse.

"Fuck off you little turd! You bastard! Streets aren't safe to walk anymore 'cos of trash like you. Why don't you crawl back to the gutter where you belong, you little shit!"

The torrent of abuse had reminded Dave of his father. Then the old man was his father. Dave's rage had drowned out reason. Hate, like a bitter tide had filled him.

The knife had silenced the old man, puncturing his flesh so easily, slicing through the skin and into the guts; ripping down and spilling them onto the pavement. Blood had poured from the wound. The man had tried desperately with splayed fingers to stem the flow and hold in his unwinding intestines. Then the cries of the mob had echoed around the dark tenements. The hunter had become the hunted.

Panic stricken, he fled along streets that were unfamiliar. The mob were gaining and growing more enthusiastic as they sensed their quarry weakening. He was certain they would kill him if they could.

A night mist was developing and thickening as he stumbled along the dark streets. Haloes of light from the streetlamps gave the mist a luminosity as it gathered into an impenetrable fog.

Exhausted, Dave slumped against a wall that was slick with dampness. He stepped back, alarmed by the sense of unease the wall transferred. It was as if something unhealthy lurked beneath the surface.

He listened. The only sound was that of moisture dripping from unseen buildings. The fog held him in a limbo of damp silence.

His heartbeat slowed. The mob had gone. Either that, or they were waiting for him to make a move. Maybe they were lost as well. Perhaps they were surrounding him at this moment....

He moved gingerly forward. The thumping of his heart made his head ache. The fog cleared - so suddenly it made him gasp. The street lay in front of him, lit by soft light. Streetlamps stood like sentinels on empty pavements.

The night was cloudless, yet the terraced houses were covered with moisture. It ran in rivulets into the damp earth of small front gardens. Shrubs and hedges seemed to crouch like petrified dwarves, waiting for him to pass. He turned, confused. They appeared to have changed shape and moved into different positions.

"Don't be so fucking stupid," he muttered. The words temporarily mollified his over-worked imagination. As he continued walking, the unease grew.

The houses watched through dead window eyes. No light shone from these Victorian shells. He wondered what lurked behind the facades.

The street was familiar. It took a while before the sickening chill of realisation sank in. It was impossible. He must be mistaken.

The front door of the house opposite opened. Yellow light flooded the street. The silhouette of a large woman was framed in the doorway.

"David, it's time to come in now. Your father'll be home soon, and if he catches you out

this late, he'll whop you!"

"Mother?" he croaked, his throat dust dry.

She moved onto the pavement. "That is you, David, isn't it?"

It had to be his mother. After all, this was the street of his childhood. He knew it was impossible. These houses had been demolished to make way for a shopping precinct - in another town.

She stood under a streetlamp. He could see her face. It was doughy and etched with worry lines. There was a darkness around one eye; a bruise inflicted by his father.

The thought of that evil bastard rekindled his rage. He suppressed it as he had always done in those bad old days. He had somehow slipped back in time, yet he remained the same - older and more able to stand up against his father when he returned.

His mother watched him through sad eyes. He ran into her arms. Her familiar smell comforted him as he hugged her. The mountainous, sagging breasts squashed against his chest.

"What's up, love?" she asked gently. It didn't matter that this was all impossible. Even though she had died when he was fifteen, leaving him to the abuses of his father, it was alright now.

He tried to push the memory of her body, laid out and yellow, from his mind. It hadn't been her in the coffin - all the wrinkles smoothed out like a tailor's dummy.

She was buried in the Municipal Cemetery. He remembered the drizzle shrouded place and the wet, cold earth taking her from him.

Afterwards he had dreamt of her, rotting and covered with crawling things.

His father had beaten him for crying out in the night. He had cowered in the corner of his bedroom. He remembered the sour stink of the man; the reek of stale beer and unwashed clothes.

One day the bastard disappeared. He was never found, and Dave ended up in a Local Authority home. When he was eighteen he left, to become part of the city's lowlife, learning quickly how to survive on the streets.

When things got too hot he moved on. Now he had sunk to the desperate level of mugging those who could least defend themselves. He knew of no other way to survive, and despised himself for it.

The circle had closed. He was back in the arms of his loving but inadequate mother. He would meet his father again. The tormentor was returning, and this time things would be different.

The knife was gone - dropped somewhere in the past, or was it the future? He had been given another chance.

"Come in, David," his mother said. "Your supper's ready."

He followed her into the house, leaving the silent, saturated street to hug the darkness until morning.

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The house was as he remembered it. Yellowed, peeling wallpaper covered in fading flowers still decorated the hallway. It had always been there, gradually degrading into the wall. The hall light was dim. There was something odd about the carpet. Dampness had soaked through the floor. The thick, cloying smell of rot assailed him. Mother beckoned to him.

"Come on, David," she repeated, "supper's ready."

A maggot wriggled from between her lips and she pressed them harder together. It was in vain. Her bloodshot eyes bulged as her mouth opened in a startled oval, disgorging a multitude of restless yellow-white creatures that she vomited down her pinafore.

Dave screamed. His legs went weak and his stomach heaved. Urine darkened the front of his trousers as he staggered towards the door.

It was tightly closed. The flaking brown paint was rough under his hands as he pounded the wood, expecting it to swing open. He grabbed the doorknob, but his hand slipped around its slimy surface.

He turned back. Mother was gone. He struggled for breath as the oppressive stench of rot overwhelmed him. He glanced down at the carpet. It was alive with parasites and shifted before his eyes.

He fled to the living room, desperately hoping to escape through the backdoor. The room was empty and sparsely furnished. There was a three piece suite, sagging and green. A coffee table stood by a curtained window. He could hear muffled voices coming from the street.

He moved across the room and pulled the curtains aside. The group of drunken youths stood outside. The familiar street had gone, and he looked out at the scene of his crime. Their voices filtered through, hanging on the poisoned air of the room.

"This is right, I'm bloody sure of it."

"You drunken shit! You must be wrong."

"I'm not. I recognise this fucking street. The pub's just down there, see...."

"Yea, yea. I suppose so. Maybe we imagined it."

"He just disappeared."

"Well there's no fucking body here, is there?"

"I could've killed the bastard!"

"It must be the booze. Christ, am I pissed!"

"I'm going home. It's late."

"Yea...."

Dave cried out, "No! You didn't imagine it. I'm real, for God's sake! Help me!"

He knew it was useless. They couldn't hear him. This was his punishment. He was in Hell, where his father belonged. Where was his father?

The smell of fried eggs and bacon filled the room, coming from the kitchen. Outside, daylight was chasing away the horrors of the night.

Dave walked to the kitchen. On the table a plateful of steaming food awaited him. A knife and fork had been neatly set out, and a glass of milk stood to one side. In the centre of the table a vase of daffodils stood, bright and blooming.

The kitchen smelt fresh, as he remembered it. When he looked across the table, what he saw sitting in the opposite chair froze him to the spot.

The murdered man spoke, and as he did so, flecks of blood spattered the white linen tablecloth.

"Hello son," he said, and stood up, holding his drooling entrails in as best he could. The man smiled, his broken lips twisting and splitting. "You found me then. Welcome home."

"Eat up, son." The thick voice of Dave's mother came from the living room. He heard her feet dragging across the carpet.

His father coughed, spitting blood. "Let's make a new start," he said with kindness in his voice.

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