

## CHAPTER

# 1

Frankie woke up, flat on his back on a hard wooden board. He had a banging headache. That was the first thing he noticed. The second thing he noticed was that he was dead.

He wasn't sure how he knew exactly; he just did. There was that headache for one thing, and a strange "deady" sort of taste in his mouth for another.

There was a deathly stillness where his heartbeat should have been. He had never really noticed his heart beating before, but now that it wasn't, he was suddenly very aware of the empty silence in his chest.

And then, of course, there was the hand.

The hand wasn't his. The fingers were thick and sausage-like. The skin on the knuckles was scarred and rough. It was a hand built for hitting things, and Frankie had never hit anyone in his life.

The arm wasn't his, either. It was hairier than any arm he had ever seen, with a faded tattoo of a dragon wrapped around it. Neat black stitches criss-crossed the skin above the elbow and above the hand.

The other arm was not much better. It was slightly longer, slightly thinner and much less hairy. The fingers were long and tapered, with long nails that had turned a nasty shade of black at the tips.

The arms lay on top of a dirty grey sheet, which covered him from just below the neck down. The outline of his body beneath the sheet looked bulkier than normal, but he decided he could worry about that in a minute. One thing at a time.



He balled both hands into fists and watched all his fingers flex in and out. The arms may not have been his originally, but they clearly belonged to him now. He wasn't really sure how he felt about that.

In fact, he wasn't really sure how he felt about anything at the moment. There was a fuzziness in his head like a thick fog. It made thinking quite tricky.

Frankie closed his eyes and tried to force his brain to work properly. What was the last thing he remembered?

He remembered breakfast – cornflakes with slightly sour-tasting milk that probably should have been tipped down the sink the day before. Could that have killed him? Death by milk poisoning?

Probably not.

He remembered the journey to school – sitting in the back seat while his mum and dad argued up front. There had been ... something. A sudden screeching of brakes. A blasting of the horn.