

What Lies Beneath

By R Brent Smith

A young woman, riding a London bus, has her attention focused on her device. Jennifer is in her twenties but looks like a preteen, short, slim, cute with long red hair. No one would ever guess that she is a twenty-eight year-old apprentice accountant working for a large London accounting firm. She is very good at her job. If only she would assert herself, she could quickly climb the corporate ladder. The bus slows as it approaches the next stop. Jennifer looks up from her device and frowns. The shops passing outside the bus window are unfamiliar. She looks around, and groans. She has missed her stop where she would normally walk along a busy block over to the tube station. There, she would catch the tube and ride it for the remainder of her journey. Instead now, she is getting off one stop later. Today of all days, she screwed this up. She has an appointment at home that she just can't miss. She needs to make up time. She exits the bus, raises her umbrella and begins walk-jogging across the wet sidewalk back toward her missed stop. She pauses at the entrance to a side street. Taking this laneway would get her to the tube station sooner, but it is dark and deserted. Her common sense is raising red flags, but her anxiety of being late overcomes her discomfort in walking this bleak, narrow laneway. She tells herself that it is only a block and she will be back onto a busy street and in the tube station in no time. Normally a timid person, she would never choose this course of action, but time is ticking. She hastens along the empty laneway, feeling alone and vulnerable, regretting her choice. A vehicle passes by and she feels less alone, for that moment. This gives her resolve to continue down the laneway, rather than turning around and returning to the busier streets. Alone once again, Jennifer glances about, sees a lone figure ahead of her, a short figure in a beige mac, a hoodie over their head. The figure is moving very slowly, more of a shuffle than a stride. She

crosses the street to avoid the figure and quickens her step. As she is passing the flat face of an old red brick building a door suddenly opens. She has to step to her right to avoid the door. She glances into the opening; a short hunched figure is in the doorway, hoodie over its head. As she passes, the figure raises its head, exposing its face. Jennifer lets out a gasp at the sight of that face. Polite society says that one shouldn't react negatively to those unfortunates among us, those who carry disfigurement, but this visage is truly horrific, inhuman. Peering from the hoodie is a ghostly white face. The face is dominated by two huge eyes. The retinas reflect the dim light, giving the eyes a greenish glow. Prominent cheek bones and a thin jaw line give it the look of a skull. The skull is framed by curly white hair that is long, hanging out of the hoodie onto its chest. A claw-like hand reaches out for her and she spins backward to avoid it. Her spin suddenly stops as she bumps into something solid but yielding. She glances around in horror to see that the figure in the beige mac has crossed the street and is now holding her in a vice-like hug. Jennifer struggles, curses in dismay. This can't be happening. The creature in the doorway reaches out and grasps her by the throat, squeezing her larynx, choking off her scream. She is shoved into the open doorway. The door closes. She is in complete darkness. She is pulled from the world she knows and leaves no sign of her exit. Rain pelts down on a dark, deserted laneway.

#

James Hampstead, thirty, is a detective with the London police. He is sharp of mind, with a memory that retains every detail. Tall and thin, he slouches as if to blend in with his shorter colleagues, relatives and just about anyone else he meets. A bit of a geek, his good looks are hidden behind thick black rimmed glasses, a scraggly beard and '70's style long dark hair. He stands out from the crowd physically and through his sharpness of mind. Once seen as rising star, he is now a forgotten man. Some months ago, James success in solving a high profile case thrust

him into the spotlight. He reluctantly and awkwardly submitted to interviews with the press. His boss thought he was grandstanding and bypassing him. His boss was supposed to be the one in front of the cameras, bathing in the success of his team. James, through no fault of his own, completely unaware of the issue, was forced into the forefront on this case. James, uninterested in taking his superior's limelight, was unaware of the festering ill will. That is, until he was transferred to cold case duty.

At first, James thought of the transfer as a promotion, giving a detective who had proven his worth a more challenging role. This couldn't have been further from the case. Here, he works on missing persons, those that have been missing for quite some time. These cold cases, left unsolved, have been pushed into the back of filing cabinets by the steady flow of new cases. The new cases have some glimmer of hope to be solved because the clues, evidence, witnesses and video surveillance are all fresh and accessible. The recently missing may be found and returned to their loved ones. There is an urgency and energy about those cases. Not so with the cold cases. The urgency has long ago faded. The momentum of the investigations evaporated. All of the excitement of solving these cases is missing. Potential witnesses have forgotten what they saw, evidence is lost to time. Video, if there was any, has been erased or discarded.

With a sigh, James adds a new push pin to a map of London on his office wall. He adds a push pin for every missing case he opens. Each push pin marks the last reported location of the missing person. A pin stays on the map until he solves the case. Unfortunately, these cold cases are difficult, many unsolvable. His map has many pins still sticking out of it. These are cases that are on-going but have little or no momentum, no hope. The trail has gone stone cold. There is no new evidence or insight that James can apply to them. These are his failures and they speak to him every time he looks at the map. Doubt haunts him. He wants out. For James, this is

purgatory. The rug had been pulled out from under him. His career had been sidelined, James Hampstead, detective, effectively disappeared, saddled with unsolvable cases. He is as forgotten as are those missing persons represented by the pins on his map.

James dusts off the folder that is now associated with that new push pin. This case involves a 19-year-old woman who disappeared on her way to meet friends for a night out. She was last seen entering the tube station at Stockwell. James glances at the black VHS tape that was in the file – probably video from the Tube station security cameras. The report, written some seven years ago, concludes that her disappearance was perhaps human trafficking. The young woman had disappeared from the face of the earth. No body, no trail, no clues, just vanished.

James checks the time and curses. He is late for a briefing. He tosses the folder onto his desk and rushes out to the conference room down the hall. James slips into the conference room as unobtrusively as possible, but standing head and shoulders above everyone else, he is hard to miss. He ignores the glances from those around the table, the glare from his sergeant. A woman from the forensics group is presenting an overview of their new DNA analysis capabilities. She pauses mid-sentence on seeing James enter the room, and then continues with her presentation. The rumours circulating through the department are that these new tools are a game changer. James is dubious. He has heard this so many times before. New software, new data bases, GPS, new analysis techniques, more cameras, facial recognition software, none have really helped in his cold cases. The woman is talking about the importance of crime scene sampling. A new technique called environmental DNA analysis can identify every living thing that was recently in the crime scene. DNA sticks around, in hair and in shed skin cells. At the crimes scene, those dust bunnies in the corners are a gold mine of DNA evidence. The minute traces of a person's DNA can be sampled, replicated and analyzed. If that person's DNA is in one of the many

available data bases, they can be identified. Even if they aren't in a data base, a close relative may be, leading to an identification. The detectives in the room begin asking questions about this technology, what it can and cannot do. As the answers come back, their enthusiasm grows. James rolls his eyes. That is all great but he doesn't have crime scenes, just missing people. He hears nothing here that will help him. The meeting runs overtime, as the detectives pepper the presenter with questions. James has forgotten that he has a lunch date with his brother-in-law.

#

In the grasp of the monsters in the Macs, Jennifer is half dragged, half carried down a set of dark stairs. The spiraling stairs seem to continue down into the depths for an eternity. She struggles to escape from the grasp of her powerful captors. Her struggles become more and more desperate as they move deeper into the darkness. She senses that there is nothing good that can happen to her at the bottom of this staircase. The creatures must become frustrated with her struggles as they stop and cuff her roughly across the face, sending her into unconsciousness. The two creatures continue down the stairs in what to you or I would be utter darkness. Their large eyes capture ten times the light that we do and these creatures can see quite clearly in what little light scatters down from above. They reach the bottom of the staircase. Here is a warren of rooms forgotten by the Londoners whose great-grandparents took shelter from the blitz in these deep caverns.

At the beginning of the Second World War, the British government ordered the construction of deep underground shelters. Eight such shelters were built, capable of sheltering 8000 people each. The shelters were dug deep, below the existing tube system of the Northern Line. Empty and mostly forgotten, Jennifer is being taken deep into one such shelter.

Jennifer regains consciousness; perhaps the stench of the place has woken her. She has been thrown over the shoulder of one of the creatures. Atop the fear of being abducted and what may be to come, she can see nothing in the utter darkness. She fears that she has gone blind. In near panic, the fear of being blind competes with her fear of being abducted by these monsters, so deeply does the human fear the loss of this essential sense. Relief washes over her when she sees a dim light ahead. Her sight is not lost. There is hope. She is carried into a room. Here, a bulb in the ceiling is casting a faint light. Jennifer looks around the room. The frightful sight that meets her eyes makes her regret that there is any light at all. What she sees is horrific; a chamber of horrors. There is a table. The top of the table is stained dark. On the table are fierce looking butcher knives, some large enough to be called machetes. Along one wall are large meat hooks. To her left, on one of these meat hooks is hanging a human rib cage. It has been picked clean of any flesh. Below the rib cage, on the floor, is a pile of bones. A skull lies on its side, the dark eye sockets staring at her. Deeper into the room, against the far wall is a much larger pile of bones. She can see several skulls in the pile. The white bones seem to almost glow in the pale yellow light. Turning to look to her right, she draws a startled breath. On a hook hangs the body of a woman. She is naked. Her belly has been cut open and her guts lie in a messy pile below her dangling feet. The meat hook has penetrated her back and is protruding between her breasts. Her head is hanging to one side. The terror of being hoisted onto one of those meat hooks energizes Jennifer and she struggles against the hard grip of the creature carrying her. Twisting in its grip, she manages to slip from the creature's shoulder and falls to the ground. The creature grunts in surprise. Its companion makes a gruff laughing sound, amused by its companions' inability to control the young woman. Jennifer gathers her feet under her and runs from the two, toward the dark entrance to this chamber of horrors.

Jennifer turns into the darker corridor. Here she is blind, using a hand on the wall as a guide, she runs down the hallway. She can hear the creatures shuffling after her. The fading sound of their feet on the floor tells her that she is faster than they are. Hope wells in her breast. Suddenly, she runs full stop into a wall. She cracks her head on the hard cement wall, her right knee smashes into the wall as well. She falls onto her back. The pain is severe. She rolls onto her side, supported on one elbow. Jennifer puts a palm to her forehead and feels a large welt rising already. Her palm feels sticky with blood. Gasping in pain, she attempts to climb to her feet. As she rolls onto her knees, her right knee screams in pain. She quickly takes the weight from the knee and rolls back onto her bottom. She feels the knee. It is puffy with swelling, wet with blood. She gingerly flexes the knee and the pain is sharp. She can hear the footsteps of her pursuing captors and forces herself to her feet, groaning loudly. She turns in confusion, not knowing which way to go. The sound of the creatures' shuffling gait is growing louder. Blood is running into her right eye from the cut above. She desperately feels around, walls in front and to her right, open space to her left. She attempts to move to her left but her knee cries out in pain when she puts her weight on it. Her terror wins out over the pain and she limps down the hallway to her left. As she limps, Jennifer resolves to fight to her last breath should these creatures catch up with her. With her hands out in front of her, she encounters a wall. She stops and feels to her right. The wall continues in the darkness. She moves to her right until she encounters another wall. Moving to her right she shortly encounters yet another wall. If she follows this to her right, it will take her back in the direction of the shuffling creatures. She has hit a dead end. She cries out in exasperation as she realizes that she is lost. She has missed the entrance to the stairs and the way out. She has no choice but to continue to follow the wall. Her anxiety is building, as she moves closer toward the creatures. She is expecting them to emerge from the darkness at any

moment. Her heart leaps with excitement when the wall running under her right hand disappears. She has reached another tunnel, perhaps this is the way out. She moves a little faster, ignoring the pain in her knee from the increased effort. It seems she has barely begun to move down this new passageway when she trips over something ahead of her. It is stairs and she smashes her shins on the ragged edge of the first step. She cries out in pain but forces herself up. She grasps a railing, rough with corrosion. She starts climbing the stairs, pulling herself along by the railing. It is cutting her hand. Each step up using her right knee sends a shot of pain up her leg. She begins crying, a desperate sobbing. This is the stuff of nightmares, pursued by monsters and unable to run away. She can now hear the creatures climbing the stairs. They have gained distance on her.

The creatures are not worried that their prey may escape. They can see her movements perfectly well in the darkness. They can see her struggles, her damaged knee, bleeding head and shins. She is leaving a trail of bloody droplets up the staircase. But the creatures know that no matter how quickly she can run, she will never escape, the darkness will be her downfall.

She attempts to take the stairs two at a time but her battered knee collapses at the increased demand. She stumbles and falls on the stairs, still grasping the railing. Her shins take another hit, more pain. She pulls herself back to her feet and tests the knee on one step. It is too painful, the swelling in the knee makes it difficult to move, the fluid buildup squeezing the nerves, crying out in pain. She has to step up only with her left leg. She proceeds, stepping up two steps with her left leg and dragging the stiff right leg up to that same step. This slows her down, the creatures are gaining. Panic is rising. She can hear the creatures, seemingly just behind her. Another stumble and they will be on her. She is breathing heavily now, her leg muscles complaining of the exertion. Her heart is racing; the combined effects of the exertion on the stairs and the terror just behind her. Her tired leg muscles are making it harder to climb. She is

pulling herself up using two hands on the railing. She stumbles. Almost going down but catches herself and recovers. Some steps later she stumbles once again. She can no longer take two steps at a time. She has to adjust her motion to take the stairs one step at a time. This slows her down to a crawl. She climbs the stairs like this for only a few seconds before giving into her terror. She attempts to go back to taking two steps at a time. She stumbles several steps into this and falls, ripping her hands from their grip on the hand rail. She is on her back on the stairs, out of breath, in intense pain from the tired muscles and her bruises and cuts. She can hear the creatures climbing toward her. She imagines their claw-like hands reaching out of the darkness and grabbing her at any moment.

She scrambles upward on her backside before rolling over, grasping the railing and climbing to her feet once again. Just as she resumes her climb, a rough hand grasps her right ankle. A split second later, another hand grasps her left ankle and the creature pulls her feet out from under her. She grips the railing hard but this just results in her turning onto her back before losing her grip and falling onto the steps. She cries out in despair just as she smacks her head on a step, losing consciousness once again.

#

Back in James' office, his brother-in-law, Tim, is waiting for him. Sitting in the guest chair, Tim scans the room. His attention is drawn to the wall map of London impaled with dozens of push pins. Tim stands and moves closer to the map. He studies the pins, their locations. He notices a pattern in the location of the pins. A planner with the London Tube, Tim knows the under belly of the city all too well. He notices that the pins seem to trace out the location of particular underground features. Places that are hidden and forgotten by Londoners. Places that had their use in by-gone decades as old underground train stations, bomb shelters and

war time war rooms. Few know of these places and yet, the pins on James' map neatly trace out the hidden entrances to a forgotten underground. Tim takes out his phone and searches for information to confirm his suspicions. When James arrives in a rush, Tim has his attention buried in his phone.

James rushes into the small office and grabs his coat. "Sorry Tim. Got caught up in a meeting. Let's go." When Tim doesn't follow James toward the door, James grabs the sleeve of Tim's coat. "Get your head out of your phone and let's go. I'm starving."

Tim resists the pull. "Hold on a minute. I've noticed something about your map. I'm just checking some details."

James steps back into the office, waiting, puzzled. Tim offers an explanation. "I noticed the grouping of pins on your map. They correspond to entrances to the dark underground."

James is puzzled. "Dark underground?"

"London has a maze of shafts and tunnels running beneath it. Some are abandoned tube lines; many are old bomb shelters built during the war. More underground facilities were built during the cold war – places for our government officials to operate during a nuclear attack. Millions of Londoners walk past the entrances to these places every day without any idea what they are." Tim motions toward James' map with his hand. "But your map here seems to know all about the hidden underground. Your push pins trace it out to near perfection."

James is very interested now. He hands a marker to Tim. "I'll order lunch in. You mark your dark underground on my map."

Tim takes the marker and turns toward the map. "You really want me to mark up your map?"

“Absolutely. The damn thing just reminds me of my failures. I was thinking of tearing it down.”

Tim shrugs. “This could take a while. Order pizza and beer.”

James goes home that night feeling positive, something he hasn't felt in a long time. This new insight from Tim gives him hope. Here is something that he can move forward with on multiple cases.

#

Jennifer recovers consciousness. She is in the dark, unable to make out any feature. There is total silence as well. She is initially confused, not knowing where she is or how she got there. Then she remembers being grabbed by the creatures on the street. She examines herself. She is naked, her clothes taken away. She has a large bump on her forehead. She remembers now her attempted escape and crashing into a wall in the dark. She feels down to her right knee. It is massively swollen. She tries to flex it but immediately feels intense pain. The knee is screwed. She feels about herself more. Her right cheek is bruised, an angry welt on her cheek bone. She doesn't remember how she got that wound. She finds a number of other scrapes and bruises about her body. Her shins are a mess, multiple bumps and cuts. The back of her head is covered in a matted mess of hair and blood. Probing, she finds a very sore open wound on the back of her head. Blood is still seeping from it into her hair. Personal inspection completed, she sits in the dark pondering her situation. There is still a part of her that denies that this could really be happening. She pinches herself, perhaps it is all a bad dream. She can barely feel the pinch against the background of so many aches and pains. She thinks of the room with the butchered bodies, the grotesque monsters that captured her, the utter darkness and her failed escape. She thinks of her great grandmother. The family often speaks of her ordeal. A member of the French

resistance during the Second World War, she had been captured by the Nazis, imprisoned, tortured, sent to a death camp. The woman survived it all and subsequently raised a large family. Jennifer had always thought of those stories as ancient history, something that happened in the long past and not relevant to her lived experience. Not so now. Her great grandmother's imprisonment by the Nazi's during the war must have felt much like this. How did the woman survive against such bleak odds? An ember of hope ignites deep in Jennifer. Her ancestor never gave up and survived against the monsters of her time. Jennifer discovers a new inner strength and new resolve to fight and survive. She sets about exploring her surroundings. She gets on all fours and feels about the place. Her hand contacts a wall. She moves to the wall and carefully stands. She runs her hands across the wall, as far as she can reach in all directions. It is rough cement. She shuffles to her right, grimacing at the pain from the movement; she runs her hand along the wall until she finds another wall. She continues to shuffle her way around, tracing out the size of the room. It is maybe six feet and six feet. There is a metal door in one wall. She relaxes, letting the pain brought on by her exploration subside. She says to herself, "Well, at least it is not a meat hook." Then she grumbles, "At least not yet." She knows that she needs to find a way out, but how, she can put very little weight on her right leg.

Shortly, her thoughts are interrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps. They have the sound of someone walking in slippers on the rough concrete floor. There is the sound of something being moved from in front of the door and then the latch being activated. Jennifer slides back from the door until her back is against the opposite wall. She stands, ready to fight if needed. The door opens for only a second and then slams closed once again. She hears the sound of something metal hitting the floor of her cell. She doesn't move, unsure if someone or something has entered her cell. She listens and hears another door being opened. Moments later

she hears that door being closed. She stays standing against the wall until there is no further sound. She detects an aroma, her stomach growls. There is food. She then steps toward the door, bends and feels about the floor. Her hands contact something. She grasps a metal bowl and lifts it, the aroma of the food filling her senses. She dips her hand into the bowl. The contents are wet and warm and smell divine to her starved senses. She scoops some with her hand and tastes it. There are chunks of meat, tasting a bit like pork, but different. There are root vegetables as well. Tasting delicious, she quickly downs the contents of the bowl. She reasons with herself that they wouldn't be feeding her if her death was imminent. This eases her anxiety and allows her to concentrate more fully on escape.

Jennifer's thoughts are interrupted by a sound, sobbing, very soft and intermittent. The sound is coming through the open vents in the metal door of her jail cell. She calls out, "Is someone there?"

After a delay of a few seconds, a woman's voice says, "Oh my God. I'm next."

The young woman is confused by this. "Next for what?"

The other woman sobs louder now. Between sobs she gets out, "To be killed and butchered, like the others."

Jennifer recalls the first room she was in, the body on the meat hook, the pile of bones. "Why, why are they torturing and killing people like this?"

The woman sobs out, "For food." Jennifer's scalp prickles at the realization. The woman continues, anger in her voice, "They eat people. Butcher them in that room. They hoist us alive onto those meat hooks." In a softer tone she adds, "I can still hear the screams of horror when they took Madeline. Her screams ended with one terrifying wail of pain when they hoisted her onto a hook."

Jennifer recalls the body of the woman she saw in that room. Madeline. She shivers at the realization that she is captive to cannibals. It dawns on her that the food she just ate may be human flesh – maybe Madeline. She gags at the thought. She wants to bring it up, so repugnant the idea, but her hungry body wants to retain that little bit of nourishment. Jennifer’s resolve to escape or die trying is hardened. She gathers herself, her inner strength welling to the surface. She finally breaks the silence, “What’s your name? I am Jenn, Jennifer.”

The reply comes in a voice filled with despair, “What does that matter? They are going to butcher me next!”

Jennifer does not know how to reply. Assurance that this is not inevitable will sound hollow. After a pause she says with conviction, “They won’t take me without a fight. I will kill them if I get the chance.”

The woman replies, “That is what Madeline said. She promised to come back for me.” Then in a small voice, “She never did.” After a delay she says to Jennifer, “If you do manage get out of here, let my family know that I love them. I am Breanna Moore from Chelsea.” More sobs, no doubt the woman is now thinking of her family and missing them now and for all the future that she always thought she would have with them.

As the hours drag into the days, Jennifer splits her time between conversation with Breanna and thoughts, fantasies of escape. The women talk about their lives, their families. They wonder about the creatures that have captured them. What are they? How could they live here, under London, and not be known about?” The pile of bones in the other room suggests that they have been at this for quite some time. They have time to reflect on the fact that so many people can go missing, meet such a horrific ending. Every so often, Jennifer cannot judge the passing time, the creatures provide them with food and drink. They never talk of the food they are

served. Neither wants to admit out loud that they may be consuming human flesh. Jennifer considers refusing the food but her body craves it and the smell from each bowl fills her cell. She reasons that she needs to keep up her strength to heal and then escape. She assures herself that this is what her great grandmother would have done. She bides her time, allowing her damaged knee to heal enough to carry her weight. She can't escape on one leg.

The only way for the women to count time is by the number of meals they receive. Twice a day as far as they can tell. After ten days, Jennifer hears them opening Breanna's cell door. Breanna cries out, "No, no. Please don't take me." Jennifer can hear the sounds of struggle, then a solid thud. The sounds of struggle are no longer. Jennifer calls out to Breanna but there is no answer. Jennifer thinks, mercifully, they have knocked her out. She will not have to face her final moments in sheer horror. Jennifer now feels the pressure of time. Her time is running out. In a few days perhaps, they will come for her.

A chill runs up her spine when she hears a shrill, terror-filled scream as Breanna awakes just as she is hoisted onto a meat hook.

#

James and Tim are standing outside green gates on High Holborn Street. These gates are locked and chained to prevent people from accessing the green door just beyond. The green door provides access to the long abandoned North End Station of the Northern Tube line. The door is set into single story brick building, devoid of windows. Hundreds of people walk by this place every day without wasting a moment's thought on it. Tim extracts a set of keys from his jacket pocket and searches for a particular one. After several seconds he says, "Here it is." He bends down on one knee and uses the key to unlock the padlock chaining the gate closed. He manipulates the chains which are wrapped around the gate to free it from its post. Pushing the

gate open, he invites James into the narrow yard. James steps forward and they both are standing before the green door. Tim once again fumbles with the keys. He finds the correct one and applies it to the stiff, rusted bolt in the door. With a loud click, the bolt pulls back. Tim grasps the handle on the door and looks at James. "Are you ready for whatever lies beyond this door? If you don't mind, I will hang back, you lead the way."

Tim pulls the door open on stiff hinges. James steps through the doorway. They are in a narrow room, stairs leading down to a landing some dozen steps below. Tim is searching for something near the door. "Here it is." With a flick of a switch, lights go on, illuminating the room and the stairs. A deafening rumble wells up from below. Their ears pop as the air pressure changes. James looks to Tim in surprise. Tim explains, "Train passing below. You can still access the platform down there."

The train passes and all is still once again in the small room. James takes his time scanning the room. "No sign of any foul play here." James then points toward the stairs. "Shall we explore deeper?"

Tim, feeling a little claustrophobic sighs, "If you must."

James leads the way down the stairs. The stairs fold back on themselves, enclosed by concrete walls on all sides. Some half dozen sets of steps down, the cement between the stairs stops and they can view down into the depths as the stairs continue to spiral downward. James asks, "How far down do these stairs go?"

Tim shrugs. His reply is drowned out by the rumble of another train passing below. Their ears pop once more in response to the pressure wave. Tim repeats his response once the train has passed. "I am not much of one for remembering numbers and stats, but they say it is the deepest station on the line."

They continue downward, endlessly spiraling until they hit station level. Here are more concrete walls enclosing a warren of small rooms. There is a narrow opening through which they can see the tracks. James grunts, “You could reach out and touch the train as it goes by.”

James moves through the various rooms, searching for anything that would hint at others being there. After several minutes, he notices a woman’s shoe in one corner of a particularly dark room. He bends to pick it up. Holding it out for Tim to see, he observes, “This doesn’t belong here. It is fairly new. Unless it was tossed from a passing train, there is no reason for it to be down here. James resumes his search of the rooms, taking more time this round, buoyed by having found the shoe. It is Tim who finds the glasses. A clear frame, the lenses cracked and broken. James examines the frame. There is a dark stain on it. “These glasses have something on them, may be blood.” His excitement rises. Blood residue can be used to extract DNA, possibly identifying who owned them. Further searching reveals nothing more. “Let’s head back up. I want to get these to the lab.”

The climb back up is difficult. They are both gulping air and sweating profusely by the time they step into the refreshing, cool breeze outside the entrance. Tim asks between breaths, “So, do you think this was worth it?”

“Definitely. This shoe and these glasses are out of place down there. They may trace back to one or more of my missing persons.” Tim is smiling, proud of his insight, glad that he could help.

James suggests, “I would like to get into more of these abandoned places. How many are there?”

Tim grins, “That could take a while. There are dozens of hidden and forgotten entrances to the abandoned underground all across London.”

“Well, I have dozens of missing persons.”

#

Some days later, James and Tim are in the entrance to the deep level shelter at Clapham North. The entrance is contained in a drum shaped structure, brick, painted green with silver graffiti all over it. Far below are two parallel tunnels running 400 feet in length. Each tunnel is divided into two decks, an upper and lower deck. The shelter was capable of housing 8000 people during the blitz. Fortunately, by the time the shelters were finished, the war had moved on and the blitz was over. Inside the pill box shaped building above, are a maze of small rooms and a staircase leading down into the shelter. The concrete walls are lined with pipes and electrical conduits. The staircase, leading downward, runs down a circular tunnel, the walls constructed from a series of heavy metal rings, bolted together to form the tunnel. The tunnel runs straight for some distance before turning back on itself to spiral down into the depths. There is a lift in the facility but a sign warns that it is not functioning. Ignoring the lift, James examines the stairs for anything that would indicate that his missing persons may have come this way. As they make their way down the stairs, James uses his flashlight to illuminate every nook and cranny. Several flights down, he finds a cell phone. He and Tim exchange looks. James pulls a clear plastic bag from his breast pocket and drops the phone into it. “The boys in the lab will get this open and find out who belongs to it.”

They continue moving down, endlessly it seems. Finally arriving at the bottom, they find a series of rooms; the shelters were provided with everything for living extended periods underground, kitchens, store rooms, toilets, bed chambers, first aid stations, etc. These rooms are mostly stripped clean of contents, just being a semicircular tunnel, divided into small rooms. They explore the facility, moving carefully from room to room on both decks of the tunnel. They

find nothing unusual. Tim is getting spooked by the tight confines and is clearly uncomfortable being down there. James is too focused on the job at hand to notice Tim's discomfort. Tim is relieved when James signals the end of his search, "Well, there doesn't seem to be anything useable down here. Let's head back up." Tim knows that there is a second parallel tunnel to the one they had just searched, but he says nothing about it. Perhaps it is his unease at being down there any longer. Perhaps it is Tim's misunderstanding that when James signaled that he was finished searching, that James was not interested in searching any further. Whatever the reason, Tim skips mentioning that there is a second parallel tunnel. Instead, Tim happily leads the way out of the place. James, not realizing that they had only searched half of the facility, follows Tim back up the endless spiral of steps. As they close the door to the bunker, deep in the shelter there propagates a scream, an unearthly scream of terror and pain as a suddenly awake Breanna is impaled on a meat hook. The sound reverberates from the cement walls, distorting and echoing up and down the tunnels, up the staircase, arriving at the top landing just as Tim closes the door. James hears a bit of the scream just as the door closes and cuts it off. He asks, "What was that?"

Tim shrugs, "Squeaky hinges." The two men turn away from the shelter and head back to the road where James' car is parked. Some paces from the building, James stops and looks back at the door, still wondering about the 'squeaky' hinge. He shrugs. They searched the place, it was empty. He turns back to his car and they drive away.

#

Some days later James has the lab reports on the blood from the glasses found in the North End Station and the cell phone found on the stairs leading into the deep shelter at Camden North. The DNA from the blood matches a woman who was in the registry of a private DNA

ancestry company. She has been missing for ten years; her push-pin is on James map. Her last known location however was nowhere near the North End Station.

The phone belongs to a woman who disappeared only three weeks earlier. Breanna Moore is not one of James' cold cases as her case is still as an active case. James contacts the detective who is handling Breanna's case, Matt Bloom. James fills the detective in on what he has found. Despite James' assurances that he thoroughly searched the shelter where the phone was found, Matt insists on his own search. He invites James along. A day later, James meets Matt and his team of two officers, Matt's commanding officer, Dean and a civilian, Bob. Bob knows the layout of the shelters. Bob gives the team a detailed description of the layout of the deep shelter. James is shocked to learn that there was a second parallel tunnel beside the tunnel that he and Tim had searched. He admits to the team that he had only searched one side of the shelter. Sitting in the meeting a memory comes to him. The high pitched sound he heard as Tim closed the door. He suddenly feels sure that it was a woman's scream, not a squeaky hinge. He interrupts the meeting, "This planning is all good but I think we need to get down there now." The members of the team turn to James, questioning looks on their faces. James explains. "As we were leaving the shelter, we heard a high pitched sound, like a scream or the squeal of a rusty hinge. I am thinking now that it was a scream, perhaps your missing Breanna is still down there."

Matt is staring at James. "Are you sure?"

James shakes his head, "No, but I think it can't be ignored. I just hope than we are not too late. It has been several days since I was there."

#

It has been a long time, maybe days, since Jennifer heard Breanna's scream. It haunts her. She often wakes with a start, imagining that she hears that scream once again. But unlike

Breanna who had given up on hope, Jennifer refuses to give in to her situation. She has taken to conversing with her great grandmother, drawing strength and hope from that woman's survival against all odds. Jennifer occupies her time rehearsing various escape scenarios, breaking free of the creatures and escaping. But the utter darkness of these tunnels is her kryptonite and their super power. If only she had light. This gets her to thinking. These tunnels were built by man. There must be lights, perhaps still working. There must be switches located in convenient places. She stands unsteadily. The knee complains but holds her weight. She limps to the door, just three paces away. She feels the walls around the door. As her hand sweeps up the wall to the left of the door it brushes over a switch. The switch flips upward and she is bathed in naked incandescent light, blinding and delightful. She quickly flips the switch off. She wants to keep the fact that there is light here a secret. Her secret weapon. This changes her escape scenarios. Her ideal scenario is finding light switches throughout the place, flipping them on as she escapes. Alas, this is asking too much. Even if there are switches, what are the chances that she will find and be able to use them with the creatures pursuing her? In other scenarios, she uses the light and its blinding effect on the creatures to attack and disable them, but how? She has no weapons and her damaged knee will affect her ability to move and use force. Her planning then runs head long into a doubt. What if the light is not blinding to these creatures? What if they have an adaptation to their sight that allows them to see in the light, a sort of built-in sunglasses, if you will? She dismisses these doubts. She, at least, will have the ability to see what she is fighting. After running scenarios in her mind, rehearsing them mentally and physically, she determines to make her escape the next time they bring her food. As far as she knows, only a single creature delivers the meal.

Hunger pangs in her stomach tell her that it is nearing time for her escape. She waits at the door, shaking fingers on the switch. She is nervous, her jaw is tight with tension, aching. She is flexing her damaged knee, working it out for the effort to come. The joint hurts like hell. She massages it with her free hand. She hears the shuffling of the creature's feet approaching the door. The massage ends as she straightens up, as she tenses for the moment. The creature works the lock and opens the door on squealing hinges. She flicks on the light. The light is blinding and she can barely keep her eyes open. The creature drops the cup of stew and with a guttural roar throws an arm across its eyes, turning away from the light. Jennifer steps from the room. The light is not so intense in the hallway. Before her stands a monstrosity. A pale gnome of a being, thickly muscled, covered in white hair. It wears a tan coloured loin cloth, filthy with stains. The hair from its head is long and tangled, hanging to its waist. In several of Jennifer's scenarios, she attacks the creature, maiming it. But the disgusting figure before her is stout, and strong. Her blows would hurt it little. The creature is calling out. Jennifer decides to run for it. The light from her prison is spilling down the hallway. She can see her escape route ahead. She bolts past the creature. Her right knee is stiff and painful but functional. She is a dozen steps down the hallway when she can hear other creatures behind, the sound of their leathery soles scuffling after her. Ahead of her she can see the turn in the corridor, the wall ahead that she ran into on her last escape attempt. Suddenly her light is gone. The creatures have turned out the light of her prison. They have the advantage now. Jennifer reaches out with her left hand until she finds the wall to her left. She speeds up, confident in her path ahead. Her left hand will tell her when the corridor turns; she just has to follow the wall. She is in darkness now, can't see anything. She reaches the end of the wall to her left, follows the turns in the wall until she comes to the foot of the stairway. She grasps the handrail and mounts the stairs, taking two at a time. Her right knee

complains but the pain is tolerable. From her last escape attempt, she knows the stairs are divided into flights of a dozen steps where the staircase turns on its self and resumes ascending. She gets into a rhythm, counting her steps up, preventing a stumble as each flight ends. Some distance into her frantic climb, she hears the sounds below as the creatures reach the stairs. There is much grunting, it sounds as if they are having a conversation, an angry one, shouting at one another. She continues climbing the stairs, spiraling around and around. It seems that the staircase will never end; a fiendish torture from Hades itself; an endless climb from sheer terror. It is the fear of the monster in the basement, just behind, never being relieved by reaching the safety of the top of the stairs. Exhausted, Jennifer has slowed her pace. She can hear no sound of her pursuers. She turns to mount the next set of steps and runs into a solid wall. She is momentarily confused. Feeling her way around, she finds that the stairs are no longer turning back on themselves but leading upward in the same direction. She resumes her climb, hopeful now that she is near the end. After mounting several more flights of stairs and beginning to wonder if this nightmare will never end, she runs out of stairs. The floor ahead remains level. She has reached the room at the top of the stairs. There is light outlining the frame of a door just ahead. Enough light is slipping through the door frame that she can make out grey shapes around her. She feels for the handle and finding it, gives the door a mighty tug. It does not move. She pushes hard into the door, perhaps it opens outward. The door is locked. Jennifer moans in frustration, "You have got to be kidding me." She feels around for the lock, a mechanism that is preventing the door from opening. She finds a keyhole. "Damn it!" she curses. In her frustration, she pounds on the unyielding metal door with her fists. Calming down, she searches for a light switch, finds it and flicks it upward. The room and stairwell are bathed in brilliant, blinding white light. She hears a roar from the creatures below as the light blinds them. She considers taking the attack to the

creatures below, powerful but blind. But she needs some sort of weapon and there is nothing that fits that description in the room. She notices a door to her right. She thinks that perhaps the key to the door is hidden somewhere and she begins scouring the place for anything that looks like a key. Dust flies as she runs her hands over every surface and into every filthy nook and cranny. Spiders disturbed by her frantic searching run up the walls to escape. She is growing increasingly frustrated at her hopeless situation when the lights suddenly go out. She is in total darkness. The faint light seeping around the door frame is not enough to register in her light adapted eyes. She reaches for the light switch and flips it down. No light results. She moans and flips the switch up and down several times. Still no light, the creatures have cut the power. She can hear them ascending the stair case once more. Time is running out. Terror grips her, a stream of warm urine splashes on the floor at her feet. She returns to that door, some few inches of steel door separating her from this dungeon of terror and her former secure life outside.

The sound of the creatures' approach is getting louder. In the darkness, she can't tell how far away they are. They could be many steps down the stairs or they could be about to enter the room. She can feel their presence, expecting those claw-like hands to grasp her at any moment. Her heart is pounding; her desperation overflowing. She begins to weep in frustration. This can't be how it ends. She curses the creatures and resolves to hold them off, a faint hope.

The creatures soon regain the landing at the top of the stairs. Jennifer is defenseless but nevertheless prepared to fight with tooth and nail. Then she hears something. There are noises from the other side of the door. Someone is out there. She is about to call to them when a rough, filthy hand closes over her face, stifling her call. She twists and strains against the beast but its strength is too much. Jennifer is dragged back down the stairs. A thick filthy rag is stuffed into her mouth. Her jaw is aching from the pressure of it. She can hear the task force enter the top of

the shelter, hear their voices. The creatures increase their pace. Jennifer attempts to call out but the only sound she can make is a high pitched whine, not nearly loud enough to be heard by those above. In the dark below, the creatures rush through the complex, travelling deep into its dark interior. The task force is slowed by the darkness. Reaching the bottom of the stairs, Ben once again tries the lights and is rewarded by the lights in the corridor below coming on. Deeper into the facility, suddenly bathed in brilliant light, blinding even to Jennifer, her captors roar in distress. She squints in the bright light and sees that she is in a large group of the creatures. For the first time, she sees females and children, all rushing along, covering their eyes with their hands. Jennifer thinks, "My God, there are whole families of these things." She lifts her head to look ahead. There, she sees a creature with the limp, body of a woman draped over its shoulder. The woman was young, with long dark hair. Jennifer never saw Brianna in the dark, but is sure now that this is her. After several minutes, they seem to reach the end of the shelter. A metal door blocks their way. The creatures are gathered, distressed, as one of them, at the front of the group, opens the door.

#

The task force, led by Matt and James, rushes through the facility. They heard the animal-like calls when Bob turned on the lights. There is something ahead of them. The task force is moving much faster than the creatures and is about to catch up to them when they come into the butchering room. They stop, horrified and disbelieving at what they see. The delay in the butchering room gives the creatures the time they need.

In the butchering room, the task force draws a collective breath when they see what lies inside. Bob stumbles from the room and tosses his lunch. Inside is a chamber of horrors.

Hanging from meat hooks are the remains of two bodies, little more than rib cages. There are tables in the room. On their bloodstained surfaces are cutting tools, axes, knives and saws.

One of the detectives exclaims, “Bloody hell, it’s a butcher shop.”

Another spits, “Sick bastard.”

In one corner is the pile of bones. James counts the skulls he can see. “Eight skulls. There may be more buried deeper in the pile.” He can’t actually touch the pile to find out. It has to be left for the forensics team.

One of the police officers is looking at a pile of clothing. “There are shirts, pants, socks, shoes. He points to a particularly small shoe and exclaims with disgust, “A child’s shoe.”

Matt curses, “The bastard must be hiding in here somewhere. Let’s go find him.”

They are eager to leave this horrific scene for a chance to deliver some ‘justice’.

Accompanied by the two officers, Matt and James leave the room to find Bob sitting on the floor in the hallway. He looks white as a ghost. Matt offers him a hand and heaves Bob back to his feet. “You okay, Bob?”

“Bloody business!” Bob is embarrassed that he couldn’t handle the frightful scene and distraught that such a thing could actually be happening.

James pats Bob on the shoulder. “This is the worst thing I have seen. Your feelings and reactions are perfectly normal.” Bob is shaking his head in disbelief.

James hesitantly asks, “Now, can you show us the rest of this place? Our fiend may still be hiding out in here.”

Bob nods and points in the direction they must take. He has no intention of leading this expedition. “If you don’t mind, I’ll tuck in behind you and lead from safety.”

Bob directs them through the rest of the complex. They find indications of recent activity. There are bits of clothing and personal items. They find a cell phone dropped to the floor in one room, quite a distance into the shelter. They find a room that has been used as a washroom, feces covering the floor. The smell indicates that the room has been recently used. They also find the odd bone discarded into a corner here and there. Bob mutters, "What kind of an animal lives like this?"

They continue to work their way through the shelter, all 400 feet of it. When they get to the end of the shelter, there is closed door. Bob tells them, waving a hand toward the closed door, "Just a store room, should be empty." Bob's body language says, "Nothing here, let's go."

James approaches the door and places a hand on the latch. Before opening the door, he nods to the two officers, pistols at the ready. James lifts the handle and the locking mechanism releases with a metallic click. He pulls the door open. They all stiffen. Fingers tighten on the pistol grips. Bob takes several steps back. All fear that a hoard of murdering cannibalistic fiends will come raging out through that door but all they see is blackness. No light reflects back to them from the wall inside. The wall is missing, replaced by a gaping hole. Bob is the first to speak, "What the ... That's not supposed to be there."

James comments, "So this is where our fiend has disappeared to." He steps into the store room and peers into the tunnel, shining his flashlight into the darkness. "Looks to continue straight, as far as my beam goes." He turns to Bob. "Where would this tunnel lead if it continues straight on?"

Bob shrugs. "The war time shelters were built in a line so that someday in the future, it could be turned into another Tube line. That never happened and the shelters were never connected."

“Until now,” interjects Matt. “Where is the next shelter?”

Bob points down the tunnel, “That would lead to the Stockwell shelter.”

Matt looks at James. “Do you think he may have tunneled that far?”

James peers into the tunnel. “Well unless you want to follow this wherever it leads, it would be a good bet to check out the next shelter in the line.”

James asks Bob. “Can this door be locked, to prevent them from returning?”

Bob shakes his head. “No locks were ever put on the doors. Maybe weld it shut.”

James considers Bob’s suggestion but welding the door closed seemed too permanent. Instead, he motions to the others, “Let’s get out of here and get a forensics team down here.”

A search of the next shelter in line, found nothing. No signs of occupation and no holes cut through its cement walls. The tunnel from Clapham North must lead elsewhere.

#

Jennifer was so close to escaping. A door separated her from those on the outside, those who would rescue her from these monsters. Now the creatures have taken her deep into the tunnels running under London. Jennifer is rushed along a rough-hewn tunnel for a long distance. Her heart drops. These creatures are taking her ever deeper under London. Her hopes of escaping back to the surface are evaporating. After what seems like hours, they enter a large cavern. The cavern is dimly lit with strings of tiny bulbs – the kind one might trim a Christmas tree with. The lights look like so many stars in this dark cavern. The walls of the cavern are carved from white limestone. There is a small town here; openings are carved into the limestone walls, buildings made of limestone block stand in the open square. There is a hum of machinery. These creatures appear to have tapped into the London electricity grid. When her group enters the cavern, they call out. Creatures emerge from openings in the stone walls of the cavern and from the buildings

built in the open area. There are dozens, perhaps a hundreds of the creatures. There are entire families. The short white bodies and distorted faces stare at her group from the shelter. The males are communicating, seemingly very distressed. The secret to their existence is not being seen, operating undercover, clandestine, undetected, unsuspected. Not so now. Their presence has been detected and they are being pursued.

Jennifer is taken to a building close to where they first entered the cavern. It is a small square building of limestone block. It has no roof and is windowless. There is a single entranceway and two creatures appear to be guarding the entrance. There are other people here, scared, naked, helpless and vulnerable. It seems that modern humans, stripped of their devices, are incapable of navigating this new landscape. Jennifer is disgusted at how helpless her species seems to be against these brutes. Surely humankind are not sheep to be led to the slaughter. In light of her now more desperate situation, Jennifer says a short prayer to her great grandmother, drawing on her ancestor's strength of spirit.

#

James and Matt are sidelined by orders not to enter the tunnels. The higher-ups have refused to let anyone enter the tunnels for fear of collapse. They have hit a proverbial stone wall. Left frustrated and anxious, it is several days later that they are called by their good friend, the head of the forensics lab, Henry White. They immediately make their way to the lab. On arriving at Henry's door, Henry jumps from his desk to greet the two detectives. Henry, a big, jovial man, is in his fifties, quite bald. He has huge, meaty hands which he now uses in greeting the detectives. "Welcome gentlemen. Good to see you again." Henry grabs a pile of reports that are occupying one of two visitor chairs and moves that pile onto another pile, the whole thing now threatening to tumble to the floor. Henry forces the teetering pile straight and lifts his huge hands

away, examining the pile for any sign that it will collapse. It seems to be holding and so he turns to the detectives. "Please take a seat."

As Henry takes his seat behind his desk, he grunts and glances up at the two detectives. "This is some business you two have gotten into." He shuffles through a number of folders. He finds one, picks it up, looks at the two detectives once again, hesitates and puts the folder down on his desk. He pats the folder, "We'll deal with that one later." He resumes his rummaging and extracting a stapled wad of papers. "Ah, here it is." He scans the report as he flips through the pages, occasionally pausing and grunting at the notes written within. Matt and James wait anxiously for the man to relate to them what is in the report. Finally, Henry is ready to reveal the contents of the report. "So, the DNA results identify forty-six different individuals." He pauses as if he expects a strong reaction from the detectives.

They do. They both react with disbelief. "So many!"

Henry continues, "We were able to identify over half of them, thirty-four to be exact, from searches of various DNA data bases." Henry shuffles through more of the papers on his desk, until he finds what he is looking for. "Here is a list of those we identified." He passes the sheet to Matt who holds the sheet up so that James can see it as well. Among the names are those of Jennifer and Breanna. James scans down the list and recognizes most of the names as being those belonging to his cold cases.

James asks, incredulous, "There were the bones of so many people down there?"

Henry shakes his head. "No actually. Most of those were identified in an environmental DNA sweep of the place. Matt looks puzzled, so Henry elaborates. "We all shed our DNA as we move about. That DNA sits around, slowly breaking down. A dust bunny from the corner of a

room can contain DNA from many who frequent that room. We can sort and identify the DNA from any number of individuals, from human to cockroach in an environmental DNA analysis.”

Matt is impressed. He asks, “So you could trace a person’s movements with this technology? Like a ghostly trail of their past movements.” James sees where Matt is going with this. He curses himself for not seeing this possibility before. He looks to Henry, waiting for his reply.

Henry is coy. “Well. The DNA trail may be there but the analysis is complex. To trace the movements of one particular individual would be possible, if you have unlimited resources.”

James jumps in, “So using this technique, I could step back in time and trace the last movements of my missing persons, months or years after they disappeared?”

Henry has a pained look on his face. What James is asking for is theoretically possible but the effort would be enormous. “Well, yes, I suppose.”

James is thrilled at the possibility but the look on Henry’s face tells him that he should temper his expectations. “We need to talk about this later.”

Henry is relieved to leave this discussion. He picks up the folder that he had put aside. Without opening the folder, just holding it in his hand he says, “There is something else.” Henry hesitates, as if he is not confident in what he is about to reveal. “It is probably a mistake.”

James and Matt look to Henry expectantly.

Henry has an internal debate on whether to even mention the results. He decides to come clean. “The analysis shows something else. I can’t quite believe it myself.”

James and Matt are still waiting.

“Oh, hell. The analysis found the DNA from something else. Something human but different.”

Matt asks, "Different?"

"Yes. DNA that is modified, evolved perhaps, mutated perhaps. It is human but significantly changed. There is something down there that is not quite human. A missing link, a throwback. I don't know. It is too bizarre to believe."

James queries, "So there is something subhuman, some mutant committing these abductions?"

Henry shrugs. He holds the folder up higher. "I have great faith in our analysis abilities here, but this is just weird. The analysis says that yes, there is something not quite human down there. It may be your murdering cannibals."

James asks, "Cannibals with an 's'?"

Henry nods, "There appear to be a number of these individuals. You have a nest of them."

James and Matt are stunned. Matt says with determination. "We can't wait for the higher-ups to make a decision on entering that tunnel."

James concurs. "Agreed. How much trouble can we possibly get into for this?"

Matt smiles, "A lot."

"Fuck it." The two detectives stand and thank Henry. They drive back to the constabulary, making plans on the way. Arriving there, they sign out shot guns and revolvers. The curious officer manning the armory suggests, "Looks like you two are expecting some heavy action."

James responds, "An undercover operation. We'd appreciate it if you would keep this to yourself." A wink from James tells the officer all he needs to know.

He nods at them, “Right. Need-to-know basis. My lips are sealed. Good luck gentlemen.” He hands them several boxes of shells for the shotguns and revolvers.”

James puts the weapons and ammo into a large sack he brought with them. Walking around with such weaponry would attract too much attention.

Arriving at the entrance to the deep shelter they greet the officer who has been stationed there to prevent any unauthorized access to the crime scene. Their detective ID is enough to get them into the shelter. They are nervous. The revelations from Henry that there may be humanoid creatures afoot in these tunnels is frightening, the stuff of childhood nightmares – creatures coming out in the night to scoop children into the dark depths of London. They pause inside the entrance to empty the sack and load the weapons. Each now has a revolver and shotgun at the ready. They descend the now lit stairs and make their way to the butchering room. The room has been cleared of everything, taken as evidence. The memory of what was in this room, of the obvious purpose of it, strengthens the determination of these two. They make their way to the end of the shelter and the tunnel entrance. The opening is dark; the tunnel is only five feet high. They will have to bend down in the tunnels. James offers to take the lead. He has lights mounted on a collar around his neck. These illuminate the chalky walls of the tunnel ahead. With revolver at the ready, James enters the tunnel. Matt follows closely behind, shotgun at the ready should James’ revolver prove to be inadequate against the monsters ahead.

#

In the underground city, the creatures have collapsed the tunnel leading back to the deep shelter. They have posted guards at the other tunnels leading out of the cavern. Jennifer is disheartened to see the tunnel that represents her escape to the surface destroyed. The situation seems hopeless. She and the other humans are free to wander about the city. They chose not to,

afraid of the horrid creatures. Jennifer, however, is determined to find a way out. She walks about the cavern. There are many tunnels leading out from the city, all have creatures guarding them. She is looking for one left unguarded but it does not exist. Besides, she tells herself, she has no way of knowing where any of these tunnels lead. She thinks back to the tunnel now collapsed. If only she could get into that tunnel. It will lead her back to the surface, back to her world. She thinks what her great grandmother would have done. The answer comes to her. She would do what was necessary to survive. Jennifer reasons that the collapsed tunnel will be blocked by loose earth and stone, perhaps not so hard to move. The tunnel is unguarded; the creatures are secure that they have solved that threat from the surface. Jennifer starts putting together a plan. The creatures have a sleep cycle. At certain periods of the day, they sleep. There is little activity in the cavern, only the guards at the tunnels. She can sneak over to the collapsed tunnel without detection and begin her escape.

Jennifer anxiously waits for the next sleep cycle. But before that comes, the terror of her situation is brought home when several creatures come to the human's compound. The humans huddle at the back of the compound as the guards look over the group. The leader of the creatures points to a young man and grunts a command. Two of the creatures enter the compound and approach the man. Having been 'selected' the young man begins to panic. "No, No. Not me, Please." The man attempts to push his way to the back of the huddled group of humans. As the creatures approach the group, the human wall between the creatures and the young man dissolves and the man is standing alone and naked, facing his end of days. He begins sobbing, "No, no." The creatures step toward him and grab him by the arms. The man struggles to free himself but the creatures are strong. His feet struggle to gain traction to fight the pull of the brutes but they are overpowering. He twists in an attempt to bite one of the arms holding him.

For this, he is cuffed viciously across the side of his head. It stuns the man and his struggles stop for a moment. The creatures take the man from the compound. The leader of the group reenters the compound and scans the people there. No one makes eye contact, hoping that they can become invisible by not looking at the creature. He points to a woman. Terror crosses the woman's face as she turns white with fear and then faints, slumping to the dirty floor of the compound. A creature lifts her from the dirt effortlessly and tosses her limp body across its shoulder. The creatures leave, the humans left in the compound sit down, lost in their own thoughts. Jennifer looks at the group of frightened, helpless humanity. She considers recruiting them to her escape plan but decides against it. The fewer involved, the better the chances are of achieving her goal without detection.

The sleep period arrives and still haunted by the taking of two of her human companions, she walks to the collapsed tunnel. Once there, she looks around. There is no one near, and sight lines to her location are blocked by structures in the compound. She smiles. It is very unlikely that her activities will be discovered. She bends to the task. She finds the material blocking the tunnel entrance to be soft and yielding. She begins clawing at it, digging a short tunnel into the debris. She is on her belly, digging deeper into her narrow tunnel, legs extended into the cavern when she feels of heavy weight land on her backside and legs. She panics, thinking she has been discovered and a creature has grasped her. When she is not dragged from her tunnel, she re-evaluates her situation. She attempts to move but finds herself pinned. The weight on her lower back and buttocks and upper legs is unyielding. She realizes that the tunnel has collapsed. She is held fast. She can't move her legs, can't push herself back out of her tunnel. She is effectively sealed in. She tries several times to free herself but it is no use. Sweating and breathing heavily, she decides to dig her way out, scooping handfuls of material from her sides. At first this seems

to be working but then new material begins falling to take the place of the material she scoops away. She is getting nowhere. Then she feels a sudden increase in the pressure on the back of the legs. More material has fallen on her. She is thoroughly trapped. She curses. Her struggles are making her entrapment worse. She stops to think, to gather her strength and resolve. While she lies there, face in the dirt, she realizes that her breathing is getting heavier. What little air is trapped in her tunnel with her is running low on oxygen. She groans, "Damn. So this is how it is going to end." She tries with all of her strength to move but she is pinned. Then she feels something brush her calf. Something pulls on her ankle. This is followed by a stronger pull that actually hurts her leg. She thinks that a creature has discovered her and is going to extract her piece by piece. She thinks that she would rather die quietly, running out of oxygen in her little tunnel than in the hands of the creatures. She hears a voice. "Hold on, I'll get you out." Her heart skips. A human voice, someone is there to help her. She then realizes how stupid it was to attempt this escape alone. She waits. She can feel the pressure on her legs slowly releasing as the person behind digs away the material. She feels hands on her calves, then thighs and then her butt. She can hear the voice clearly now. Breathing becomes easier, fresh air is getting into her tunnel. The person grasps her by the ankles and Jennifer can feel herself slipping backward. As she slides from the tunnel, more dirt cascades down on her, a large weight pushes her face into the dirt. She panics as her breath is cut off. A final tug and she is free, able to roll onto her back and see her savior. It is a teen, a mere boy. He is slight. Jennifer is surprised that he had the strength to drag her from her dirt nap. He smiles at her, pleased with his success. "I noticed you were not in the compound and came looking for you. I saw your feet sticking out from under this mound."

Jennifer is sitting up now. She sighs heavily, “Thank goodness you did. I was a goner. But what made you want to find me in the first place?”

“Of all those people in that compound, you were the only one who hadn’t given up. There was a light of hope about you. I wanted to be a part of that.”

Jennifer lets him in on her plan. She waves a hand at the crumbling pile of debris that used to be a tunnel opening. “Well, my plan was to dig through this debris and open up the tunnel to the surface. It didn’t work out so well.”

The boy looks at the mound of dirt. “I will help you. I want out of this place.”

Jennifer is glad for the companion. “Okay. Glad to have you aboard. But you can’t tell the others. I don’t want too many people involved, the creatures might catch on.”

The boy nods. Then he offers, “I think we should dig near the original wall of the tunnel. The edge of the tunnel is more stable, won’t collapse on us.”

His suggestion is genius and she agrees. She gathers her knees beneath herself and feels through the material at the former tunnel opening. She feels for the transition from loose earth to a more solid wall of the former tunnel. Finding it she says, “Here. This is the edge of the old tunnel. Let’s dig here.”

The boy suggests, “You rest and watch for any creatures while I dig.”

Jennifer thankfully takes a rest while the boy frantically digs at the loose dirt. The boy makes good progress, tunneling his body length into the dirt. Jennifer is aware of the passage of time and suggests, “We should stop soon, for the creatures will be waking up. The boy wriggles out of his tunnel. The two dust themselves off. Jennifer studies the hole in the debris. “That hole is a little obvious. It might be discovered.”

The boy kneels in front of the hole and piles loose dirt in front of it until it is covered.
“That should disguise it.”

Jennifer smiles, alive with the idea of escape. “Good work. Let’s go rest and get back here in the next rest period.”

#

Matt and James are deep into the roughly hewn tunnel. They are dismayed by how far they have travelled, seemingly miles. At a bend in the tunnel, they come up short. The tunnel is collapsed, debris blocking any further progress. Matt looks nervously at the material above his head. “This is what they warned us about. These tunnels could collapse at any time. What now?”

James suggests, “Let’s see if this collapse is just a local bit of dirt. Maybe we can dig through it.”

Matt looks again at the roof of the tunnel. “It could keep collapsing if you try to dig through it.”

James pauses. The pins on his map come to mind as does the list of names on the paper that Henry provided. He turns to Matt. “I have to solve this. I can’t give up. Stand back while I dig a little. If it collapses on me maybe you can pull me out.”

James begins pulling at the loose dirt. For every hand full that he pulls out, two more handfuls fall in its place. He stops in frustration. “I am getting nowhere.”

Matt suggests, “Push the barrel of your shotgun into the mound, and see if it penetrates through. It might give you an idea of how far this collapse runs.”

James places the barrel of his shotgun against the pile of dirt. He turns to Matt. “This is a terrible thing to do to this shotgun. We’ll catch hell if we return this with the barrels plugged

with dirt.” He shoves it with the butt. After some initial resistance, the gun slides in effortlessly. James looks back at Matt. Seems that there is nothing after about two feet.”

On the other side of the collapse, Jennifer and Ben are back at work. Ben is digging; his slender body means he can dig deeper into the mound while removing less material than Jennifer. Jennifer moves the material that Ben passes to her out of his way. Ben is some six feet into the mound, a situation that makes Jennifer nervous. If the mound collapses on him now, she is not sure she would be able to extract him in time. Ben reaches out to claw away more dirt when his hand closes on something hard and round. “What’s this?” He stops and that is when he hears voices. The sound is muffled, faint. He calls out “Hello?”

Jennifer hears Ben’s cry and thinks that he is in trouble. She frantically reaches into the tunnel and grasps his ankles. Ben, realizing that Jennifer is about to pull him from the tunnel, grasps onto the strange object. Jennifer pulls on Ben and he pulls on the rifle barrel. On the other side of the collapse, James suddenly loses his grip on the shotgun butt. “What the?”

He reaches for the butt of the shot gun just as it disappears into the dirt before him. James backs away from the pile of collapsed dirt, not knowing what to expect. Perhaps some crazed half-human monster was about to emerge from the pile. Matt looks at James. “Are you okay there?”

James points to the point where his shotgun disappeared into the dirt. “My gun. It just disappeared. Something pulled it through!”

Jennifer yanks Ben from the tunnel. The rifle, grasped in Ben’s hand comes out with him. Jennifer is staring at the boy. “Where did you get that?”

“It was in the tunnel. I heard voices.”

Jennifer takes the shot gun from the boy. Get back in there and call to them.” Her heart is pounding with excitement. Perhaps this time, help will arrive. She looks around to make sure that they have not been discovered. She doesn’t want to be dragged from rescue at the last moment once again. She checks the shot gun. It is loaded but the barrel is packed with dirt. She recalls from her distant past that it is not good to fire a gun with a plugged barrel. She lays the gun to the side.

Ben wriggles back into his hole and calls out. “Hello. Is someone there?”

James and Matt, staring at the place where the shotgun disappeared are startled by Ben’s call. James steps to the mound and calls back. “Yes, we are here to help you.”

Ben calls back to Jennifer. “Someone is there!” Ben begins digging furiously at the dirt ahead of him. On the other side of the mound, Matt and James are doing the same. Several minutes of digging away cascading dirt and Ben’s hands reach those of James. He pulls Ben through the hole. Dirt cascades, filling the hole as Ben emerges before the detectives. Ben looks back at the disappearing hole. “Jennifer!”

James asks the boy, “Is someone else with you?”

The boy is clawing at the dirt. “Yes, a woman named Jennifer. There are more people, eight more.”

James and Matt bend down to help the boy dig. Jennifer on the other side of the mound saw Ben’s feet disappear into the hole and the hole then close behind him. She is near panic. Her escape is closing before her eyes. She desperately bends to digging, calling Ben’s name.

Ben, digging frantically, hears Jennifer calling his name and calls back. “I’m here. Keep digging.”

Some minutes later, a small hole opens up. Jennifer grasps Ben's hand and holds it tight, relieved that all is not lost. Ben tells her of the two men with him, police officers. Jennifer is buoyed, relieved and excited. She is finally going to escape. Then she thinks of the people back in the compound. She can't leave them behind. She must go back for them. She calls to the Matt and James. "There are other people. I have to go back for them. Keep digging."

James calls back, "Can you use the shotgun?"

Jennifer responds, "I don't think so, the barrel is plugged with dirt."

James reaches for his revolver. "Don't use it then. Take my pistol."

Jennifer reaches into the tunnel and takes the weapon from James. She examines it, takes off the safety and grips it tightly. She has fired cap pistols and BB guns in her past. This feels heavier, as it should, it is a real gun. She heads off to the compound to retrieve the people there.

In the shelter, the people are sitting around, depressed and lethargic. She enters with a frantic energy, getting their attention. "We can escape. Come with me."

Her statement is met with a range of reactions. Two of the people bounce to their feet, excited at the prospect. Others are dubious, looking at her with blank, uncomprehending looks. Jennifer is impatient and motions, "Come, follow me." The group gathers behind her and looking around for any of the creatures, Jennifer leads them to the tunnel. As she arrives, Ben emerges from the tunnel.

"The tunnel is still very narrow, send the smallest people through first."

Two women are directed to the tunnel and they wriggle into the narrow tube of dirt. On the other side, Matt and James pull them through. The passage of the two women causes dirt to cascade into the opening. Ben crawls in to dig out the added dirt, attempting to claw the tunnel wider. Matt is doing the same from his end. It takes some time as the dirt refuses to cooperate.

Jennifer is nervously scanning the compound. It has been a long time and the creatures will be ending their rest period. As they wait, comprehension comes to those who were almost catatonic. Excitement is building in the group and several are rushing Ben, offering unhelpful suggestions and clawing at the pile of dirt themselves, causing more of the pile to collapse around Ben. Jennifer has to push them away from the pile at gun point to get them to stop from making things worse. Some of the people begin arguing with her, shouting at her. This draws the attention of one of the creatures who then approaches to see what is going on. When he realizes what is happening, he rushes away to get help. Soon a group of the creatures is approaching. Several of the males are rushing toward them. These are followed by a crowd of curious on-lookers. Jennifer turns her attention to the approaching creatures. She raises the pistol and fires at the approaching group. The recoil of the pistol sends her shot high and it passes over their heads. The creatures are stunned by the sound from the weapon but it doesn't stop their advance toward the little group of frantic humans. The humans are once again all clawing at the dirt blocking the tunnel. Ben is being buried by the collapsing earth. Jennifer has all of her attention on the approaching creatures. Gripping the revolver tightly in both hands, she fires another round. This hits one of the creatures in the chest. It screams in shock and pain, stumbling a few steps before going down. The creatures with it stop, looking from Jennifer to their fallen comrade. Jennifer fires again and hits one of the creatures in the arm. He roars in pain, examining the hole made in his arm. Blood is pouring from the wound. The creatures are confused by the ability of this human to do such damage from such a distance. They regroup and approach more slowly now. Jennifer raises the revolver once more. A young creature has moved level with the group of adult males and Jennifer decides on a gambit. She points the gun at the juvenile. This has the desired effect. The males stop, realizing that the youngster is at risk. They turn and usher the group of

onlookers away. Jennifer growls at them, “Yes, go save the little bastard.” She turns her attention back to the group of humans at the collapsed tunnel to see chaos. Ben is nowhere to be seen, nor is his tunnel. The frantically clawing group has collapsed the tunnel. Her first concern is for Ben. He could be sealed into the pile by the collapse. She rushes to the group and fires a shot into the air to get their attention. This has little effect on the desperate group. She has to physically pull the people from the mound, pointing the pistol at them. She is raging with anger by the time she has the group back under control. Seething, she growls at them, “Don’t move until I tell you.”

Checking to ensure that the creatures are not rushing the group, she turns her attention to the debris. She claws at the place where their tunnel used to be. The dirt falls away, exposing a narrow tunnel. There is no sign of Ben. She calls into the tunnel, “Ben, Ben are you okay?”

Ben calls back immediately, “Yes, but you have to make the people stop digging.”

Jennifer turns and glares at the group of people standing huddled together. “They have stopped. The creatures are on to us. I scared them away for now. We need to get these people out of here.”

James considers crawling through the tunnel to help keep the creatures at bay but realizes that his big frame would never make it through. Ben holds his hand out. “Give me a weapon. I will help Jennifer.”

Matt passes his revolver to Ben. Ben turns to reenter the tunnel but Matt stops him. “Take this shotgun as well. You may need more fire power.” Ben shoves the shot gun into the tunnel ahead and quickly disappears. Jennifer sees a shotgun emerge from the tunnel and then Ben’s hands appear. She pulls Ben through. Ben turns to the tunnel and works on enlarging it. Jennifer glares at the huddle of people, a warning that they better not get in the way. A group of male creatures approaches once more. There are more of them and they have spread out. If they all

charge at once, Jennifer and Ben will never be able to hold them off. Fortunately, the creatures are not tactical and approach cautiously.

Jennifer keeps watch on the creatures, occasionally pointing the pistol at them. Each time she does this they scream and growl like a pack of excited chimpanzees. Some have rocks with them and they toss these at Jennifer. They fall short but are cause for concern should the creatures get closer.

Ben emerges from the tunnel. "Okay, we can squeeze the rest of you through. Ben takes charge, pointing to a thin man. "You. You go first." Ben works his way through the group, sending them through, smallest to largest. Each time one passes through he has to clean out the tunnel from the debris created. Jennifer is holding off the creatures, taking one down every so often as a warning that they need to keep their distance.

Finally, Ben has one more person to go. He is an older man, a big man. Ben has opened the tunnel as wide as he dares. He pushes the man into the tunnel, arms extended so that Matt and James can pull the man through. Half way through the man's chest jams in the hole. Matt and James pull with all they can, being in an awkward crouched position and having little traction. The man, jammed in the tunnel begins to panic. He is kicking his legs frantically, causing dirt to cascade onto him. Ben attempts to hold the man's legs still but receives a kick to the face for his attempt. The man is too strong for Ben to constrain him. Ben watches helplessly as the pile of dirt and the tunnel that was his way out is churned up by this panicking brute of a man. On the other side, Matt and James recruit the others the help provide more pull. This works, and the man is drawn slowly through the hole. The cavern side of the tunnel has collapsed. From Ben's point of view inside the cavern, the tunnel looks to have collapsed completely. Jennifer has run out of bullets for the revolver. She asks for Ben's revolver. Ben looks up to see a solid

line of the creatures inching toward them. They look poised to rush their position, having figured out that Jennifer can only take down one at a time. Jennifer asks, “How are we doing?”

Ben reports, “All are through but in the process, it looks like the tunnel has collapsed.”

Jennifer groans, “Can’t you dig it out again?”

Ben steps toward the pile of dirt. “That depends on how badly it is collapsed.” Ben scrapes at the pile where their tunnel used to be. Dirt falls away, revealing the tunnel, still open for most of its length. Sections of it are filled halfway with dirt but Ben can see the light of the detective’s flashlights through the tunnel. Excitedly, he calls to Jennifer. “We might be okay.”

Jennifer is scanning the line of creatures with her pistol. “Then go! Get out of here.” Ben looks at Jennifer and the advancing line of creatures. “Are you sure?”

“I’ll be right behind you. Pull me through.”

Ben turns and picks up the shot gun given him by Matt. “You may need this. Good luck.” With this, Ben ducks into the tunnel.

With Ben gone, Jennifer backs toward the tunnel. She fires four shots from the pistol in quick succession. Two of the shots hit home. She drops the pistol and picks up the shot gun. At this, the creatures rush her position. Jennifer drops onto her back and uses her legs to wiggle herself into the tunnel on her back. The shotgun is between her legs, pointing out toward the onrushing creatures. As she propels herself into the tight tunnel, the creatures arrive, within reach of her still exposed feet. She lifts the shot gun and aims it out the hole. She has nothing to secure the gun against recoil so she ensures that it is not pointing at her face and pulls the trigger. The blast from the shotgun is deafening. The butt of the rifle flies past her head and thuds into the side of the tunnel. The ejected shell casing falls onto her belly, burning her badly. The shot from the shell makes a bloody mess on the other side of the tunnel. A creature who was bending down

to grasp Jennifer's ankles takes the shot in the face. The back of its head explodes into the gathered creatures behind. Some of the shot passes around the now headless creature and rips into the legs of those closest to the hole. There is pandemonium among the creatures there. Pulled by the hair, Jennifer makes her exit from the underworld of these creatures. As a last act, Matt reaches back into the tunnel to retrieve the shot gun, their only remaining weapon. Hugged by her grateful fellow prisoners, Jennifer breaks down in tears. Finally, finally, after being so close so many times, she has escaped her captors.

The group makes it back to the shelter where Matt and James find enough rags to clothe their naked group. The group emerges on the top of the shelter to a startled copper on guard there. The man is too stunned to think. Matt has to order the man to call for emergency services.

#

The meeting with their commanding officers is uncomfortable. James and Matt are grilled for disobeying orders. Their story is too fantastic to be believed.

Ultimately, the nest of creatures is invaded in force and the creatures after a short battle are taken into custody. The authorities don't know what to do with the creatures; do they put them into a zoo or a prison? Do they try them as humans or euthanize them like any rabid animal?

Academics intervene. They want to study the creatures, learn their origins. Exploration of the city beneath London reveals that the creatures had tunnels leading up to many of London's tube stations, where they could snatch unsuspecting Londoners. These tunnels matched exactly to the clusters of missing persons on James' map. The mystery of where these creatures came from remains unsolved.

James returns to work on cold cases with a new perspective. His map of London has only a few pins in it and James has plans to use environmental DNA sampling to trace those missing persons' last movements. He is excited and re-energized.

Jennifer eventually returns to work after a long recovery from a cracked patella and her ordeal at the hands of the creatures. Confident and courageous, she quickly rises up the corporate ladder on a new-found strength of leadership.

#

To understand where these subterranean creatures came from, we must go back 135 years. In the reception room of a house in Richmond, London an adventurer is relating his story of his travels to his disbelieving dinner guests. He claims to have travelled in time to the far future. There he found a society divided, with weak-willed, innocents living a leisurely life provided to them by terrible cannibalistic troglodytes. Filby is dubious and outspoken. He scoffs at such an outlandish tale. "Pure fiction." Undeterred, the adventurer tells of how his time machine, his only link to his own time was taken, dragged into one of the buildings by the cannibalistic Morlocks. At this critical point in his story, a point where he may have lost his machine and be trapped in the distant future, he digresses. The adventurer boasts of how he has cleverly rigged his machine so that no other can use it. But why would he digress like this? Perhaps, it is because he is holding back part of the story. Maybe when he reclaimed his machine, he found that the chronometer on it had been fiddled with. Possibly too, the energy device upon which the machine was powered was drained, as if the machine had been used a lot. This would disturb the adventurer. First and foremost, in his 19th century English arrogance, he had deemed these primitive men of the future incapable of defeating his clever safeguards. Secondly, what had they been doing with his machine? Several trips had been taken by these

Morlocks – where were they going and what were they up to? Once someone gets hold of a time machine, they have all the time in the world to travel about, getting into mischief. In the days that the time machine was in their possession, they could have been using it for weeks or even years. How much damage might these creatures have done while in possession of his machine? The only thing limiting their travels in time would be the power supply, drained as it was. All of this, he did not relate to his spellbound guests. It would be to admit the folly of travelling in time.