

# EXPRESS DELIVERY

**M**artin looked at the foot sitting nakedly in the box in front of him with a numbness that only true terror can inspire. All he could picture in his head was the way he had smiled at the boy from Express Delivery. He had smiled and thanked him whilst taking possession of the innocuous looking brown box with the blue and red company logo down the side. The logo down the side, and his left foot sitting cosily within. And there was no doubt about it; that was definitely his left foot. The only difference between the one in the box and the one inside his slipper was that the one in the package wasn't attached to the rest of him. Oh yes, and the one inside that padded tartan warmth didn't have a tag tied round its big toe stating in bold black letters:

**YOU HAVE TWO DAYS.**

Even though he'd recognised the landscape and the structure of the foot immediately when he'd seen it, he still pulled off his slipper in the vain hope that the foot had been delivered to the wrong door, that there was someone else in the world that had gotten themselves into some deep shit, and this was just a crazy coincidence. Being very careful not to touch the contents, he picked the box up from the coffee table and placed it on the floor. Feeling the heaviness and uneven weight of the package made the skin between his fingers tingle in disgust. Maybe it was time to put his toes on a diet, ha, ha. Not very funny, he concluded to himself. Not very funny at all.

Looking at the two together there was no doubt about it, they were definitely a pair. The same dark brown mole just inside the arch, and the same little tuft of hairs sprouting from his big toe. If he counted them he would bet his breakfast that there would be the same amount of hairs on each, and each one of those hairs would be identical to that of its counterpart. His mouth dried instantly, and although his face was flushing he could feel a chill

running through his body as his blood pulled back into the centre of him, protecting itself.

He looked at the note again. YOU HAVE TWO DAYS. Shit, oh shit, oh shit. How had he let things get this far? Although dramatically delivered, the words themselves were pretty irrelevant. They were just a time scale, tickety tock said Mr. Clock, and all that jazz. The real message was the foot itself. It told him their intentions more fluently than any amount of words could attempt. The message was pretty simple.

In two days time, if he didn't produce the money, he was a dead man. A dead man, and yet not a dead man. He would cease to exist, be rubbed out, whacked or whatever these gangsters called their form of murder these days, but no one would find his body, no one would grieve for him and more importantly, there would be no police investigation, because, hey, to all intents and purposes he would still be alive. Not the original him naturally. No, he himself would be incinerated neatly out of society. Not him, but a perfect copy. The perfect clone that would visit his children at weekends, sleep in his bed, and wear his goddamned tartan slippers. The clone that would be found a job and would pay a percentage of its salary every month to its creators; partly to cover the cost of bringing it into the world and partly to cover the debts of its dead predecessor. He was only thirty now, so that gave them a good thirty years to get a return on their money.

He stood up on shaky legs and crossed the room. Standing on tiptoes he reached over the top of the bureau, feeling the dust shifting beneath his fingertips. After a few seconds of blind fumbling, his hand found what it was looking for, and pulled down the small tin. Cigarettes had been illegal in England for over ten years, but thank the Lord for small mercies, the government wasn't as harsh about it as they were in the USA. Sure, you could get busted for it, but if you only had a few for personal use, the police tended to turn a blind eye. After all, most of those guys weren't beyond having the odd puff themselves. The end of the Marlboro blazed red as he sucked in deeply, the harshness of the stale tobacco tickling his throat, and as his head began to swim and buzz, he returned to sit on the sofa. Hell, he might even smoke two today. There was a time when the fear of getting busted for smoking

would have kept him awake at nights wondering if the neighbours could smell his once a fortnight law-breaking activity, but those days were well and truly over.

He could feel his panic resurgent within him. *Two days*. Two days to find one hundred thousand pounds, or the clone had his life. He pulled harder on the cigarette, not wanting to waste any of its polluting cargo.

He had been expecting something, but not this. Cloning wasn't the big deal over here, not like in big brother's America, where the surge in the industry had created national paranoia. Was your mother really your mother, or has Dad traded her in for a replacement? For a price, you could have the satisfaction of murder with none of the comeback. There were even strong rumours in many leading international newspapers that the President hadn't really recovered from that heart attack he had last year, and this was in fact, version two, the new model. But here in little England, it had never really taken off. Or so he had thought until now.

It was common knowledge that the Greater London Mafia ran most of the city, and some said the country, but they must have way more money than he originally thought to spend out like this on a nobody like him. A whole load more money.

He could remember sitting in that huge office, with its leather chair, sweating against his trousers, wondering if when he stood up there would be a damp patch there betraying his nerves, his naiveté, his lack of criminal experience. He did not do things like this. He was a LAW ABIDING CITIZEN. He was a respected space-planning officer and he had PROSPECTS. The man who owned the illegally large office had just smiled and asked him the details of the program that he required, and then politely offered him a cup of tea. He imagined a solitary hair falling desperately slowly to the floor as he recalled leaning forward to take the delicate bone china cup. Whether it was a hair, or a flake of skin, it was irrelevant. They had got his DNA from somewhere.

He reluctantly extinguished the smouldering butt. This was all Carol's fault. If she hadn't told him out of the blue she didn't want him anymore, to leave her and the kids to get on with their