

Synopsis

When Billy sells a USB stick online containing information about a dangerous gang, he has no idea what trouble it will lead to. Before he knows what is going on, he is made to help the gang get it back as he knows who he sold it to. After breaking into the warehouse and getting it back, the leader of the gang is killed. With the leader dead Billy thinks he's in the clear until the others reveal how deadly they are. Billy realises how disposable he is and has to outrun the gang before they kill him. However, once they find him, they threaten something else – his family.

The novel is in the crime genre and explores themes of manipulation and blackmail. It questions good versus bad and makes the reader wonder if Billy is a good character or if he's not as bad as the others. Some novels that inspired me are: *The Family Upstairs* by Lisa Jewell, as it gave me an idea of how to write characters and *The Jack Reacher* series as this helped me with the action and drama of the novel.

The Heist

My heart thumped against its ribcage jail even though I was standing still. The warehouse was a massive grey building with a steel, ridged shutter locking in the contents. It was a sorting office during the day, but at night it looked and felt abandoned. I could feel the security cameras on me even though I wasn't in their sight. I wasn't ready for this, but I had promised Cameron and now I didn't have a choice. A thousand scenarios ran through my head of how this could go wrong. All I could hear was my blood gushing in my ears.

A head obscured by a ski mask could just be seen on the other side of the building. That was Nate. I could see it was him by the crowbar he held. The rain could barely be felt, but the headlights of the grey Nissan van behind lit it up. Gideon was in there, hacking the security system. The same hacker that had found out I had sold the USB stick, and tracked where the package had gone in the first place. The engine put me on edge at how loudly it cut the silence. A hand patted my shoulder, and I gasped before realising it was another one of the group, Joey. I wanted to scold him for scaring me like that but decided against it. If the cameras weren't down yet, my voice would risk the entire operation. I breathed out slowly,

trying to calm the nerves. Why had I gotten myself mixed up in this? Who would've thought selling my dad's dodgy USB stick would lead to this much trouble?

The van door opened and another ski-masked man came towards us. The man was the leader of the group, Cameron. Gideon must've done it. The security was down. He nodded at Nate, who wedged the crowbar underneath the shutter and levered it up. It didn't budge. Maybe we wouldn't be able to get in and we could all go home. Cameron pulled a gun from his jacket pocket and fired at the lock. The padlock broke with some sparks flying out and Nate pushed the shutter up, which rattled as the cylinder at the top rolled in on itself.

The warehouse was dark, but the lights automatically came on triggered by Nate's presence, giving off a low hum. Rows and rows of shelves and units lined the walls and floor, filled with items I didn't recognise. Nate and Joey rushed in, searching the shelves and sending items crashing to the floor. Cameron pushed me from behind, my cue to follow the others. My feet protested at what I was doing and I glanced back to see Cameron glaring at me through his mask. Then he pointed his pistol at me, and that gave me the threat I needed to run after the others.

Units crashed to the ground as Nate pushed them over and I tried to avoid all the things on the floor that Joey had swept off the shelves. It was chaos and I couldn't believe this was a robbery. Weren't robberies supposed to be quiet to avoid the police? We were practically advertising ourselves to be arrested. Another unit crumbled to the ground with stuff cascading all over the place. How could they be sure the USB stick wasn't in the mess they were creating? I said nothing for fear of Cameron's rage and went further into the warehouse, away from the others. I just didn't understand why a USB stick would be amongst all the junk that was stored on the shelves.

At the far end, a light leaked under a door as it quickly closed fully. The person behind the frosted glass window ducked from view. I wanted to ignore it, but what if the USB stick was in that room instead of out here? If I got it, Cameron was bound to leave me alone, but if I told the others about the room, would I have a death on my conscience? I glanced at Nate and Joey, destroying yet another load of things and shelves. Where did Cameron find these people? They were the noisiest thieves I had ever heard.

The sound of police sirens was faint in the distance, but it caused me to freeze as my heart hammered harder. Nate and Joey turned to the entrance of the warehouse, then looked at each other and sprinted towards it. I ran after them with the instinct that they knew what they were doing. The van engine was already going and the side door slid open for them as they leapt in. Cameron's head poked out as he ordered me to go faster and eventually, I crashed onto the van floor as he pulled the door shut and we veered to the side as the vehicle sped around a tight corner. My face squished against the door as Nate fell into me, before correcting himself.

The police sirens faded away and I relaxed, but only for a second before I felt Cameron's eyes on me. I gulped and slowly turned to look at him. A face like thunder met me. The van slowed down to a stop and I looked out the front to see we had stopped in a layby. Before I could ask why we had stopped, Cameron's hands grabbed my collar and hoisted me up.

'What was that?' he demanded. 'We ripped the entire place apart and there was no USB stick. So where is it?'

'I don't...I don't know,' I said as my legs dangled beneath me.

'Well, you better hurry up and find out.' Cameron threw me down and I fell onto my bum.

They all looked down on me, accusingly, like I was the one who had called the police. I didn't know what to do as I slowly rose to my feet.

'I guess you're expecting us to go back?'

'I want a reason why the police were called and why we couldn't find that USB stick. You get that, Billy?'

What if I told them about the man in the office? What if that got him killed? I glanced away from the faces expecting an answer and tried to think of one that didn't involve any deaths.

'Maybe there was an invisible trigger that alerted the police?' I shrugged. 'And the USB stick was probably in that mess Nate and Joey created. You saw how they were destroying the place.'

Cameron shot a glare at Nate and Joey. 'Yeah, that would explain it.' He walked closer to me, then turned, addressing the others. 'Okay, tomorrow. We'll go back and search in the mess that was made. We have to find that USB stick.'

Chapter 2

For a second night in a row, I stood outside the warehouse, waiting for the all clear to go in. If we messed up again, there wouldn't be a third time. Corpses didn't rob warehouses. There was a new lock on the shutter, locking it down to the ground. It was as if it was the first night again. Nothing was different from the outside, but inside, I knew it was absolute carnage, and we had to go through with a fine toothcomb. If only Nate and Joey had been more careful.

Cameron came from the van, which meant Gideon had disabled the cameras and security again, and shot the lock off again. Nate pushed the shutter up to reveal the mess of the night before. Joey went in first and I followed, not wanting to be last and be threatened by Cameron's gun. How were we supposed to find anything in the mess? A movement at the back distracted me. It was the office door again. Why would anyone stay in a warehouse that had been robbed the night before? I glanced at the two grown men on their hands and knees, carefully picking through everything, and diverted off to the office.

Just outside the office door, I could hear a frantic whispering from the person inside, but couldn't work out the words. It sounded like he was on the phone to someone. Probably the police. We couldn't get stopped again. Cameron would lose his head, or I would. Slowly, I pushed the door open and poked my head around the corner to see a brown haired man in a black security uniform, cowering on the floor and holding a corded phone to his ear. Tears trickled down his face as he begged on the phone. My heart broke and I squeezed my way into the room, hoping he didn't start shouting, which would've alerted Cameron. Shutting the door, I turned the light off and turned on my phone torch.

The man had stopped talking and now sat shaking in fear. I got down on my knees and took the phone off him, placing it back on the receiver. He cowered more and covered his eyes with his hands, still shaking and crying.

'I won't hurt you,' I whispered. 'But I need to know where the USB stick is.'

His state of terror didn't change, despite me reassuring him.

'Look, if I'm gone too long, the others will know. Please just tell me where it is.' I glanced towards the door and hoped the others were too busy searching to care where I was.

'I don't know any USB stick.' I looked back to see the man had uncovered his face.

He was just scared. Of course he knew about the USB stick. 'You have to remember where you put it. Please!' I hissed, thinking about how long I had been gone. They were bound to notice soon.

The man covered his face again and shook his head, crying. I got up and shone my torch on his desk, which consisted of a computer, a phone and a few stationary products. I went and tried the drawers down the side of the desk, but they didn't open. There was a lock at the top.

'Oi, where's the key?' I whispered at him. The guy was having too much of a panic to do anything. How did anyone hire him as a security guard? I searched the desk again, hoping it would just be on there, but it wasn't.

The office door opened with such a force that it slammed behind into the wall. I jolted, then froze, hoping it wasn't Cameron. Nate came in and flicked the light on, illuminating me and the guard. He frowned at me, then the guard, while I stared at him, hoping he wouldn't kill the guard. He came forward and gave me his crowbar, then glanced at the security guard and walked out. I breathed a sigh of relief and set about wedging the metal in the gaps between each drawer. The first one snapped open, but was empty.

This was wasting time that we didn't have. The guard had already been on the phone so how long was it until the police arrived? I got back down on his level.

'Please just tell me. At least tell me which drawer. Please!'

'I don't...I don't know what you're talking about.'

I gave up and went back to forcing the drawers open. The security guard got up and edged his way along the wall, focussing on the door. I stopped and looked at the man, who was reaching out for the door handle.

‘Please don’t open that door.’

He didn’t stop or seem like he had intentions to.

‘Listen to me. They’ll shoot you if they know you’re here.’

At this the guard stopped, but his hand still hovered over the handle. I prayed he’d bring it back, maybe even go back to cowering. At least on the floor he wasn’t advertising himself in the frosted glass window. Footsteps came closer to the room and I envisioned the chaos if it was Cameron. I went back to pulling open the drawers. Maybe I could save the guards life if I found the USB stick. The guard withdrew his hand and got back onto the floor as the door opened.

My heartbeat quickened as Cameron came in, gun in hand. The guard curled back up into a ball and cried. Cameron looked down on the guard, then slowly raised his gun and pointed it at his head. I rapidly hunted through the drawers, hoping for the USB stick, needing to save an innocent life. A USB stick made itself visible amongst the other junk, but it wasn’t the one I had sold, but I held it up in triumph.

‘Cameron, I got it. Look!’

He gave me a dubious look. ‘Is that so?’

I nodded with a small smile. I knew it wasn’t, but he didn’t know what it looked like, that’s why he had needed me to start with.

He came towards me and plucked it from my hand. 'If this is the USB stick, why was everything I needed on one Joey found out there?' He nodded towards the door.

I gulped as he changed the aim of the gun onto me. 'Okay, look,' I said, holding my hands up in defence, 'I was just trying to save the guard's life, okay?'

Cameron finally took the aim away from me and went around the desk to my side, before plugging in the memory stick. He had just said it wasn't what he was looking for, so what was the point? How many minutes did we have left until the police showed up. A file flashed up on screen, full of different documents, none of them with names I recognised.

The guard slowly shifted his way to the door and reached up for the handle. A gunshot rang out with the bullet splintering the door just in front of the man's hand. His breathing quickened as he went back to panicking, and he looked wide eyed at Cameron, who had fired the shot. My ears rang with how close it had been. Then, he tutted, like a disappointed schoolteacher.

'We have been naughty, haven't we?'

Whatever he was on about, it didn't matter and I really didn't want to get caught. 'We have to go. He called the police. They'll be here any second.'

'No, they won't,' came the flippant reply.

'Yeah, they will. He called them before I came in here, and I've been here a while now.'

Cameron's face cracked into a smile, then a cruel laugh escaped his lips. He addressed the guard. 'Talk to a nice policeman, did ya? Reassured you they'd be here in minutes, did they?'

The guard opened his mouth slightly in shock and glanced at me, still breathing like he'd done a marathon. His eyes begged at my soul, but I was powerless against Cameron. He was the boss and I was just the guy who sold stuff on the internet. Not that I was doing that again after all the trouble it had caused. Cameron took the memory stick out of the computer and pocketed it.

'Quite interesting. I think I'll have that.' The gun pointed at the guard again. 'And now to get rid of witnesses.'

I scanned the desk for a convenient second gun that the guard could defend himself with, but all I found was a holepunch and a stapler. I picked up the holepunch and stepped back a little to get a good swing to try and distract him from killing the guard. 'Cameron, just think.'

He snapped his head towards me. 'Will you stop saying my name?' he hissed.

I took the moment and swung my arm with the holepunch in it and smacked him on the head. He cried out and put a hand to the wound as blood trickled down into his eye and further down his nose.

'You little shit!' he snarled, raising the gun at me.

Okay...that wasn't the idea. He was meant to drop the gun. Why didn't he drop the gun? I backed away, still holding the bloodied holepunch, while my hunter stalked me like a lone wolf. All I could see was the barrel of the gun and all I cared was that it was pointed at me. There were so many things I hadn't done with my life. So many things I should've done and so many places I should've seen. My parents didn't even know where I was or what I was doing. Now I was faced with the end of my rather short life and Cameron wasn't taking no for an answer.

There was a crack and I expected the pain of a bullet passing through me. I looked down and expected to have to hold a bloodied patch on my shirt as I sank to the ground. Why didn't I feel anything? Where was the blood? Panicked, I looked back up at Cameron, but he had changed into the security guard who was holding the crowbar. Yeah, I'd been hit. The hallucinations were starting, messing with my head. Tears ran down my face and I sank to the ground.

Why was Cameron lying face down on the floor? Why was there blood matting the hair on the back of his head? A drip of blood splashed into the puddle on Cameron's caved in skull. I wasn't in pain at all and I wasn't dying because Cameron never pulled that trigger. I stood up, using the wall to help my shaking legs support me as my eyes met the bewildered security guard. We both looked down at the body at the same time, and he dropped the crowbar beside him, the clang hanging in the air.

Then I took off, and I ran and ran, the adrenaline coursing through me like a river's rapids. There was nowhere to go except outside where the others were waiting in the van and I stopped, my entire body shivering with the unused adrenaline. Where did I go?

'Billy!' From the entrance, someone shouted my name and held out their hand.

I couldn't go with them. What did I tell them about who killed Cameron?

'Billy, we don't have all day!'

I ran towards the outstretched hand and as I got closer, I realised it was Nate. He grabbed me and pulled me behind him as we headed for the van. I was flung in again as Nate slammed the door shut and Gideon put his foot down. They didn't know Cameron was dead and they were leaving him anyway.

'We're leaving without Cameron?' I asked, not wanting to seem like I knew he was dead.

'Oh, who cares about him?' Nate said dismissively, as he held up the USB stick. 'The amount of shit on this thing involves loads of people, not just him.'

Joey grinned. 'Yeah. Think about the blackmail, Billy. The amount of people we could demand money from, we'd be rich!' His entire face lit up as he rubbed his hands together.

Just to make sure they didn't think I had anything to do with Cameron's death, I said, 'So you don't care about Cameron at all?'

Nate raised his eyebrows. 'You're telling me you do? Who'd care for a thuggish brute like him?'

I gave a nervous laugh. 'Well, obviously not me. I was...just checking that...everyone was okay with the situation.'

We stopped in the same layby as we had done the night before and Gideon got out of the front. The side door slid open and he nodded towards me.

'Right, that's it, get out.'

I glanced at the others. 'Why?'

Gideon gave a small shrug. 'You're done. You don't need to be part of us anymore.'

'Oh, right,' I said with a relieved smile. I got up and jumped out of the van. There was a little country road in between two fields, nothing else. 'Hang on, don't I get dropped home?'

'No. Don't be daft.'

'But how do I get home then? I don't have any money. I don't even know where this place is.' I looked behind at the field, hoping it would suddenly become familiar.

'Oh, you don't need to know that where you're going.'

I laughed. 'Where am I...' There was a gun aimed right at my face. I gulped and raised my hands while pleading with the other two with my eyes.

'Sorry, mate, but you know too much,' Gideon said, as if shooting me would be my fault.

'I won't say anything.'

'Isn't that a cliché? You'll let slip at some point. I don't wanna spend my life worrying about loose lips and careless talk. Sorry, Billy.'

I screwed my eyes shut and waited for the inevitable. The sound of an engine grew closer and closer until I opened one eye to see a red car speeding along the road. Gideon stared open mouthed at it as it slowed down and stopped. The security guard got out and stayed by the open door, then pointed Cameron's gun at Gideon.

'Quickly, boy. In here!' he commanded me.

I didn't need telling twice. Gideon shot at the guard and the guard shot back, rapidly firing as I scrambled my way into his car. Once the door was shut, the guard hopped back in his side and sped off as more bullets fired into his car, the sound deafening me. Glancing out of the back window, three people stood by the van, all watching us leave.

Chapter 3

After getting away, the guard drove us to a quiet street. We hadn't gone to a house, or not a bricked one anyway. It was more of a wooden shed in the back garden of an abandoned house. The house itself gave me the creeps with its boarded-up windows and graffiti covered sides. The guard had led me through the overgrown front garden, full of brambles, nettles

and other unwanted plants, and opened the wooden gate to the back garden. I wondered who was living in the house, or who had lived there in years gone by. Was it his house, or just a place to squat until the threat had gone away?

The wooden shed's paint had peeled so much that it showed more wood than paint. Inside it was cold, but there were loads of blankets to keep us warm on the small sofa that had been crammed in there. I sat with one of the blankets on me as the guard made hot drinks with a mini kettle. It looked like he lived here all the time.

He gave me my drink, which looked and smelled a lot like hot chocolate and sat down, pulling another blanket onto him. I thought we were going to sit in silence, but he obviously didn't want to.

'So, how did you get caught up with them, then?'

I looked at a shelf and composed myself. 'I found this USB stick, which I then sold online. Well, it turned out to have some very incriminating evidence on there and so I was made to retrieve it.'

'But how did they know what the USB stick contained?'

I shrugged. 'Don't know, but I guess Gideon did a bit of digging.'

The guard took a sip of his drink while staring off into the distance. What was his connection to all this? How did he know I would be down that road? The silence had fallen again with the only sound being the birdsong and calls as they flew overhead.

'Yeah, that Gideon digs like a dog after a bone,' the guard said after a while.

'So, how exactly do you know them?'

He glanced at me and gave a long sigh. 'I saw them, witnessed them doing a job. The clever thing would've been to keep my mouth shut ... but ...' He sighed again and looked down at his mug. 'I guess I felt too guilty to leave it.'

He looked through a tiny crack towards the house, and I sensed that he had lost something. There was something about his eyes, wrinkled and sleep deprived. Who wouldn't be sleep deprived living in a cold shed and sleeping on a small, old sofa?

'They found where I lived, came in all guns blazing in the middle of the night.' His voice shook. Why was he telling me something that physically hurt to tell?

'Listen, if it hurts, don't open the wound, you know?'

He turned his head to me, tears trickling down his face. 'But I want to, Billy. I want you to know what sort of people they are.'

'I know what sort of people they are. They hurt people and steal from them. You don't have to tell me.'

He swallowed as more tears streamed down his face. 'They...took...' He sniffed and wiped his eyes. 'They took...my family. Came in that night ... and that was it.'

I didn't know what to do or what to say. They had murdered his family. Fear suddenly buried itself in my chest. What if they murdered my family? 'I assume they only murder if you tell the police on them?'

'I don't know, lad, I really don't know,' the guard said with a sad, slow shake of his head.

Suddenly, my nice calm sit down became smothered in panic and worry. What if they killed my family? How could I protect them?

'Oh... I've worried you, haven't I?' the guard said. 'Sorry... that really wasn't my intention.'

I put my mug on the floor by the sofa. 'Doesn't matter. What do I do?' I looked at his face with wide eyes. 'Tell me what to do.'

He stared down at his mug. 'I really shouldn't have said anything.'

I spied the gun he had defended me with on the side, next to the kettle. I leapt up and pocketed it. The guard glanced at me, put his mug on the table, then turned around completely.

'What're you doing with that thing?'

'They killed your family. What's to stop them killing mine?'

'Well... do they even know where you live?'

I nodded. 'They know my address. It was on the sender section on the delivery label.'

The guard's face fell and he picked at his lip. Time wasn't a thing I had a lot of, and I was being forced to waste it while the guard came up with an idea. Maybe it was time I came up with a plan. Was there a way to save my family without violence?

The guard's eyes lit up and he raised a finger. 'Do you have their phone number?' he asked pointing at me.

I took my phone out of my pocket and scrolled through the call log. 'Yeah ... but I doubt it'll work now. It was probably just a burner.'

'But if it is their number, you can use it.' He got up and went around the sofa to me at the back. 'Think about it, Billy. You know what they've done. You can save your family with blackmail.'

I raised my eyebrows in consideration. It was a big risk and we didn't even know if they were after my family. Plus, if it worked, their target would change to me and I had nowhere to hide. Working up the courage, I nodded and tapped on the number in the call log. It rang for ages before someone finally picked up.

'Yeah?' came the dubious tone in Nate's voice.

I locked eyes with the guard and took a breath. 'Nate, it's Billy. Just wondering what your plans were?'

'Our plans?'

'Yeah, you know, if you were planning on ... killing my family for example.'

There was a pause on the other end. What if they had already done it? What if I was too late?

'Well now that you mention it...' Nate started.

'Don't!' I said a little too desperately. I could picture the smirk on Nate's face with the thought of my fear. I took another breath and composed myself. 'Just think about what I know. I know you, and the plan and...' I looked at the guard for something else to add to the list. He searched around, then put two fingers to his head. The gun. Cameron, that was it.

'And?' Nate pressed on the other end.

'And I'll tell them you killed Cameron.'

The other end went silent again. 'Cameron's... dead?'

'Yeah, and the police will blame it on you. So you can't go near my family, or I'll tell the police everything.' This was working. I was so sure it was working. The guard even looked hopeful.

'Oh, don't worry about your family, Billy.' Nate gave a small, unnerving laugh. 'No, no, we wouldn't hurt your family. If I were you, I'd be worried about myself after that amount of blackmail.' The line cut out and I lowered the phone, my face the picture of someone who had done something stupid in a moment of cockiness.

'So?' the guard said. 'They leaving your family alone?'

I nodded, slowly. 'But now I'm their target.'

His face made the same expression mine was making. One of realisation and fear and worry all mixed into one. My family were safe. Now we were the targets. My phone buzzed in my hand with a phone call. It was the same number I had just called. Dread buried itself in my stomach as I picked it up.

'Yeah?'

There was nothing on the other end. Then, a sound like a firework echoed in the shed as a hole poked light in through the wood. I gasped.

'Oh, good, you are in the shed,' came Nate's voice over the phone.

My blood ran cold. It was a bullet that made that hole. A bullet from the gun that Nate, Joey and Gideon had. And we were trapped in a shed. That was it. We were dead men walking, or rather... just sitting targets waiting for them to pick us off. There was no escape.

Chapter 4

I didn't dare move in case they saw us through the gaps in the wood. Goosebumps covered my body either through fear or cold. The guard watched me as if I had the answer of what to do. The phone call had ended and for the last few minutes, it had felt like hours, worrying and second guessing what their plans were. If we went out the door, we'd probably be shot on the spot. Was there another way out? I looked at the walls, thinking about prising a slat off and creating an escape route. Was that feasible?

'What you thinking, son?' the guard asked.

'If we can create another escape route, other than the door, they won't even know.'

The guard's eyes lit up as I went to the side and started testing the wood. They all made the same noise, which sounded strong enough and none of them were rotten. None of them even bent slightly. It was good solid wood. We needed a tool, or something and I scanned the shelves for a convenient power tool that could cut through the wood, but there wasn't one.

'Have you got any tools?'

The guard's eyes looked around, before going to one of them at the back and sliding a paint tin around. Behind it was a small Stanley knife. In my head, I groaned. We'd never get through the wood with that thing. The guard handed it to me with a sheepish look on his face, as if he knew it was a terrible idea to use it. I took it to be polite, then started sawing through the wood with it. It did nothing other than make a small indentation. My arms ached and my fingers got cramp as I cut slowly into the wood.

'I mean, there is this.'

I turned to see the guard holding the gun. 'We can't shoot through it. They'll hear us.'

'No, but we could run for our lives while firing and hope it saves us.'

I took the knife from the wood and considered him. 'I...I guess...'

'I know it's a shitty plan, but what else do we have?'

I glanced back at the wood I had been cutting at. 'I could just keep chipping away...'

'Face it. We're going to have to leave sooner or later.'

I didn't want to advertise us leaving in front of Nate, but the guard was right. If we stayed here for too long, they'd probably suspect something anyway and shoot random holes in the shed. I tried to picture the garden and house, envisioning an escape route. It all depended on where they were. If they were in the house, we would escape through the gate. If they were in the garden, we didn't have that option and were essentially trapped. If they were that close, we'd be dead before we could say the word escape.

'Okay, I'm gonna open that door and see what happens. I just want to see where they are.' I took a deep breath and opened the door a crack. Nothing happened, so I stuck my head around it to see their positions. A bullet whizzed over my head and I leapt back in, leaving the door swinging in the gentle breeze.

'See them?' the guard asked.

I shook my head, while breathing heavily. He went over to the crack between the slats of the wood.

'Can't see anyone.'

I didn't want him standing there too long. If he could see through the crack, they probably could too. The sound of a firework erupted again, and the guard slumped against the wall, face first. I rushed to him and pulled him away before they had another shot at him. The blood was slowly spreading across his stomach and there was a wild panic in his eye.

What did I do? What did I say? There was nothing I could do or say that would've saved him. His body gave me an idea. It was cruel and heartless, but if he was dying anyway, what was the harm? I saw it in a film once, where the protagonist used the dying guys body as a shield against the attackers. I could lift the guard. All I had to do was run with him and use him as my defence.

'I'm sorry. It's my only option.' I took him by the lapels and hoisted him onto me. 'If I don't do this, both of us die. If I do, you're the only one dead, but I think you're pretty close anyway. I positioned myself by the door, then ran for it. Shots fired from several different angles, but I felt no pain. My run slowed to a stagger as the guard's eyes closed as his head lulled to one side. He was dead, but I wasn't and the gate was just in view. I ditched the body to open the gate and rushed through.

A hand grabbed me around my mouth, yanking my head back from my body. Gideon looked down at me with a gun pointed to my head. My heart pounded as my brain ran through a million scenarios, trying to save itself from death. Nothing came out with me alive. Nate and Joey came through the garden gate and joined Gideon, with the same cruel smirk plastered on their faces. Instead of being shot on the spot, they shoved me in their van and closed the door.

'Fancied a nice bit of blackmail, did we?' Nate mocked. 'Thought you were untouchable, did you?'

'I... I was just trying to... to save my family.'

'Oh, we get that, Billy, we really do,' Gideon said. 'But blackmail just isn't very friendly, is it boys?' The others shook their heads in agreement. The gun was taken from my back pocket.

'So as your punishment, we've decided to let you do it.'

I looked at the three faces looking down on me. 'Do it? Do what?'

Nate laughed. 'Oh, Billy. We're gonna let you kill your family, silly.'

(6000 words)