

A DEAD END JOB by Justin Alcala

EXCERPT

Chapter 1 Opening

Today was going to be busy. I don't know how I'd fit a murder into my schedule.

For starters, I was out of coffee. I don't think anyone can really start the day unless they have a cup of joe. Not me at least. Since I live in a more affordable part of Chicago, there were no corner coffee shops charging mortgages for a fix within walking distance. Which means I had to drive deeper into the city to feed the shaky caffeine monkey beating on my back. I joined a local horde of zombies in a hipster neighborhood called Bucktown as they waited in a Disneyland-worthy line for a chance to be a real boy or girl again. This gave me time to think about my to-do list.

I needed to return my library books. I was finally catching up on my Bukowski novels after years of recommendations from friends. Why is good advice so hard to swallow? Since I paid for everything in singles and change, I couldn't just buy a book online. I had to check them out whenever a reading itch needed a scratch. Afterwards, I'd need to replace the squeaky brakes on the van, shower, and then pick up a new hammer strut pin from Denny's Pawn Shop. Denny and I had built a relationship based on trading illegal firearm parts, which was great for a guy that doesn't like proof of sale when it came to his career tools. Finally, my role-playing group had a six o'clock table reserved for our D&D campaign at the neighborhood gaming store. We were nearing level ten, and as the party's wizard, they'd need me to survive our latest adventure. Hmm, when could I possibly squeeze in work?

"That'll be twelve-fifty," declared the barista with black framed glasses.

"For a cup of plain coffee?" I stared at the register's cost display. "I mean, seriously?"

The acne covered art history major working the register didn't flinch. He must have been seasoned.

"Do I get a veteran discount?"

He shook his head. I used my sparse wallet insulation to pay for the mud, but only after my debit card declined. Now I was really running late.