

**DEAD
FALL**
A ZOMBIE NOVEL
**JOSEPH
XAND**



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Chapter 4

L *OOK AT YOU, TURTLEMAN, you fat, ugly fuck!*

Turtleman managed to open his encrusted eyes and gaze at the giant woman's head above him. She slurped a frosty, pink drink from a straw, her eyes frozen in astonishment. She stared down at him contemptuously. Always staring. Always cutting him down.

"Hey, fuck you," Turtleman squeaked through his dry throat.

Then, "I'm losing weight, you know."

And later, "Why don't you slurp on this, bitch!" He tried to grab his crotch as he said it, but his arm barely moved.

I'd have to find it first, fat ass, the giant head shot back. Columbus couldn't navigate those jelly rolls to locate your scrawny, little pecker.

"Fuck you," he managed again after a while. He closed his eyes and thought of home, back when he was still Harry Tuttleman.

Harry hated home. His grandmother was mean and smelled of piss and shit even before she died. The fact she was a smelly, rotting corpse who wanted him dead was pretty par for the course.

He'd come to live with his grandmother (and her never-less-than seven cats) about five years ago when

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his fat whore-of-a-mother dropped him off and never returned. All his mother had ever done was smack him around, so good riddance. His grandmother used to hit him, too, but at least she couldn't hit as hard.

Harry's father died in some war in some sand-drenched country when Harry was really little. But good ol' dad didn't die heroically on the battlefield, jumping on a live grenade or some shit like that. Oh no. He was a Tuttleman. He died of a heart attack while choking down a donut, working his assigned desk job. He was too fat, slow, and incompetent to be anywhere near the action.

Living with his crotchety, senile grandmother wasn't much better than living with his whore-of-a-mother. All Harry's hopes and dreams had rested on what his grandmother threatened him with; that is, that she'd cancel her life insurance policy and leave him with nothing. If she had a life insurance policy, then maybe once the old bag kicked the bucket, he'd inherit a large amount of money and finally be able to leave this shithole town.

Harry even considered helping her along, but he didn't know how to kill her without screwing something up and getting caught. He was a Tuttleman, after all.

And of course, damn his Tuttle-luck, she waits until the whole world goes to fuck before she dies, leaving him jack-fucking-squat.

But he paid the bitch back. Real good.

Once she got sick and it became apparent she was going to die, he closed the door to her bedroom so she couldn't get out when she woke up again. Once he knew she was reanimated (when she started pounding on her bedroom door), then he started having fun.

First, he berated her through her door, calling her all the names she used to call him and more. Stuff he'd

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have never gotten away with when she was alive. Not without a smack to the side of the head.

Then he got a GREAT idea. He climbed up the hide-a-way ladder leading up to the attic and kicked a hole in the ceiling of her bedroom.

He found an old door up there and laid it across the ceiling joists to lessen the danger of falling through. Then he pulled up a chair and watched and laughed at her and called her names. She would just stare up at him through the hole, moaning, reaching up with her boney arms.

Sometimes he'd throw things down at her head. Other times he'd spit on her. A couple of times he stood up, lowered his pants, and pissed on her. She never once dodged or even blinked, completely oblivious to the warm, salty urine pouring down her face and through her hair.

And just when berating her was getting old, and being cooped up in the house while all the crazies tore up the neighborhood was becoming mediocre, he thought of a new form of entertainment. It came to him when he was watching a DVD for like the fiftieth time (when there was still electricity). He lazed on the couch, shoveling beef ravioli out of a can, and one of the cats jumped up on his lap for the fourth time, sniffing the air. Once again he brutally shoved the nuisance off his lap and onto the floor.

All of the cats had gathered around him, anticipating food. You would think they'd have learned not to come to him for food. He hadn't fed them or given them water for weeks. How the hell the little shits were still alive was a mystery, although all of them were noticeably malnourished.

Harry hated those cats, if hate were a strong enough word. Probably because his grandmother had loved them so much. More than she'd loved Harry.

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And it was when Harry was staring around at the thin pupils staring back at him, his lips plastered with cheaply-manufactured marinara, and trying to figure out what to do with the useless rodents (burn them, stab them, bury them alive) that the pounding on his grandmother's bedroom door, the pounding he'd long since relegated to the back of his mind, registered again. He turned his head to it, as if it were a new sound he'd just noticed, then back to the cats, and smiled.

He knew how to have some fun with granny.

Over the next week, he took the cats one at a time into the attic, some of them clawing him up pretty good in the process, and dropped them down to his grandmother. The kitties, which were once her most precious babies, she now chased around the room like a hungry, ravenous animal. Sometimes it took her a while to catch the cats. She'd chase them for hours, toppling furniture and knocking pictures off the walls. But inevitably, either because she had the feline impossibly cornered or because the starving, emaciated cat just ran out of energy (something his dead grandmother never did), she'd catch it.

Harry would sit above the room, laughing and urging her on, the most entertainment he'd seen in quite a while.

And when granny finally did catch one of her precious babes, she wouldn't pet it or cuddle it or try to calm it. And the cats, likely sensing their impending doom, in spite of their weakened states, would scratch and claw and bite her hands and face the entire time they were being lifted up to her mouth. And when Harry's grandmother finally sank her teeth into their furry coats, they would exhibit a scream Harry would have thought unlikely from such small creatures. They would fight and wiggle and bite harder on her nose and cheeks, but to no avail. Eventually, they'd stop moving,

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allowing granny to cover herself with blood, gore, and fur with no resistance at all.

It reminded Harry of some Greek play they'd read in school; something about some guy feeding his brother's children to his brother for some reason. Maybe the brother had had sex with his wife or something. Most of that Greek stuff was usually boring, but other times it was cool. Like that guy who gouged out his own eyes because the dumbass accidentally had sex with his own mother. Awesome.

Of course, it made Harry imagine having sex with his fat, whore mom, and that made him want to vomit.

And thinking of those plays made Harry think of school. He hated school.

It used to not be so bad. The other kids had picked on him for as long as he could remember because of his weight. But he got used to it, for the most part. At least he wasn't at home.

But then two years ago, Reg Rollins transferred from another school, and he took bullying to a whole new level.

Reg quickly became the football team's star quarterback and the most popular guy in school. Once he achieved that level of fame, every nerd, hippy, emo, and loser flew into his radar. Demeaning nicknames were created, books were knocked out of arms, lockers were ransacked and booby-trapped, wedgies were dispensed.

But all that paled in comparison to the treatment dished out to Harry.

Harry had always been called "Turtleman." After all, it was kind of a natural derogatory transition from Tuttleman.

But Reg was the first to make a song out of it.

Turtleman, Turtleman, fat as fuck.

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*Turtleman, Turtleman, likes to suck.
If you wanna get blown by a fat-ass slob,
Turtleman, Turtleman will shine your knob.*

Reg first barked out the tune between classes in a crowded hallway. Harry was looking for his American history book in his locker when he heard it. He turned to see Reg laughing. And so was everyone else who'd heard it—jocks, cheerleaders, preps; nerds, loners, headbangers—everybody. Even Julie from homeroom, who Harry liked and who actually treated him like a real person.

People weren't just calling him fat anymore. They were calling him "faggot" and "queerbait." Other guys were grabbing their crotches and asking if he wanted some. Jocks told him not to use so much teeth next time, yelling the request into open doorways where Harry was attending class. The bathrooms were covered with graffiti detailing all sorts of explicit homosexual acts the "Turtleman Fag" would perform for one's corn dog, a piece of cake, or just for fun.

And EVERYONE sang the Turtleman song.

Julie stopped talking to him, or when she did, he wasn't Harry to her anymore. Even she called him Turtleman.

And to pour salt on the wound, she started dating Reg Rollins. One day she showed up to homeroom wearing his letterman jacket, and what was left of whatever small amount of respect Harry once had for Julie crumbled away.

But Harry could have lived with all that, as bad as it was. The worst humiliation was yet to come.

One day he was in the gym locker room dressing for a shower. He was trying to dress quickly and quietly because he could hear Reg and some of the other football players talking and laughing in the adjacent

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team locker room. They'd seen him when he came in, but for once didn't pay him any mind. After all, Julie had their undivided attention. She'd sneaked into the locker room with them. They were talking about penis sizes. One of them had a ruler, apparently, and they were trying to coax Julie into measuring their penises to see whose was the biggest, probably hoping it would somehow translate into one of the "girl-bangs-the-football-squad" kind of scenarios. But Julie refused to take part.

Then Reg piped up. "Turtlemaaaaaan. Come here, Turtleman!"

Harry tried to ignore him. Eventually, Reg poked his head around the corner. "Hey, I'm calling you, fat ass. Get over here."

"I gotta get to class. I'm already running late, and--"

"Sounds like a personal problem, queerbait. What's that got to do with me?"

"Well, nothing, but..."

"Nothing's right. Now get your blubber butt over here."

Reg walked back around the corner and, putting on his shirt, Harry reluctantly followed. In the football team's corner of the locker room, Harry found Reg, Julie, and six other players from the team. The team members all wore t-shirts and underwear, and nothing else.

"Hi, Turtleman," Julie said almost warmly.

"Hey, Julie," Harry responded, his head down.

The rest of the team saluted him variously with "fat ass," "faggot," "Turtle Butt," etc., occasionally accompanied by a crotch grab, which got a laugh out of some, and even a snicker from Julie. None of them called him Harry.

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Reg snapped his fingers and pointed to the bench around which they were gathered. "Sit down, Turtleman," he ordered. Harry did as he was told.

Then Reg handed him the ruler.

"What do you want me to do with this?" Harry asked, afraid he already knew the answer.

"You're going to use it to measure our dicks, dumbass," Reg leveled coolly.

"No, no," Harry responded, trying to hand back the ruler, "I don't want to."

Someone smacked him on the back of the head.

"Who asked you what you wanted, queerbait?" someone said behind him. It sounded like Monty Evans.

"We'd prefer a girl to do it, but Julie won't, and you're the next best thing," Reg explained smiling.

"But, but..." Harry began, his face flushed.

Reg crouched down and looked Harry in the eyes. "Look, Harry. It's simple, okay? We're gonna walk up to you one at a time and whip out our dicks. You place the ruler under our dicks, up against the balls, and then read the ruler. Can you read a ruler?"

Harry probably should have said no, but instead he nodded. He was shocked that Reg had called him Harry.

"Good. Now we can get this done quick, and you can get back to Fat and Flabby 101, choir practice, Cooking for Queers, or whatever faggoty-ass class you're missing right now, okay?"

Harry nodded again. *He called me Harry*, he thought.

"Good!" Reg stood up. "You're up, J.J.," he said to Joel Jenkins, the team's tight end. As Joel made his way to Harry, Reg stood behind Julie and circled her waist with his arms. "Let me know if you see something you like," he said to her, and kissed her neck.

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Once he was in front of Harry, J.J. gave Julie a wink and fished his penis out of his boxers. Julie smiled back at him. Harry stared at the penis bouncing in front of him. Again Monty smacked him in the back of the head. "Quit fantasizing about it and measure it, queerbait."

Jarred back into reality, Harry lifted the ruler and placed it daintily beneath the penis shaft. J.J. pushed his penis down so that it rested along the length of the ruler.

"Five and three-quarters inches," Harry said, having to lean up to read it.

"That's six inches even, faggot!" J.J. corrected him. "I thought you could read a ruler." J.J. lifted an open hand, threatening to slap Harry.

Harry flinched back. "Okay, yeah, you're right. Six inches even."

J.J. lowered his hand and tucked his penis back in his shorts. "Next," he said.

Aside from the occasional comment such as, "Try not to suck on it, queerbait" and "See anything you like, fat ass?" the next two measurements moved without complication. Patrick Reeves measured at five and a half inches and Rob Miles at roughly six and a quarter inches. After each was measured, he'd step aside and start dressing while someone else took a turn at the ruler.

However, there was a problem when Everett Collins stepped up to the ruler. "Dammit, I'm not hard yet!" he exclaimed. He started stroking himself and looked at Julie. "Care to help me out, babe?"

"In your dreams, pervert," Julie returned with a smile, watching him stroke.

"Maybe fag boy can be our fluffer," Monty said from behind Harry.

Harry's heart skipped a beat.

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"Hell no!" Everett shot back. "I ain't gay! He ain't touchin' me!"

Harry relaxed a little.

Then a hand slid down Harry's shoulder and roughly grabbed one of his breasts. "Maybe you could feel up fag boy here. His tits are bigger than Julie's." Harry tried to push Monty's hand away, which earned another whack to the back of the head.

"I ain't touchin' queerbait's tits," Everett laughed, still stroking.

"How 'bout this?" Reg said. They all looked at him to see him snake his hand into Julie's shirt. Under the fabric, his hands massaged her breasts. Julie smiled and let it happen.

"Oh, hell yeah," Everett said. That seemed to do the trick. Soon he was erect and measured—five and three-quarters inches.

Next up was Demarius Washington, the team's wide receiver and one of the school's only black students.

When he pulled his penis out of his boxers, Julie mouthed, "Wow!"

"That more your size?" Reg asked her.

"I've got all I need right here," Julie assured him, reaching down and patting the bulge in his briefs.

Demarius measured just over eight inches.

"I guess it's true what they say," Reg said, and they all laughed. Even Harry got in on the joke.

When it was Monty's turn, Monty turned to Reg, "You gonna go, chief?"

"Uh-uh. The only person who sees my beast when it's hard is Julie," he told them. Julie laughed and leaned up for a kiss.

Obviously nervous, Monty walked in front of Harry and pulled down his briefs. Even before measuring, it was obvious he had the smallest penis yet. Snickers could be heard around the room.

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"Four and a half inches," Harry informed them. Everyone bursted out laughing. Including Harry.

Monty's face turned beet red. "What are you laughing at, fat ass?" Monty raised a hand and slapped Harry across the side of the face and head. The laughter stopped immediately. Harry dropped the ruler and his hand went to his stinging face.

"How big's your dick, faggot?" Monty screamed at him. "Do you even have a dick?"

All the others in the room turned their attention to Harry, urging him to show his penis.

Harry was terrified. His face white. "No, I don't want to!" he begged them. They continued to demand him to stand and drop his pants.

Harry stood slowly, hesitated, and then tried to make a break for it.

He didn't get far. Reg stuck out a foot as Harry tried to run past, and Harry slammed to the concrete floor, busting a lip in the process.

Quickly half a dozen arms and hands were on him, picking him up and dragging him back to the bench. Harry fought and writhed as he was pulled down across the bench and forced to lay on his back. As three or four people held him down and kept his arms from swinging, others went to his boxers and worked them down from around his waist. Even when his underwear was down around his knees, his belly flab concealed his crotch. Monty reached down and pulled back the flab. Gasps and laughs burst out from around the locker room as they all stared at Harry's shriveled penis, buried in layers of obesity.

"Holy shit! Is that even a dick?" someone asked.

"It's like it's not even there!" Julie observed.

"Mother fucker's got a thumb for a dick!" Demarius tossed in.

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All around the locker room, the comments and laughter continued: "I've never seen one that small!" "No wonder he likes dick. He doesn't have one of his own." "How does he even jack that thing?" "With tweezers!" "No need to measure that!" "How could you measure that?" "He's practically a girl!"

Harry laid on the bench defeated, but he refused to cry in front of them.

Inevitably someone took out his cell phone and snapped a picture. Soon nearly all the others followed suit, laughing and joking the whole time.

Eventually, they left, and Harry laid there long after they were gone, his boxers around his knees. And he still refused to cry.

* * * * *

If school had been tough before, after the locker room incident it became unbearable. Names referring to his weight or his assumed sexual preferences were replaced or used in addition to names like, "baby dick," "dickless," inchworm," "Harry the Thumb," and more. Girls walked past him and laughed. The picture of his penis turned up everywhere. No one ever talked to him, except to degrade or verbally abuse him.

School used to be his refuge from home. Now there were no refuges. But he preferred to be at home, the physical and verbal abuse from his grandmother being far easier to deal with.

Eventually, he stopped attending school altogether. His senile grandmother barely even noticed. A few weeks later, dozens of dead people began walking out of the ocean. After that, no one cared about the truancy of one Harry Preston Tuttleman. Many students were kept home from school. And soon the schools were shut down completely.

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But whereas most people considered the bacterial outbreak that swept across the country and the globe to be an apocalyptic disaster, for Harry it was the best thing that could have happened. After his grandmother died, there was no one to call him a derogatory name or slap him around. Harry Tuttleman was the ruler of his own kingdom.

And somewhere between his grandmother's constant hammering, and feeding her beloved cats to her, and spending his days gorging himself, watching DVDs and trying not to remember the past offenses administered against him, he embraced, finally, the persona of Turtleman; reveling in admiration of a creature that wasn't fast, or pretty, or elegant, yet one whose greatest strength was in its ability to withdraw into itself and shut out the world.

But when the cats were gone, and the food grew scarce, and the electricity left Turtleman alone in the dark with his grandmother's never-ending barrage, he thought mostly of school and the humiliation and degradation he experienced, brought on by the sadistic cruelty of some asshole by the name of Reg Rollins. Turtleman's anger bloomed. He drew pleasure in imagining Reg, tied up and helpless, being lowered down head first into the tearing claws and hungry teeth of his grandmother. He thought of the cat's screams and wondered how they'd measure up to those of Reg. Would he beg and plead? Would he cry? Would he apologize for everything he'd done to that fat pussy, Harry Tuttleman? And Turtleman would listen to the pleading and apologizing and blubbing, but then let Reg know that it all fell on deaf ears. That Harry Tuttleman no longer existed.

"That fat fuck is dead, asshole!" Turtleman imagined himself saying, even speaking the words aloud to the empty room.

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And it was a few days later when the first real pangs of true hunger began to set in, that Turtleman realized for the first time that it didn't have to be a fantasy. Reg lived less than a mile from his grandmother's house. Turtleman could capture him, bring him back here, make sure Reg knew what was about to happen. And if he wouldn't come easily, Turtleman could just kill him right then and there. He could get away with it, too. There were no crimes anymore; no laws. He could kill a thousand Reg's, and no one would care.

Turtleman went outside into the backyard and, in the tool shed of a grandfather he'd never met, found a rusty, dull machete. He also found a sharpening stone and took both back inside and went to work putting an edge on the blade. It took awhile, but eventually, the edge was shiny and hazardous.

Taking nothing else other than the machete and a bottled water, Turtleman wandered into the world beyond his neighborhood block for the first time in a long time. He found it to be a dangerous world requiring him to tread slowly and cautiously. Twice he was chased by the dead. Once he was able to test the sharpness of the blade on the head of a dead woman who lunged at him from the shadows.

He made it to Reg's house hours later, when the sun was waning. He knocked on the doors and peeked in the windows. No one appeared to be home. He found the back door not just unlocked, but slightly ajar, and stepped into the home of his nemesis. He found closets drained of their belongings and dust-covered, empty dressers. No one had lived here for a long time.

Turtleman was beyond angry. Reg Rollins still might be alive in this dead world, and Turtleman would never have a chance to watch him die.

He stayed the night at the Rollins's residence, sleeping in a bed housed in a room full of football

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trophies, school colors, posters of nearly-nude women and sports stars, and snapshots of various people and faces, most of whom he thought he recognized as once-tormentors of the late Harry Tuttleman.

The next morning, Turtleman wielded his machete and destroyed everything he saw, taking special care to lay out the photos on the bed and slice up the smiling faces with meticulous care.

That completed, exhausted and dripping with sweat, Turtleman sat on the couch to rest and try to decide what to do next. He decided then he couldn't go back to the house of his grandmother. He could no longer sleep in Harry Tuttleman's bed. There was no life for him there. Not anymore. It was time to move on.

Later, walking along a rural, two-lane highway, staying close to the edge of the woods out of sight, he noticed a billboard in the distance and on it the head of a pretty woman sucking on a straw. He decided to climb the billboard to get a higher vantage point and see if he could scan the adjacent countryside, hopefully settling on a direction in which to travel.

He was halfway up the ladder affixed to the side of the billboard when two corpses appeared at the bottom of the ladder, clawing at his feet. They must have been in the woods, following him.

He'd been trapped on the catwalk ever since, berated constantly by the giant head of a beautiful woman who was too eager to remind him that Turtleman bore a striking resemblance to some fat loser named Harry Tuttleman.

Over the next three days, Turtleman suffered like never before. The water left in the bottle lasted only a few hours. There was no food at all. The sky was completely cloudless and the sun battered him endlessly each day, the billboard, angled almost perfectly east to

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west, casting no shadows Turtleman's direction. His skin burned and peeled.

On day two, Turtleman discovered two ounces of dingy, moldy water trapped in the glass cover of a street lamp attached to the side of the billboard. He managed to unscrew the cover without spilling it and guzzled it greedily. It wasn't much. Below him, in a ditch next to the road, water was still puddled in spots from a rain several days earlier. It might as well have been on another planet.

Midway through day three, he laid on the catwalk, barely able to move. Below him, the two zombies, not reliant on food or water or shade to sustain them, clawed at the wooden ladder.

Turtleman considered rolling off into their waiting arms. Possibly, he'd snap his neck in the fall. But with his luck, he'd survive, remain conscious, and have to watch himself be slowly devoured. That would be the ol' Tuttle-luck, and wasn't he a Tuttleman, after all? He honestly didn't know.

Do it! the giant head urged him. The world would be a better place without your faggot ass. It could be your one contribution to the human race, what's left of it.

Turtleman shot the giant head the bird, even if he didn't have the strength to lift his arm.

"Fuck you," he said, but no sound came out. The giant head laughed and laughed.

But then something happened that wouldn't have happened to a Tuttleman ordinarily. A small dog, what his grandmother would have called a "yippee dog," came trotting down the road, its toenails snapping on the gravel. It was brown and mangy and bone-thin.

When it saw the corpses clawing at the ladder, it arfed at them. They turned to the small dog and suddenly whatever they'd been reaching up at for three days was forgotten. They staggered through the grass

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and onto the road towards the dog. The dog retreated several paces, then turned and barked at them again. The chase was on. It would go on until either something else attracted the attention of the dead creatures or until the dog passed out from exhaustion, allowing them to finally catch their prey.

Their abandoning of the bottom of the ladder filled Turtleman with renewed vigor, if only a little. Slowly, painfully, he rose and maneuvered himself so he could climb down the ladder. But he was still five rungs from the bottom when his energy wavered. His foot slipped, and he tumbled to the ground.

He lay on the ground for hours before finally rolling towards the ditch. There, he found a puddle and lowered his face into it. He drank and drank until his stomach was full. Then he vomited violently, rested, and drank some more.

A long time after that, long after the sun relented to the night, Turtleman rose to his feet. He refilled his water bottle with muddy sludge and felt to be sure his machete was still sheathed inside his belt.

Turtleman limped along the long, dark road, a cool breeze at his back. He was battered and burned, but he somehow felt good.

He had set out to find Reg Rollins and kill him. Well, he'd find him. Reg Rollins would be easy to find. He'd never met anyone who wasn't a Reg Rollins, at least a little bit. Yeah, Reg Rollins was out there, and Turtleman would find him, and then he'd make him pay. He would make them all pay.

You got lucky this time, fat ass! the giant head screamed at him as he left the billboard behind. *You got lucky this time!*

Turtleman didn't respond. He didn't turn around. He kept walking.

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After all, she was right. For once in his life, luck was on his side.

Perhaps he wasn't a Tuttleman, after all. Not anymore.

About the Author

Joseph Xand has been (in no particular order) a carpenter, pizza deliverer and cook, psychology clerk, dishwasher, resident assistant, security guard, community organizer, CAD designer, cabinet maker, line feeder, forklift driver, warehouse worker, hall director, political organizer, writing instructor, screenplay analyst, reach truck driver, editor, non-fiction author, granite fabricator, secretary, janitor, Union organizer, website and graphics designer, convenience-store clerk (for one day), cashier, record-store clerk, screenplay club founder, and computer tech.

Now he can add novelist to the list.

He lives in Texas with his wife, three kids, three dogs, and three cats.

For information on the rest of the book, please visit JosephXand.com