

Our Mother of Mercy Job  
A Manny Williams Adventure  
By Brett Beyer

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*Ten years after the zombie apocalypse, the world is trying to put itself back together. The dead have been mourned, cities were burned and order was restored after a fashion. Store owners put their open signs up, the freeways opened back up, and the government began its processes all over again, despite everyone's best efforts. The world feels as if it has just survived a war. Some things have changed, however. A lot of technology failed, the world's economies crashed. No one quite feels safe on the streets, and the undead can still be found, straggling out from the wilderness or the slums of Manhattan, ready to begin anew the plague that threatened to finish humanity on the face of the earth. To answer the call, a new career path was opened to the soldiers who survived the apocalypse. They are classified under Zombie Exterminators but the world calls them Horsemen.*

#### Our Mother of Mercy Job

Transcription of Emanuel (Manny) E. Williams audio notes found on location.

Occupation: Zombie Exterminator (Commonly known as "Reaper")

Description: 6'1, Male. For relevant features, see attached photo.

Officer Report-

When we arrived at the missing person's office, we found the door unlocked and the premises empty but undisturbed. We received no response to oral commands and requests. There was no sign of a struggle, nor any indication of violence of any kind. We found a fully loaded .38 on the desk, a bottle of scotch and two glasses, one half-full of water (presumably melted ice) and the other mostly full of scotch. All have been sent down to the lab for testing. There was one (1) recorder with the voice of the missing person. The office space belongs to one Santos Korvacs who supposedly rents out to Mr. Williams, and we have requested that Mr. Korvacs be contacted for questioning.

The missing person, Emanuel (Manny) Williams rents out the office space as a base of operations. He is a licensed Zombie Exterminator who has been authorized to eliminate zombie stragglers in the greater New York area. His license is framed on the wall and up to date.

We have found an audio recorder on Mr. Williams' desk (one of those nice ones that pick up everything) that he seemed to be

using it at the time of his disappearance on the twelfth. We have labeled the recorder as evidence and sent it to be transcribed. Transcription is to be attached to this report.

Begin Transcription.

MANNY: Check, check.

Hey, Jack. I heard about the accident. I'm sorry. I guess you're back to work transcribing to get your mind off of it. The nice part is that you don't need your eyes for transcribing, right?

Let me give you a run-down of the office, so you can get a picture of where I work.

The walls are a wooden finish, because the cheap Hungarian running this place won't put up for wall paper. I have a desk, a coat hanger and a cheap desk fan with a rotating head. I couldn't even afford the plastic ones you could pick up from the box stores. This one's circa 1956 or something.

On the bright side, there is a bathroom and space enough to put a couch in case I get kicked out of my apartment. Now if it weren't for the blinking neon light advertising this place mounted only two feet outside my window, I could feasibly get a good night's sleep.

Let's try to avoid that and get onto the job. While I still have one, anyway.

This is concerning job number 071126, job for Our Mother of Charity Hospital on Manhattan island... billing address to follow. Charge five-hundred dollars for corporate extermination and client has been made aware that there will be a running expense account.

Ah, let's see, at 5:45, I got a call from Our Lady of Charity Hospital on the main island. By the sound of the hysterics, it's a particularly bad infestation, though they assured me that there couldn't have been more than four or five stragglers at the most. They were sketchy on the details on the sighting which tells me that they want to keep this under the radar. Charge twenty-five dollar processing fee for operating under unusual conditions.

I'm to report to a... Jessica Spozanza, head nurse on the fourth floor. I'm to come wearing civilian clothes (what, do they think I have a uniform or something?) and this case is supposed to be extremely hush-hush. For the record, hospitals can be extremely sensitive about stragglers, probably because they were among the first to see the outbreak. Not only that but it can be a pretty bad black mark if grandpa goes in for an artery bypass and comes out infected.

The report from the hospital says that there was no sign of a morgue escape, so this pack may have wandered in from the sewers or off the street. It's highly unlikely, but it happens. Hospitals pay for their own security, but no system is infallible.

Note to self, first check security for leaks and bill for extra time.

The report was vague, but it sounds like abduction. That means we could be dealing with newer stiff who still thinks in terms of storing for later. Better pack heavy artillery, as newly stiffes tend to have better endurance.

Charge for usage of hollow-point rounds.

I will be bringing my "Doctor's Bag" and all supplies necessary in there as per extermination rules and regs 69.2(a-f). I will also be bringing my .38 which is... loaded. I'm low on hollow points... Looks like I have five left. Also, my bag is freshly stored with rubbing alcohol, flare gun with two shots, six flares, latex gloves, flashlight, booeey knife, bone saw, note paper and extra pencils, office supplies and a pack of government issue anti-infection cigarettes. I don't know why they can't just issue pills or a breathilizer, but Hal over in forensics said that it has something to do with heat being the active agent. So we have a nation of smokers with cigarettes that taste like crap.

I will hail a cab from here to the main island. Remember to ask for receipt for business expense.

6:05 pm. Listening to the news report on the cabbie's radio. No announcement on the hospital abduction. The press ain't involved yet. If I can wrap up the case without alerting the press I can push for an additional bonus for keeping it quiet.

6:07 pm. Another announcement of a straggler home-invasion. Senator Abrams from upper-state New York. One zombie got past a lot of security and took out the good senator's family. Every security system has leaks, but this one seems a bit extreme. Politicians pulled out of the pandemic faster than roaches from nuclear fallout. Check into case. There's a possible job there.

6:13. Note to self, research possibility of political assassination by zombie. Possible book deal to follow.

6:45 pm, delays due to rioting on the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge. Seeing crowds of people at night is still eerie. I don't think any of them are aware of how quickly a huge late-night gathering could turn into another pandemic. At night, only the most gruesome of stragglers stand out from ordinary people if you aren't paying attention, and all it takes is one loose stiff in that crowd and it all starts over again.

Rioters were protesting the closure of the subway system. Seems more stragglers have been camping down in the tunnels down there.

Note to self: research subway system as a possible breeding ground for infected for a book deal. Come to think about it, that's probably already been done. Look into movie deal for that idea. At least I could sell it to a B-Movie studio.

6:50. Arrived at Our Lady of Charity Hospital. Still no sign of police or press. For as big of an issue they made about this particular infestation, they have done a good job of keeping it quiet. Enough people are staring at me that I will go through the service entrance.

6:53. I have arrived at the service elevator and pushed the fourth floor button. The fourth floor is... maternity. Ah. I have serious doubts about a positive completion of this job.

Note to self: Consider reducing fee.

Manny: 7:00 p.m.

By saying yes, the following individual agrees that all of the information she gives is true to the extent of her knowledge and that I, Emanuel E. Williams am not responsible for actions taken based on false or misleading information. Do you agree?

JESSICA: Yes

MANNY: Jack, for your eyes, I'm in a small office with an attractive nurse wearing scrubs and a stethoscope. There's a monitor on a wooden desk, file cabinets along the wall and a large window overlooking the nursery. I'll address the nurse, now.

Your name is...?

JESSICA: Jessica Sporanza

MANNY: And what is your position here in the maternity ward of Our Mother of Mercy?

JESSICA: Managing Nurse, day shift.

MANNY: Can you go into detail about what happened today at approximately four-thirty p.m. Miss Sporanza?

JESSICA: We had just finished with our afternoon checkup and we were beginning to hand out dinner menus when that thing..

MANNY: What was on the menu?

JESSICA: What? How should I know? Should that matter?

MANNY: Just curious. Have you eaten dinner, Miss Sporanza?

JESSICA: Are... Are you asking me out?

MANNY: No.

JESSICA: I could swear..

MANNY: So when did the stiff make its appearance?

JESSICA: It was about 4:30.

MANNY: Where did it come from?

JESSICA: We think she came from the stairwell. Over there.

MANNY: Miss Sporanza has pointed on a floor map to the north-eastern corner where there is an indication of an emergency stair well...

JESSICA: It's Missus.

MANNY: I'm sorry?

JESSICA: It's Missus. I'm married.

MANNY: I don't see a ring.

JESSICA: Nevertheless.

MANNY: Nevertheless.

JESSICA: Anyway, this zombie... she just appears out of nowhere.

MANNY: I thought you said it came from the stairwell.

JESSICA: We think she did. She couldn't have come from the elevators. They're clear over here. Somebody would have seen her before she got to the nursery.

MANNY: How could you tell it was a stiff?

JESSICA: She was missing part of her face and the gaping stomach wound was a big tip.

MANNY: Those are usually good indicators. Then what did it do?

JESSICA: I think you should see the surveillance video.

MANNY: Miss Sporanza has turned on the surveillance video. It's a three-quarters view of where they keep the infants. The image is black and white with a running time stamp in the corner. There appears to be one nurse in the room attending the babies. The Stiff enters the room, attacks the nurse. The zombie rips what appears to be the nurses' forearm off, then retreats the way it came in.

JESSICA: That's what we thought. Keep watching.

MANNY: Hmm...

JESSICA: See?

MANNY: So if the nurse still has both of her arms, what did it take off of her?

JESSICA: She was holding a baby, Mr. Williams.

MANNY: It took an infant? That hardly seems likely. The nurse makes for much heartier eating.

JESSICA: Mr. Williams...

MANNY: Call me Manny.

JESSICA: I'm married.

MANNY: Mr. Williams will do fine.

JESSICA: I noticed you refer to the creature that broke in here as an it.

MANNY: That's right.

JESSICA: Why?

MANNY: Falconers refer to their bird as a she no matter what gender it is. Sailors do that with their boats, too.

JESSICA: In the case of falconers and sailors, the thing they are referring to isn't human.

MANNY: Zombies ain't human, lady.

JESSICA: They used to be

MANNY: Not anymore. Whatever is riding around in that shell lost its humanity a long time ago.

JESSICA: You sound pretty passionate about all of this.

MANNY: It ain't passion, Miss Sporanza. It's fact. When we turned the tide after the third wave, we saw what these things could do. They don't think, they don't feel, they just consume. I don't think "why" even enters into it. There's no motive or remorse, consideration or anything else. Whoever they don't eat entirely will become one of them. It's like accidental breeding. It's a fate worse than death. When you put down a stiff, it means less than putting down a rabid dog and it solves more problems.

We had a problem of soldiers assigning "he" and "she" but once you see a convert that looks too much like a mother tearing into a child, you find a certain amount of solace in the phrase "it."

JESSICA: I cannot imagine a mother turning on a child.

Tell me, what will you do if the child is infected but still alive?

MANNY: I'll do what needs to be done.

JESSICA: I don't think I like your job very much, Mr. Williams.

MANNY: Nobody does. Not even me.

Now, a word about the tools I'm using. I have flares as well as a flashlight...

JESSICA: We're a hospital, Mr. Williams. Open flames are forbidden.

MANNY: Flares don't just provide light, Miss Sporanza. The heat tends to cauterize wounds, it's rumored to disinfect a zombie bite and if placed well enough, can stop prospective infected before they fully convert. It's the same science behind the cigarettes.

JESSICA: That may as well be, Mr. Williams, but there are oxygen canisters all over this hospital, and an open flame in the wrong place could reduce our facility to a smoking hole in the ground. While this may cure our zombie problem, it would also solve our patient, patron and staff problems as well. No open flames.

MANNY: Along with my light source...

JESSICA: Did you hear me?

MANNY: Yes. I will stick to my flashlight.

JESSICA: Thank you.

MANNY: So I probably shouldn't mention my side arm.

JESSICA: What was that?

MANNY: Nothing.

JESSICA: You were mumbling.

MANNY: Sorry. As I was saying, I will be using standard elimination techniques, so I will require the assumed infested area evacuated.

JESSICA: Not a problem. The sanitation staff has already been cleared out.

MANNY: speaking of sanitation, I primarily use alcohol to clear the area after I have dealt with the infestation. I recommend you use similar precautions with any place or anyone the zombie has come in contact with. Use gloves, mask, goggles, everything.

JESSICA: We are a hospital, Mr. Williams.

MANNY: I understand, but it needs to be on record that I have instructed you with every precaution.

JESSICA: Duly noted.

MANNY: I believe that covers my equipment roster. Can you confirm that I am showing you said inventory and have gone over with you everything that I will be using for all intents and purposes?

JESSICA: Confirmed. Are you taking everything in that bag?

MANNY: No. That's why I wear the trench coat. I can't spend excess time searching for the right thing while I have an army of stiffs gasping down my throat. I have a series of inner pockets to keep things simple. It's all very utilitarian.

JESSICA: That explains the trench coat. What about the old man hat?

MANNY: It completes the ensemble.

JESSICA: I see.

MANNY: Is there anything else I need to know about before I begin?

JESSICA: You are aware of the original task force that went down?

MANNY: I was made aware that there was a contact malfunction shortly after they encountered the infestation.

JESSICA: Listen.

MANNY: Miss Sporanza has brought up an audio file dated earlier today at 5:15 p.m.

Audio: We have visual on the zombies. Looks like four... no, five bogeys. (Gun fire) Wait, what does... One zombie has the baby, confirmed, it's still alive... wait. No, that's not right. Wait. What is she...? No, that can't... (Gun fire, gun fire cuts off, chocking sound, baby crying)

MANNY: What do you suppose that means?

JESSICA: I'm not sure, but you had better take this with you, just in case.

MANNY: Miss Sporanza has opened the refrigerator and handed me a small bottle. On closer inspection... I can assure you, Miss Sporanza, the baby is either dead or infected. I hardly think...

JESSICA: Humor me.

MANNY: OK...

JESSICA: And put it in an inside pocket to keep it warm.

MANNY: It's cold!

JESSICA: Refrigerators do that.

\*\*Sound of door opening\*\*

SENATOR PIERCE: Nurse Sporanza, may I have a moment alone with Mr. Williams?

JESSICA: Of course.

\*\*Sound of footsteps and a door closing.\*\*

SENATOR PIERCE: Mr. Williams, My name is Baxter Pierce.

MANNY: I recognize you from your campaign ads.

SENATOR PIERCE: Yes, these thing happen every few years, don't they?

I understand you have been called in on this case.

MANNY: Yes, sir.

SENATOR PIERCE: I don't have to tell you how important it is that your utmost professionalism be utilized in this situation.

MANNY: Of course. I'm always professional.

SENATOR PIERCE: And I'm sure that's true. Let's just say that I have personal interest in this particular case. I've been on the board for Our Mother of Charity for years. We don't need the bad press, especially as the need for medical research is so important since the invasion.

Here at Our Mother of Charity, we are making serious steps forward in treating brain cancer, meningitis, even serious cerebral maladies such as dementia and Alzheimer's.

I'm not supposed to say anything, but we even have a research facility working on a cure for the zombie infection.

MANNY: You can't save the dead, Senator.

SENATOR PIERCE: We believe that if we can reach a bitten victim within a certain period of time, we can undo any permanent damage done by the infection. Do you understand the phases of conversion, Mr. Williams?

MANNY: Yeah. Bite, infection, death, reanimation.

SENATOR PIERCE: You have such a lovely way with words, Mr. Williams. Our doctors have found that each phase that you covered have sub-phases. Steps between steps, if you will. We are really excited about the possibility to isolate and actually reverse the infection, when set upon in the earlier stages.

MANNY: Why are you telling me this? I haven't heard anything about it on the news.

SENATOR PIERCE: We are going to announce it soon, but only if we don't have to deal with the negative press of a zombie breaking into the newborn wing of the hospital.

MANNY: That's why I'm here. I'm getting paid extra to keep it under wraps.

SENATOR PIERCE: You do that. Oh, one more thing.

MANNY: Yes?

SENATOR PIERCE: We understand one of the newborns have been abducted. Let's be clear on this: If we can get our hands on that child, it will work out best for everyone. See what you can do. If it's too late, it's too late. But looking at the babies here, I would hate for it to be too late. As I'm sure you would, as well.

7:45. After confirming that maternity nurse has been placed in isolation for inspection of infection, I took the stairs down to the sub-basement.

I'll tell you something, ever since the Judy Garland/Ginger Rogers hairstyles come back, I've been kind of hoping the nurse uniforms would come back with them. Oh, well. I'll just go back to ogling the skirts on the street.

Let's see, here. Traces found of both infected and security all along the stairway. Rags, smears of blood, and dents on the metal doors where the stragglers had to hammer their way through, and bullet casings everywhere. How nobody heard that, I'll never know. The security left motion detectors in case they are followed by stragglers left behind. This means if the receivers the security hold are still active, they will beep because I broke the infrared security trip wire. This will make the bodies easier to find for both me and the stragglers down there. At least they'll be localized.

The door to the subbasement shows signs of multiple zombies. I have found whole fingernails and bits of flesh. By the looks of the scratch marks on this side of the door, these stragglers didn't get along. It almost looks like they were in a rush to get back out. Zombies fighting amongst themselves ain't unheard of, but in the bad old days, it was usually rivalry over the same prey. I put on my latex gloves and have doused the door with a bottle of alcohol. I am now cutting the security tape.. and entering. The area appears to be a series of hallways branching out to each side, illuminated by fluorescent lights. Traces of stragglers show in two different directions, one to the south, one directly east. The trail leading east seems fresh, but I'll check the south passage first for the entrance point.

7:55. I have found the first security officer. He was probably sent alone to find and secure the zombie entrance. The stiff who got him was found some distance away, fallen from the battle. Burn marks on its body suggest phosphorous rounds.. looks like they flared late. Two shots in the chest and one in the spine. The rounds took time to burn out, but effectively neutralized subject.

The stiff is wearing male clothing, about mid-thirties during point of conversion. No sign of the infant.

I lit a hand flare and cauterized along the small of the neck of the security officer adjoining the base of the skull. Massive mastication on the neck and right arm say that this victim was taken by surprise and from the right. Blood trail says the stiff wandered up from an adjoining office. Area cleansed with alcohol. Other offices locked.

8:00. Security breach found. There is a break in the wall, with substantial traces of a stiff. Due to the lack of lighting, I can't tell how deep the hole goes. I have created a Molotov cocktail out of a bottle of alcohol and a handkerchief. First I dropped in a flare. There seems to be some two or three stories before the flare contacts the ground. By the sign of activity, I've found a nest of zombies. Let's see... Looks like I've found one of Miss Sporanza's famous oxygen tanks. In it goes... And here goes the Molotov... That didn't work as well as expected. Maybe I should have opened the nozzle on the oxygen tank. I'll try that with the second tank. \*\*Manny grunts\*\* Not as much of a reaction as I expected. I'll just try a few shots with my .38 and see if I can hit the tank...

\*\*Gun fire.\*\*

8:25. Ok, now I understand what Miss Sporanza was talking about with the oxygen. Ears are still ringing, but I think I've officially sealed off the security breach. It's going to take a long time to dig out the rubble that's blocked up the fissure, dead or alive. There may be residual damage to the building. I don't think this is a major fault line or the rest of the hospital would be sitting on top of me. Mental note... ugh... don't do that... again. I'm going to sit this one out for a moment.

8:45. Retraced my steps. Ears are still ringing, but I can hear the cry of a baby.

8:48. Remember to ask for Miss Sporanza's number.

8:50. Found three corpses, all infected. Curiosity: corpses were all decapitated. Upon inspection, decapitation was not done with a clean blade. By the stress tears, it looks as if their heads were torn-off. Atypical.

Two stiffs were dressed as male, one large and muscular, the other a street punk. The third stiff was wearing a dress but does not match the zombie from the security video. The third stiff is missing its left arm, but that appears to be from a previous encounter, possibly during conversion.

There are signs of violence about the scene: broken plaster, wiring torn off the walls, pipes torn off the ceiling and it's going to take a lot of alcohol to sterilize this place. Charge fee for six bottles of alcohol and advise fire for sterilization.

8:57. Note to self: Miss Sporanza is married. Strike earlier comment of retrieving her phone number.

9:06. (Sound of crying baby). I have switched on continual recording if by chance this is the final note in this case.

I've tracked down the creature and the infant.

After following the sporadic sound of the baby crying, I came across the rest of the security. There were four left and I didn't need to worry about cauterizing their medulla oblongata where the infection first germinates. Stiffs rarely convert after decapitation. Curiosity: There is no sign of mastication. There are bullet holes all over the walls and ceiling, the lights have been shot out, and there is serious signs of violence, suggesting panic of the victims and swift movement from the attacker. This is atypical for zombies.

I can hear the baby wailing loudly from an adjoining office. The door has been torn off, but re-erected haphazardly across the door frame. I'm down two hollow points, so I've replaced them with standard rounds. I'm approaching the office. I am lighting a flare and will toss it into the room to distract the stiff, and then enter firing.

\*\*Sound of striking a flare. Rattling noise typical of a tossed object hitting tiled floor. Rapid movement\*\*

ZOMBIE: Hiss!

MANNY: I..

(Sound of metal object hitting floor)

ZOMBIE: Hiss!

MANNY: What is she...?

ZOMBIE: Hiss!

MANNY: That can't be right...

\*\*Sound of crying infant\*\*

MANNY: 9:21. I'm facing the creature. It is sitting in the corner of the room. The flare is our only light source. It is the same stiff from the security tape, wearing the same summer dress. She... *It* is clutching the baby. One of the straps on the dress has fallen down to its shoulder. It... I think it's trying to breast feed the baby. At first I thought it thought I was trying to take its' meal away. I was wrong. I think the only thing that kept the creature from killing me was that I dropped my gun. Now that the shock has worn off, I've got a better idea of my surroundings. I'm sitting on the floor opposite the thing. When I came in, it clutched the child protectively. When I sat down, it turned its attention to the child, stroking her head. The way it looks at the baby... it's almost human.

I don't know how this can be. Ever since the first stiff walked on our happy shores, we've known that these things have no emotion. They feel no fear, no remorse... just hunger.

But I'm here, and so is it, and so is the baby. The baby appears unharmed, but I can't get close enough to examine her. I've got to get back in the game. Come on, Manny. You can do this.

Some beasts have been known to show human-like behavior. Animal trainers have been working with creatures for years using calm voice and slow actions to get them to act right. I'm no animal trainer, but anything is worth a shot.

MANNY: Hello.

ZOMBIE: Hiss!

MANNY: That's a beautiful baby you have there.

ZOMBIE: Groan.

MANNY: I can tell you are taking good care of it.

ZOMBIE: Groan.

MANNY: Looks a little hungry, though.

ZOMBIE: ...

MANNY: Look, I've got something here, might help.

ZOMBIE: Hiss!

MANNY: No, look... See? It's milk. The nurse says it belonged to the baby's mother.

ZOMBIE: Hiss!

MANNY: His *other* mother.

ZOMBIE: Groan.

MANNY: Look, it's got a nipple and everything. Can I bring it to you?

ZOMBIE: ...

MANNY: OK, I'm getting up and walking... slowly... toward the creature. I'm placing the bottle down next to it.

ZOMBIE: Moan.

MANNY: She's trying to pick the bottle up. Stiffs ain't used to picking up small objects...

ZOMBIE: Groan.

MANNY: *Smaller* objects.

ZOMBIE: Moan.

MANNY: The baby looks cold. Here, let me use my coat. I've never been this close to an animated stiff before. I can smell it from here. Her one eye is missing, but the other looks almost human. It almost looks like... the blast must have shaken me up more than I thought.

May I see her a minute? Here, I'll just wrap her up in my coat. I'm going to have to take a few things out, but... There. See, she needed a little bit of warmth. Kind of looks like a raisin, doesn't she?

Straggler: Hiss!

MANNY: Don't take it personal. I think they all look like raisins when they're this new. I guess she looks sort of cute after a manner of speaking. I hear tell you went straight up to the fourth floor for this dame. That's a long way.

ZOMBIE: Groan.

MANNY: So, here's what I don't understand. You passed orthopaedics, in-patient, the lobby... there were plenty of easier targets to hit on

the way up. You could have had any of them with your little crew there. Any one of them could have been an easy meal.

But you weren't after a meal, were you?

We learned in the field that your kind have some crazy senses. You could smell us out for miles and hear even a little noise from a long way off. And by the sound this girl was making, you could probably hear all the little ones clear down below the hospital... And you made a b-line, didn't you? I've noticed that you were thinking about things that weren't usual. I'm guessing those others that came up with you had different plans for this little raisin. So you removed them from the equation. Don't mess with the mama bear, am I right?

ZOMBIE: Groan.

MANNY: Listen, lady. I'm no doctor, but this baby looks pretty new. I've never had one of them myself, but I'm pretty sure the docs and the nurses have to keep a close eye on them for the first few days. You know, to keep them healthy. What's say you and I go upstairs and put her in the nursery?

I know it ain't easy letting someone else care for her, but trust me when I say these docs are the best. That nurse Spozanza, you know she's got to be a great mom. If those ain't child-bearing hips, I don't know what are.

\*\*sporadic noise, hard to discern what it is\*\*

If I didn't know any better, I'd say you were laughing.

Tell you what, lookin' at your legs tells me you have a bit of a limp, and it's getting hard for you to walk and hold the baby at the same time, so why don't I keep a hold of her as we go up.

ZOMBIE: ...

MANNY: I know it's hard. Nobody wants to give up the kid, but if she's going to make it through these first few days, we're going to have to trust these folks. What do you say? We can even take the service elevator. That'll be easier on your leg.

MANNY: Tuesday, July 11<sup>th</sup>... What time is it? Better make it July 12<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*Sound of bottle clinking against glass. Pouring liquid\*\*

Using the elevator telephone, I got us clear passage to the fourth floor and into maternity. I laid the baby into her plastic bed and we both stood there for what felt like a short eternity. I said something like "It's time to go" only better, because she put a decaying hand to what was left of her lips and then lay it on the baby's head. If she had a heart I would have sworn it was breaking. We stepped away and back into the elevator. I don't think there was a moment when I didn't wonder if she was going to turn around and bite me, but she never did.

On the main floor, there was a police squadron waiting with a muzzle, hand and leg irons and a hospital gurney. They used the usual

tact and tenderness they would use on a rabid pit bull, and who can blame them? Once you've seen one stiff, you've seen 'em all, right?

I got my coat back and closed with Miss Sporanza. I asked what she was still doing at work, and she just said that she had a patient unaccounted for. She asked some uncomfortable questions about the noise and building shaking while I was down in the subbasement but she also let me know that the baby wasn't an ordinary one. Turns out she was the first granddaughter of an aristocratic politician that would rather this unfortunate incident never happened. When I enquired which one, she said "Didn't you know? You talked to him long enough." Senator Pierce had left that bit of information out, which means he didn't want me to know about it. For the sake of argument, I escorted Miss Sporanza downstairs and paid for her cab (\$36 cab fee) and gave her my extra gun. Miss Sporanza seems to think that the senator might even reward me for my efforts and returning his granddaughter. Sporanza may be smart, but she sure don't know politicians very well. I told her to take a different route home than usual and lock the door when she got there. I would pick up my extragun tomorrow if I could. The infestation seems to have brought out the worst in politicians, and I would hate Miss Sporanza to come to a short ending because she was on duty on the wrong day.

So, why did I take the zombie with me to take the baby back when I could have out-run her? Stiffs were never known for being quick on their feet. I did it for two reasons. One: I could see what she did to those other zombies and the security team when they tried to take the baby away and two: because... You'd just have to have been there. If she wanted to hurt the child, she would have. She didn't want to hurt her. I think she wanted... \*\*Manny exhales. Sound of swallowing followed by the clink of glass and pouring of liquid.\*\*

In the end, what does it mean? It was easier in The War. We shoot them. They get back up, we shoot them again. They have no souls. They have no hearts. They have no lives. It's simpler that way. Makes it easier to take them out. Then something like this happens and the world changes. At least for me it has.

I don't know if I should charge the hospital double or just hang up my hat and go work in a bakery or something. Like I should find something as far away from stragglers as possible. If that is possible.

What do you think this means for the rest of the world? Can a stiff still have a soul, assuming they ever had one? We all know that zombies are driven by hunger, but maybe some things run deeper than hunger. Something more primal and central to the core of a person. I'm willing to bet this whole expense report that when they run the medical tests on that stiff, they'll find she was pregnant before conversion. That kind of news would tip the world on its ear.

ZOMBIE: Groan.

MANNY: Ah. It appears the good senator really didn't want this story to get out.

ZOMBIE: Hiss!

\*\*The sound of a bottle clinking against a glass. Liquid pouring\*\*

MANNY: I didn't see you back there.

ZOMBIE: Groan.

MANNY: Looks like our friend, Senator Pierce has his final loose end to tie up, and I'm on your menu. Maybe you're just one more assassination by zombie, eh? But let me ask you this before you dispose of me, my late friend. Care for a drink?

ZOMBIE: Moan.

End transcription.