

Zombies Anonymous
By
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To
Bren, Claire, Vanessa, and Val for their help and support.

In a very brief summary *Zombies Anonymous* is: 'Sad, funny, poignant, shocking, horrifying and revolting' and concerns the life, death and undeath of Archibald Griest.

In a little more detail: As a member of the undead, even though he retains his faculties, Archie is rejected by family, friends, work colleagues and has no legal rights. In fact, as a zombie, there's no washing-up to do. Archie forms a support group called *Zombies Anonymous* to discuss this new state of supernatural existence with other zombies including: The problem of slowly rotting; the predilection of the living to bury while you're asleep and whether Chanel No. 5 can cover the smell. But, as the number of zombies rise, the living residents of his home-town of Springdale go from curious to hostile. The behaviour of the living horrify the zombies. This leads Archie to consider going from a convener of a support group to a leader of a revolution.

Chapter 1

You know those scenes in movies where the hand of the living dead sometimes emerges sinisterly from a grave, usually grabbing hold of someone unsuspecting and giving them a bit of a shock? Well, I can tell you what that's all about. Being a zombie, every time you take a nap people think you're dead and bury you. Then, you wake up again in a coffin and manage to claw your way out. It inspires me with a great deal of anxiety. Even after many years and the many times it's happened, I still haven't got used to it. It explains that terrible look and all that moaning.

One thing you've got as a zombie is a good set of fingernails and boy do you need it! Even with unlimited zombie stamina, being undead and all that, I still get a bit exhausted with all that clawing, though I suspect I'm only demoralised, and just manage to poke a hand out of the grave. If you're lucky, there'll be some couple necking on the grave or the gravedigger taking a breather and having a sandwich. So I grab these kind folk, with the honest intention of getting some help and not at all of turning them into zombies, eating their flesh or brains. But, as usual, there's much screaming, yelling, running away or just beating me with anything that comes to hand.

I guess the first thing you must be thinking is how did I become a zombie? Well, I'd be blowed if I know.

It was a Sunday afternoon just after a big roast lunch; it was right tasty with roast beef, potatoes, boiled carrots, peas and Brussels, with cream of horseradish and lashings of gravy. One minute I was watching the footy on the telly with some of the lads and the next minute I was on me back in agony - chest tight as a knot, couldn't breathe and the pain was unbelievable. I'd felt a little under the weather for a few days but thought nothing of it, as you do. Well, it was difficult to believe that anything was *that* wrong.

That afternoon, me two youngest, Peter and Carly, were playing in the garden, me oldest, Adam, was in his room playing video games and me wife Phyllis was in the kitchen with some of the local girls. I think they were discussing hair dyes. I saw her grey roots through the brown from where I was. She was still pretty with blue brown eyes and long pointy chin.

The lads and I were enjoying the game - well, nothing out of the ordinary there. What's more, I suddenly found meself floating out of me body and looking down. Blimey, I didn't realise I look *so* old, but still manly. I realised I was bald but where did that gut come from? The lads gathered around. I felt just fine and peaceful, wondering what all the fuss was about. Chris, a youngish bloke of lanky frame loomed over me body, was saying they should try PCR.

'No, no,' John, a bearded man-bear said, 'it's CPR, but how do you do it?'

Everyone looked at each other anxiously but paralysed. Phyllis was crying and suddenly seem older than her forty nine years. Her comforting mumsy-wifey appearance shattered with concern and grief. Peter and Carly, had come in from the garden and were just staring. The lads were still fretting and it went all sort of blurry after that.

I was in an ambulance and then in the A&E, with doctors rushing about. I was floating around as usual. I guess I should've been egging them on like, 'Come on, lads, you can do it,' but all that floating around was right peaceful. The doctor finally seemed to give up and one of those heart monitors went into a continuous beep. Phyllis starting crying again and Chris comforted her. I suppose I should have said, 'Oi - hands off me wife!' but I was still feeling a bit floaty. Me kids were in the waiting room being looked after by Chris' wife Gladys. I went a bit fuzzy and there

was this light. I thought, *'Ah, I've heard of this.'* Those people who've had an end of life experience, or rather a near-death experience I suppose it's called, talked about such things. Never thought I would see it meself. It was *so* beautiful I was drawn to it, through a tunnel like they said and then into a garden where a man in a white robe waited for me. *'So God IS a white bloke with a beard! This won't make the feminists and the racial equality rights people happy.'*

'Hello,' I said, a little spacey.

'Archibald Griest. Welcome to paradise,' he said in a rich baritone, which made me ears resonate.

'Are you God?'

The bloke in the robe just smiled.

'Does it matter if I'm an atheist? I never expected to meet God.'

He stopped smiling at that mention. Perhaps it was the wrong thing to say. The next moment I was flying backwards down the tunnel and then into darkness. *'This is all very strange,'* I thought.

Chapter 2

I woke up, sat up, banged me head on something with a metallic dong and then fell back. I was lying on something cold, and it was not 'alf uncomfortable. Me chest was a bit sore – shortly after death you still have some sensation, but later it's a lottery of which sense remains. I felt around me chest to find these great coarse stitches. That bloody cardiac surgeon got a lot to answer for. I banged around in me container trying to find a way out. It was all mighty strange.

Suddenly, the container I was in I slid open and I found two blokes in lab coats standing next to me. I tried to say hello but all that came out was a moan. At this point in developments you think you are speaking perfectly well, but the living only hear a moan. I tried to ask them what they thought they were doing, but it also came out as a long moan. One man fainted, and the other stared at me in what I assumed must be terror and then ran away. *'Well,'* I thought, *'thanks a lot.'* All I wanted was an explanation and maybe an apology. So I sat up a little stiffly and swung me legs around to stand on the cold floor. 'Oooh, oooh, cold, cold, cold,' I moaned and hopped about until I got used to it – still a bit sensitive for the first few days after death. I wrapped meself up in this blue blanket I found with me and walked off down the room – wall-to wall filing cabinets would you believe! It didn't look anything like I thought an intensive care unit would look like. But of course I was in the mortuary, something that didn't occur to me at the time.

When you're first undead it's a bit disorientating, as you still think you're alive, and well, you're in a state of denial. So I took a lift up to the wards and approached a pretty young nurse.

'You poor fellow, you look like death,' she said. 'You should be in bed.'

'I feel like it,' I said, but it came out as a moan.

'Um, which ward are you in?'

I shrugged. She ushered me into a consulting room and said she would get a doctor. I sat and waited. If I'd known then what I know now, I would've scarpered - though shuffled gracelessly would've been more like it.

Finally, the doctor came along, a bit rotund and red faced. It only took two hours, but what the hell - it's the NHS! He took a look at me, measured me pulse, ummed to himself and then tried the other wrist. 'This doesn't look good,' he said. And then he got out his stethoscope and listened to me heart. He took quite a time, I can tell you. He tried different areas of me chest, then checked his gear on himself. Finally, he looked at me and gave me a curious gaze. 'Well,' he said, 'you don't seem to have a heartbeat.' He tried again. 'Would you take a deep breath for me?' he asked.

I tried but didn't seem to have it in me.

'I see,' he said. 'How do you feel?'

I wanted to say that I felt okay, a bit half-dead, but then that was to be expected after having had a heart attack, but it came out as a moan.

He said, 'Um.'

The nurse asked the doctor, 'But what do you think of this, doctor?' and pulled me sheet apart a little to expose me chest. There was a great Y-shaped scar there with very coarse black stitches.

'Bloody hell, is this due to the cutbacks?' I thought.

The doctor looked genuinely shocked and said nothing. He then looked at me wrist and there was a plastic band there. 'Oh,' he said.

A PA announcement called for emergency staff to come to Ward 10.

The nurse and doctor hesitated a moment, then told me to wait there, before rushing off. I waited for a few minutes, decided I was okay, really, found some clothes over the back of a seat and left. I found some money in the jacket pocket and used it to call Phyllis at work from a booth in the hospital reception.

Phyllis answered and said, 'Hello.'

'Hello,' I said, relieved to hear her voice, but again mine came out like a moaning sound.

'Who is this?' she asked concerned.

I moaned again.

'If this is a joke,' she said more sternly.

I moaned and she put the phone down. I was nonplussed. I called again and moaned.

Phyllis answered and then put the phone straight back down. *'What a cow!'*

This was all very strange, so I used the last of my change to get a bus. I got some peculiar looks from the people at the bus stop, on the bus and from the bus stop to me home – sort of the way people look at beggars and drunks.

I reached my front door, took the key from under the plant pot and went inside. The house was quiet. I called out a few times but no one else was in. So I sat down, put the telly on, watched some daytime soaps and then fell asleep.

Chapter 3

I woke up and found myself in a cramped dark space. I tried to sit up but hit my head on something that sounded wooden. *'This seems familiar,'* I thought. I didn't realise it at that moment but, someone, mentioning no names, had buried me. I banged on the lid but it only made a dull thud. I tried to push on the lid but it was unmoveable. So, I began to scratch at the wood. Fortunately, my nails were good and strong, and I made some headway. Suddenly, the lid broke and I was covered in soil. *'Where the hell am I?'* I thought. The soil wasn't very dense - I guess because it had been freshly dug - and I was able to make my way through it.

Unfortunately, for them, a couple was sitting next to my new grave, presumably whispering sweet nothings. I was exhausted when I broke through the soil's surface and grabbed for the nearest thing to help pull me out. As it happened, it was the girl's leg. Boy, did she scream! I didn't let go because I was desperate to get out of that hole. She hit my arm with her handbag and kicked something rotten. Which I suppose was true after a fashion - my arm was not quite fresh. I let go. The couple ran off and I had to dig myself out. *'Bloody cheek!'* I thought. *'They could've helped!'*

I ploughed through the soil, dragged myself onto the graveside and discovered I was lying on a pile of newly dug earth. I looked up at the stars for a moment and then noticed there was a gravestone just standing there with my name on it, would you believe? The gravestone said:

'IN LOVING MEMORY
OF
ARCHIBALD GRIEST
AGED 51 YEARS
LOVING HUSBAND
MUCH LOVED AND LOVING DAD
AND A DEVOTED SON
1963-2014'

'Holy shit! They think I'm dead! What kind of sick joke is this?' I thought. Remember, the newly undead have a hard time coming to terms with their undeadness. And this was the case for me. So I decided to go to the police about it, as you do, when someone buries you alive. I thought I knew the whereabouts of the graveyard - on the edge of town next to the old church. The police station was in the centre of town a few miles away.

So, the first thing I discovered about my new 'life' was that walking was a challenge. It was not so much walking but shuffling and swinging my arms about to get some momentum. I also found I couldn't keep my head straight; it sort of listed to one side. My hands were all clenched claw-like, and it took a real effort to straighten them out. *'All this was due to a heart attack?'* I wondered. So I took a few steps and did this awkward shuffle, then stopped to take stock and tried again. I tried and I shuffled once more. Frustrated, I stopped and then concentrated very hard on coordinating my limbs, but on my next attempt, I did the zombie walk again.

'Bugger!' I yelled. I couldn't see any way around this weird mode of perambulation, so I got on with it and walked in the general direction of the police station. As I reached the main road out of the graveyard, a police car passed and shone a light at me. I stopped and thought, *'Great, I don't have to walk a couple of miles.'*

A policeman got out of the car and said, 'Sir, we've had a report that someone in the graveyard attacked a couple earlier on.' He sounded a bit sour and jaded as though he'd got lumped with the night-shift. His partner got out looking as though his truncheon was his closest friend and he intended to use it.

I said that it wasn't me, but it came out as a moan.

'Did you see the couple earlier?' the policeman asked.

I moaned at him.

The policeman talked on his radio: 'I think we may have a suspect. I'll bring him in.'

'Shit!' So I made a run for it – or rather, a rambling shuffle.

The policeman and his partner quickly caught up with me and said, 'Now, where do you think you're going?'

I thought, *'Away from you, you idiot!'*

But they grabbed me arms and walked me to the rear door of the car. They seemed lot stronger than me or I was weak, I wasn't sure which. I moaned at them.

'Is this man drunk?' the policeman asked.

'I don't know about that,' the other said, 'but he 'alf stinks.'

'Well, thanks a lot!' I thought. *'How would you smell if someone buried you?'* I was right dischuffed.

So they put some cuffs on me and put me in the back of the car.

The police station was fairly small; it was merely a small town branch after all. There was only one bloke waiting on a bench, talking to himself. He then gave me a long hard stare and I moaned at him. He raised his eyebrows at me.

The policeman then swept me into a back office where he took me fingerprints and picture. The police doctor tried to take some blood. He didn't have much luck, but after a few goes he did get a little out. Getting blood is a problem if you don't have any blood pressure. They tried to get me to blow into a breathalyser but I didn't have any breath either. They were right puzzled and thought I was messing them about. The doctor noticed the band on me wrist and decided to call the local hospital.

He came back a few minutes later and said to me, 'Well, the hospital thinks you're dead and there's nothing they can do for you.' The doctor wandered off, and the policeman left me alone to watch the goings-on in the police station.

Sometime later the policeman returned and said, 'The couple who were attacked didn't recognise you, so you're free to go.'

I moaned a 'thanks' at him.

He seemed to take pity on me and said, 'Perhaps we can drop you off at home tomorrow morning?'

I nodded and tried to smile at him, but he appeared to be disturbed by this. So, I spent the night on the bench with the 'talking to himself' bloke.

Chapter 4

So, I stood at me front gate mid-morning and in the house there seemed to be some sort of party going on. *'I don't remember Phyllis saying anything about a party,'* I thought. See, I'm still in denial at this point. I shuffled up to the front door and knocked. Some bloke I didn't recognise answered and said to come in. I said nothing. Thought I would keep me mouth shut rather than all that moaning. Fortunately, I was in me good suit, the one I was buried in, and didn't look out of place. At this point, I was still no doubt fairly lifelike, though probably a bit pale and blue lipped with lifeless eyes. I don't think anyone noticed, and no one seemed to recognise me. Perhaps being undead gives you a sort of cloak of invisibility or maybe the buggers just bloody ignore you. They must have been thinking, *'Something right peculiar there so we shall ignore it'*. So I helped meself to some nibbles and drink but most of it went down me front since most of the feeling in me face seemed to have gone. A few minutes later the drink ran down me leg and pooled in me shoes. I decided not to have any more drink after that. Over the other side of the room, I heard Phyllis' voice and so decided to have a look.

'Why did the hospital leave my husband's body in the front room on his favourite sofa?' she said, while sobbing and being comforted by Gladys.

'What's the silly cow saying?' I thought. *'I got home under me own power.'*

'But the hospital denies everything, saying they didn't drop him off.' She then lowered her head and began to cry more heavily.

I couldn't stand this nonsense any more, and so I shuffled over towards her. Some bloke got in me way, I bumped him and spilt his drink.

He said to me, 'Watch where you're going.'

I didn't like his tone and moaned at him.

'What's wrong with this bloke?' he said, seemingly talking to the people around us who were taking note.

I took some offence, got a bit stroppy because I wasn't going to take that kind of shit from him and grabbed him by the collar and moaned at him. He struggled to get free, and the other guests grabbed hold of me arms and pulled me back.

'Archibald!' Phyllis yelled and came running over to me. 'We thought you were dead!' she said quietly and sensitively put her hand to me face.

I tried to smile at her and moaned.

She gave me a hug. 'You're very cold,' she said, 'and - phew, you stink to high heaven!'

I couldn't smell it meself, so I had to take her word for it. All this caused quite a commotion though; all of the wake guests had gathered around and were smiling, laughing and patting me on the back. I didn't know who the hell half these people were. *'Is that the postman?'* I wondered.

Peter and Carly came hurtling in from the garden and flung themselves on me. Adam was nowhere to be seen, probably upstairs playing computer games. 'Dad! Dad!' they exclaimed. 'Mum said you were dead.'

I tried to smile and moaned at them. I got the impression that Phyllis noticed something was wrong with me and decided to call the doctor just in case. In the meantime I was given something to eat and drink (that I tipped behind the chair) and guests came over to give me their best wishes. Gradually, they all left and a doctor, Dr Franklin, a young bloke, far too young to be a doctor, came round which certainly made for an interesting half hour.

‘Well, technically,’ Dr Franklin said, ‘your husband is dead. He’s doesn't have a pulse, no heartbeat, no blood pressure, no pupil response and he doesn't appear to be breathing.’

‘I don't understand,’ Phyllis said in a worried voice. ‘How can that be? He's walking around for God's sake!’

‘*Walking? I suppose you could call it that,*’ I thought. She was beginning to sound a bit hysterical to me and I tried to hold her hand to comfort her.

‘I don't know,’ Dr Franklin said shaking his head. ‘I need to do some tests.’

At that point, and to me eternal embarrassment, me drink exited me nethers and washed over the sofa!

‘This must be some sort of joke,’ Franklin concluded.

‘Who's joking?’ Phyllis exclaimed. ‘Perhaps you aren't using that thing correctly,’ she accused the doctor pointing to his stethoscope.

Dr Franklin didn't like that, I can tell you, said his goodbyes and left.

Phyllis then turned to me and said, ‘So, what *are* we going to do with you then?’

I moaned and grinned. I guess at this point she thought I was just poorly after the heart attack and had completely ignored what the doctor had said. However, over the next few weeks, she was *definitely* going to change her mind!

Chapter 5

So, I got up the next morning and thought, *'Um, something's different.'* I was feeling a little stiff. I pulled back the bed sheets and me dick was standing erect like a tent pole. *'Blimey!'* I thought. *'Morning Glory?'*

Phyllis woke up beside me, looked over and said, 'Is that for me, darling?'

I smiled and shrugged. She then came over, hitched up her nightie and sat on it. The next fifteen minutes were right peculiar to say the least and which I do not wish to recount. At this point, I had no real sensitivity in any region of me body including me knob so, I thought I'd better play along and moan rhythmically – that was about all I could do anyway.

When she finally got off, figuratively and literally, I noticed that me knob was bent in half. I quickly covered it up and shuffled off to the bathroom. It straightened out quite nicely; I then folded it down so it would fit in me underpants. I thought that would be the last of it but I and 'it' remained stiff for the next three days.

Later in the day, among other things, like trying not to be too zombie-like, the phone rang. Phyllis answered it - she had the day off - and said it was a senior doctor from the local hospital. He wanted to come and see me. I nodded and groaned a little. Phyllis told him he could come.

Half an hour later, the doctor arrived (now *there's* service for ya!). If you're dying you wait two hours and if you're dead you wait half an hour. What the hell was that all about? Phyllis led a Dr Freeman and assistant into the front room to meet me.

'Now, what do we have here?' he said and peered at me through thick black-rimmed glasses and stroked a grey goatee.

I moaned at him.

'He doesn't *really* say anything,' Phyllis said.

'Um, aphasia,' he said. 'It could indicate brain damage.'

'Brain damage!' I wondered if I should tell him about me dick. I glanced at Phyllis and thought better of it.

'According to his records he had a heart attack, perhaps associated with a stroke and hypoxia,' he said.

'The last doctor said he was dead,' said Phyllis assertively.

'We shall see,' said Freeman. He was a man who only believed it when he saw it, I guess. 'I've reviewed his medical records, and it's certainly a strange case. Now, let's see.' So he did the usual tests - the pulse, the blood pressure, the pupil response, heart, breathing and he even tried to take a blood sample. 'Well, apart from the blood test, you appear to be clinically dead,' he said matter-of-factly.

'What does this mean, doctor?' Phyllis pleaded.

I raised me eyebrows at him.

'I don't know yet,' he said. 'Can I look at those stitches?'

I nodded.

He looked intently at the pathologist's stitches. 'Do you mind if I cut them open?'

'What!' Phyllis yelled.

'I will sew him back afterwards,' he said.

'Oh, well that makes it better.' Phyllis could get really sarci when upset.

'I think you'd better leave the room, Mrs Griest,' he said.

'While you cut my husband open?' she screeched. I was not liking the sound of that meself.

‘He won’t come to any harm, Mrs Griest,’ he said softly. ‘If we’re going to find out what’s wrong we have to take a look.’

Phyllis seemed placated by this and left the room.

‘Right, now let’s see what we have here,’ he said. Freeman got me to sit down in the recliner and laid me back. His assistant handed him a pair of scissors, and he snipped the coarse stitches. Once he’d finished he got out some unknown implements and placed them in the wound. ‘Can you feel this?’ he asked.

I shook me head. Freeman and his assistant pulled on the implements and without any pain me chest opened and I could look down into the chest cavity. ‘*Oh God! I really am dead! Bloody typical!*’ Strange, I generally took me undeadness with only a smidgen of angst and a great dollop of resignation.

‘Phwoar! The smell’ the assistant said.’

‘It does smell a bit,’ Freeman admitted. He felt around in the cavity and the organs present. ‘Um, the heart’s missing.’

‘Wow!’ exclaimed the assistant.

At this point, Adam, me prodigal son lost to online chat rooms, blogging and videos games, emerged from his pit. Black long greasy hair draped around his face. ‘*Where he get that black hair from anyway?*’ I thought.

He stopped, looked up from a magazine, stared at me chest cavity, said, ‘Dude,’ in an impressed sort of way, put his head down in the mag again and then continued on towards the kitchen as though nothing really unusual had happened.

‘Right,’ said Freeman as though rudely interrupted. ‘You can see the ending of the aorta and vena cava,’ he explained.

I looked down, too. ‘*Blimey, the heart is bloody necessary.*’

‘Well,’ Freeman looked me in the eye and said, ‘in my opinion, there is no way you could be alive.’ He then proceeded to sew the Y-shaped wound back up. Afterwards he said, ‘Well, we’ll take these samples to the lab and we’ll be in touch.’ He talked briefly with Phyllis and left.

Phyllis came over, sat next to me and said, ‘Well really, what *are* we going to do with you then?’

Chapter 6

Well, indeed, what were we going to do? A few days later I seemed to loosen up again, and me dick went limp to the chagrin of Phyllis.

A week after the doctor's visit Freeman telephoned us with the results. They were rather troubling, particularly to Phyllis. He said that me tissues were in a state expected several days after death, and he had no idea why I was still moving around. He would very much like to monitor the situation. I nodded and Phyllis told him that was fine. And so, the process of me decomposition began and eventually losing me family and home.

There are several stages after death. That is, clinical death – the cessation of breathing and respiration.

Stage 1: Fresh meat, or the juicy zombie, 0-10 hours;

Stage 2: Rigor mortis, or the stiff zombie, 10 hours to 3-4 days;

Stage 3: Bacterial and enzyme decomposition, or gassy zombie, 5 days;

Stage 4: Liquification, or sticky zombie (no fun at parties), 12 days;

Stage 5: Desiccation or 'classic' zombie.

So, I had something to look forward to if I knew it was coming, which at the time I didn't. I was getting fed up with all this moaning though, and actually tried to form words. I had some success. I could sort of say 'hello', 'no', 'yes' and make a general moaning sound with gestures, which was quite useful. Phyllis seemed to understand me without much communication, but I guess that was twenty years of marriage speaking. Over several days, I noticed that I was getting a little larger. Me skin seemed to be filled with gas. Then, one morning at the breakfast table, I let go one God-awful fart.

'Do you mind not farting at the breakfast table; I'm trying to eat,' Phyllis demanded. As the cloud of brown-green gas emanated, Phyllis went from wafting and complaining to looking a bit dizzy and then fainting.

The kids went running into the garden yelling, 'Dad, you stink!' Adam was out of nose shot, but even I could smell it. I decided to open all the windows and go into the garden. I told the kids to help their mother. That day, I think I was quite unpopular with the neighbours who were downwind. Massive and atrociously smelly farts were released and drifted on the wind. I could hear choking sounds coming from all down the street and comments like:

'Christ, what the hell is that?'

'Has someone died?'

'Is there a gas leak?'

Phyllis recovered, but after that she wouldn't let me in the house. I thought, '*Okay, fair enough*' so I stayed outside. I used a penknife to release the gas in me limbs and had to do that from time to time to release new gas. I waited outside for the rest of the day, and finally, when the sun went down I was getting a bit antsy. It was me house as well after all. I had a right to be in there too. So I went inside. This initiated one hell of a one-sided argument.

'Archibald, would you stay outside!' Phyllis yelled.

'You stink!' the kids said and ran upstairs.

'*Weird. They're not identical twins but, they certainly think alike.*'

Adam appeared, presumably to raid the fridge, and sniffed the air, wrinkled his nose, looked at me, said, 'Dude,' and gave me the thumbs-up.

'You can't stay in the house, Archie,' she pleaded.

I gestured, but where the hell am I supposed to go?

'I don't know, just not in the house,' she said. 'What about your mate, David?' she suggested. 'Perhaps you could stay with him for a bit.'

Did she think that David had no nostrils or something? Or, was it the fact he's a bachelor and his place was always such a mess that he wouldn't notice the stench of a putrefying corpse in his living room? 'I dunno,' I moaned, shrugged and gave her me best forlorn look.

She got out her purse and put two hundred pounds on the table. 'Go and get a room or something,' she demanded.

I looked at her again and tried a pleading gesture.

'Well, okay, if *you* don't go, *we* are,' she said.

'*Bloody hell!*' I thought.

'Think of the children, Archie,' she pleaded.

I gave in and took the money. I waited outside in front of the house while she booked a local bed and breakfast and a taxi. She gave me the details on a piece of paper, all the while holding her nose. Finally, as she closed the door, she mouthed, 'Love you' through the window. I waved back having not yet found a means to enunciate, 'goodbye', 'love you' or anything really useful for that moment.

A few minutes later the taxi arrived. I showed the address to the driver and got in. About thirty yards up the road the driver stopped the cab and turned to me.

'What the hell is that smell?' he shouted.

I shrugged.

'Get out of my cab, you smelly git!' he shouted.

I obeyed. He drove off with the windows down. Thus, began the long walk to the B&B.

Numerous eye-watering farts, bystander faintings and projectile-vomiting episodes later, I arrived at the B&B. I went to me room and immediately opened the window, sat on the bed and turned on the telly. I skipped through the channels, as you do, and settled on the news. I watched the usual stuff, politics, business, war, crime and celebrity, all the negatives, and then finally, something else came along that knocked me on me arse. A medical doctor was interviewed and said that he was getting a number of peculiar cases in which the patient showed no signs of being alive but still moved around and seemed conscious.

'Blimey! I'm not the only one,' I thought. I guess it was at this point I came out of denial and accepted that I was dead. 'Bloody hell! Dead - dead as a door nail. I have ceased to be; I'm dead as a dodo; I have shuffled off this mortal coil; I bought the farm; I popped me clogs; I am stone dead!' If I could've breathed I would've taken a very deep breath. So, wearied by this revelation, I lay back on the bed and fell asleep.