

The Custom Of The Sea

This short story was written by Colin M. Drysdale, the author of [For Those In Peril On The Sea](#). Copyright: Colin M. Drysdale, 2013. While this story is free to download, it must not be stored or made available on any site other than <http://www.ForThoseInPeril.net>. The original can be found at http://www.forthoseinperil.net/Free_Stories_From_Colin_M_Drysdale.htm.

16th May: This is the 20th day since the dead came back to life. Well, not really life but a pale imitation of it which comes with an insatiable hunger for human flesh. I don't know why I've decided to start keeping a diary now, but I have; I think it's to do with Martin's death. He died this morning; probably from starvation. We're all pretty close but he was the first to go and now there's only seven of us. I always hated this place, yet now it looks like I'll spend what little is left of my miserable life here with the colleagues I despise so much. Martin was the only one I liked; now he's gone I feel lonely and abandoned. I knew we should have run right at the beginning when we still had the chance but the others persuaded me it would be better to pull down the shutters, lock ourselves in and wait for the authorities to deal with the dead that were wandering the streets and attacking the living. Within a day it was clear there were too many of them for the army or anyone else to deal with but by then we were trapped, just the eight of us in the warehouse. We'd be okay if the company we worked for sold food but it didn't; it sold stationary. We've tried going outside to search for supplies but the dead are everywhere and they always chase us back in before we got more than a few feet. We've seen from the upper windows what happens when the dead catch the living; it's not pretty, and none of us want to go that way, but still we need to find something to eat or, like Martin, we'll starve to death, and there's nothing to eat in here.

17th May: I woke this morning to find the others discussing what to do with Martin's body. We kept away from it at first, frightened he might come back but he didn't, he just lay there: eyes sunken, cheeks hollow, his arms as thin as sticks. Steve was talking about starting a fire and initially I thought he was suggesting we cremate Martin. Then I realised Steve was talking about cooking and eating him. The very thought of doing that makes my stomach churn with disgust and I can't believe he'd even suggested doing something so awful. Surely he can't be serious.

18th May: For the first time since it happened I have a full belly but it makes me feel sick to think of what I've done. Steve was the one who

did it; who cut Martin up into thin slices with a box cutter and cooked him on a fire he made from the reams of A4 paper that surrounded us. At first, I didn't want to eat but the smell of the cooking meat was too tantalising; it smelled just like bacon and my body couldn't resist. It wasn't like we killed him and I'm sure Martin would have wanted us to do all we could to survive.

25th May: We ate the last of Martin four days ago and we're starting to get hungry again. Steve keeps going on about something he calls 'The Custom Of The Sea'. He says it's an unspoken rule for people who find themselves trapped like us. He says it's better for one of us to die so that the others can live long enough to be rescued than for all of us to die. I don't know exactly what he's talking about but I don't like the sound of it.

26th May: Steve has finally made it clear what 'The Custom Of The Sea' is. He wants us to draw lots. Whoever picks the short straw would then kill themselves so that the rest of us could eat. Thankfully no one seems keen on the idea.

28th May: We drew lots today and it was Jimmy who lost. He looked dumbfounded at first then he started shouting that he wasn't going to do it. Steve said that was okay, that it had to be voluntary but that we'd all agreed to the rules before we'd drawn lots and that he had a moral obligation to honour his word. Jimmy just refused.

29th May: I woke this morning to find Jimmy was dead. Steve told me he'd seen reason and had slit his throat in the bathroom but something seems wrong there. Jimmy was so against the idea last night and I can't see what would have changed his mind. I was going to say something but before I could, the smell of cooking flesh started to swirl around me. It made my mouth water and all I could think about was how great it would taste in my mouth. When it was ready, I ate as greedily as the rest of them but afterwards, when I had time to think about what I'd just done, I almost threw up. Somehow I managed to keep it down though. Later I went upstairs and looked out of the window. The dead are everywhere: stumbling and shuffling around. I think they must know we're in here because they're crowding tightly around the shuttered doors now, trying to force their way in. I was hoping I could see a way out but I can't; there's just too many of them. I went into the office where I used to work; the one administrator overseeing those on the warehouse floor. The phone lines are still down and with no power I can't turn on the TV. I did find an old battery-powered radio but all I could find on it was static. It's like we're the only

people left in the world. In a sudden and all consuming fit of frustration and rage at what I'd been reduced to, I picked up my chair and smashed it repeatedly against the wall; it didn't do anything to change our situation but as I surveyed the broken pieces of wood scattered across the floor, I felt better for it.

3rd June: Steve's talking about drawing lots again but this time he says we have to draw twice; once to see who we'll eat and once to see who'll kill them. He says this is so that the person can't back out like Jimmy did. This confuses me because I thought Jimmy killed himself; then I realise he didn't and that Steve must have done it in the night. At first I can't believe Steve would do that but then I think about it and realise it's exactly the type of thing he'd do. I've always had him pegged as a bit of a psychopath, what with the way he's always manipulating and bullying people to get his own way.

28th June: There's just the two of us left now: me and Steve. Tomorrow we'll draw lots to see who kills whom. I know he's been fixing the draws, using them to control everyone else and to make sure he not only stays alive but isn't the one who has to kill anyone. After all no one gets that lucky. I know I haven't been; so far I've been forced to kill twice. What I don't understand is why Steve has kept me alive so long. Maybe he doesn't see me as a threat because it's clear that since Jimmy, he's been picking off those most likely to stand up to him. He hides it well, but I swear he's enjoying what he's been making us do.

5th July: I've just finished the last scrap of Steve, and now, if I want to eat again, my only choice is to go outside and face the dead. I didn't wait until the morning to draw lots because I knew Steve was going to rig it; nor did I sleep the night before we were due to do it because I didn't trust him. Instead, I sat up, keeping watch and making sure he didn't catch me unawares. It was about four in the morning when I realised I couldn't do this forever and that I needed to act before he did. That was when I picked up broken chair leg I'd brought down from my office earlier in the day and smashed Steve's head in as he slept. Now I've eaten him, I'm all alone and I realise I'm no better than the dead that are crowding the doors outside. In fact, I may be worse; they do it because they don't know any better while I knew exactly what I was doing. I keep telling myself I only did what I had to do to survive but still there's a part of me that knows it would have been better to die.

8th July: I'm going outside now ...