

TIME MEDDLERS EXCERPT

CHAPTER 1

The Walking Corpse



“I don’t want to go to school here,” Sarah yelled at her father. “You dragged me away from all my friends and plunked me down in this *wilderness*.”

Sarah’s dad, Donald Sachs, tried his best not to smile. “Ottawa isn’t a wilderness, darling. It’s a rather large city.”

Sarah scowled and tossed back a tangle of curls. “You call this a city. We’re out in the sticks. Look around. There’s only trees and mounds of snow.”

“Most kids like trees.” Her dad swept his hand through his raven-black hair and peered out the window of their new two-story house. Sarah followed his gaze.

They were on the last row of a new construction of the suburb, and their backyard opened up on a field. Corn stubble, laced with frost, extended between pockets of wooded land. The landscape shimmered like nothing ever did in slushy metropolitan Toronto.

Sarah blinked as the light seared her eyes. She still preferred the slush.

“Well, I don’t,” she said. “I hate it here.” She stamped so hard on the solid tiles in the foyer that pain jolted up her leg. Tears crowded the corners of her eyes.

“Like it or not, dear, we’re here for good.”

“I want to live with Mom.”

“Mom doesn’t . . .” He gritted his teeth. “Your mom is too busy right now, darling. I know it’s hard to move in the middle of the year, but we’ll just have to make a go of it, okay? You’ll make new friends and eventually you might come to like this place.”

Sarah swiped at her eyes. “Yeah, sure,” she said.

“Now you know you have to go to school.”

Sarah wanted to protest again, but it wouldn’t make any difference. She pulled on her snow pants, wrenched on her coat, zipped it over her chin, jammed on a hat, laced up some oversized boots, and yanked on her mittens. “I feel like a polar bear,” she growled.

“You look like one, too,” he said.

She slammed out the door.

“Watch for cars,” her father called after her.

Sarah trudged through the deep snow, anger heavy as a bear on her shoulders. Her eyelashes were soon dusted with feathery flakes. The frigid blast of winter numbed her face in an instant. *What a place to live.* As she rubbed her mitts together to try to restore circulation to her hands, other kids emerged from the houses in the sprawling subdivision. They dashed past her, tossing snowballs at each other and rolling in the snow. If only she were back home, with her friends—Keith and Jamie, the basketball stars. Even the bully Bob would be a welcome sight compared to these strangers. How could they be having fun in this Arctic wilderness? She clutched her coat around her like a shield from the laughter that filled the air.

She could have tolerated this—the cold, the strangers—if only Mom had come with them. If only Mom hadn’t insisted on staying within the shadow of the monstrous highrise where she worked, and Dad hadn’t walked out on her. Sarah could have endured living in a cabin in the backwoods of Northern Ontario if they were all still together—a family.

It hadn’t worked out that way, though. Dad, as a politician, had to travel back and forth to Ottawa, and spend most of his time in this city. Mom, who was a successful fashion designer, wasn’t willing to sacrifice her own career for Dad’s *convenience*. She’d heard the arguments over and over. No one had asked Sarah what *she* wanted to do. Or where *she* wanted to live. So here she was, walking through a blizzard to get to a school in the middle of nowhere.

As Sarah walked, stewing over her miserable life, a flicker of movement across the street caught her eye. A boy was walking parallel to her with hunched shoulders and a twisted grimace on his face. He was kicking snow and punching shadows. He seemed oblivious to the frolicking kids, or to her. His eyes focused on the snow like it was an enemy.

Sarah looked away from him, but every now and then she’d look up and find they were keeping pace with each other. The boy seemed typical of kids from this northern town—bulky parka, Maple Leaf toque and a cold-flushed face under the snowflakes—yet he was different. He was distant from the others—an outsider, like her. She couldn’t stop watching him.

Finally they reached an intersection and he turned in her direction. It looked like he was about to cross the street. Yet he didn’t look up, didn’t pay attention to the traffic lights, didn’t even glance down the street; he just kept walking.

Sarah saw the red Explorer racing down the icy street. She cried, “Hey, kid. Look out!” Her stomach clenched and dropped as if weighted by heavy ball bearings. The SUV jammed its

brakes, skidded from side to side on the slick asphalt and went *right through the kid*. The boy kept walking, untouched.

Sarah stood there in shock, immobile. The boy walked past her, meeting her eyes for a split second.

“Wh-who-what are you?” she asked.

He shrugged, smiled and kept walking.

Sarah sank down in the snow bank and watched him continue up the street and into the yard of the red brick school. She shook her head. Had she really seen what she had just seen? The Explorer slammed to a stop, twisted halfway across the road, and the driver jumped out of the car. He looked back at the intersection, one hand poised in midair and the other scratching his head.

“He should be dead,” he muttered. “Thank goodness, thank goodness.”

Sarah blinked. Snowflakes whipped into her face and pasted to her eyelashes.

“I must have missed him, hadn’t I?” he called over to her.

She nodded, but as she turned away from the driver she whispered, “You hit him dead on.”