

The Lighthouse At End Of The Road

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](http://www.forthoseinperil.net/Free_Stories_From_Colin_M_Drysdale.htm).

The dog's ears prick up and he growls quietly but whatever it is that's caught his attention it's not enough to make him sit up. Instead, he remains lying on his side in front of the glowing embers in the fireplace. I reach over and scratch him behind his left ear as he falls silent again. A second later he's on his feet, facing the door, hackles raised, a deep rumble coming from his throat. Now I know he's sensing something out there in the darkness, I hope it's only a fox and not one of *them*. This is my third hideout in four weeks, each more remote than the last; if we have to leave I don't know where we'd go from here. Surrounded by sea on three sides, the lighthouse is about as far from civilisation as I can get. Right up on the northwest tip of Scotland, it's miles from anywhere and any human habitation. There isn't even a road here, just a track that starts at a small pier on a narrow inlet and ends at the lighthouse itself. We'd had to leave the car on the other side of the water, walk round the end and then onwards up the last ten miles; I can't see how any of *them* could have made it here, not yet anyway. The dog steps backwards one leg at a time and growls again, ears up, lips curled back, head down sniffing at the wind whistling under the door, trying to get a scent of whatever it is he hears out there. This is what he was like just before the last place was over-run.

There'd been five of us there but only me and the dog made it out alive, and that was only because his superior senses gave me just enough advanced warning before they attacked. I'd learned from the first safe house that to stay and fight was a sure way to end up dead so I'd started scrambling for the back door the moment I realised why he was acting strangely. Before I could warn the others the first of *them* came crashing through the door. Jen and Mike had been killed before they made it out of their sleeping bags; Jack got as far as the kitchen and Sam was just behind me when they grabbed him. That extra second, that extra foot the dog's warning had given me was what made the difference between escape and death. Even though I'd only known them for a week I'd liked those guys and it was devastating to know they were now gone. As I'd driven away I'd sworn to myself I wasn't going to get attached to anyone else again; from then on it was always going to be just me and the dog.

The dog barks. I've tried to get him to stop doing that ever since I found him wandering along an otherwise empty road but it seems it's just part of his nature. This was before I met up with Mike and his friends. I'd been on my own for three days by that point and I'd been glad of the company. The dog felt the same way and once he'd sniffed me enough to be certain I wasn't one of *them* he was all over me. Since then, regardless of whether we were somewhere nice and warm or out in the open, we'd barely left each other's side. I'd only been on that road because of what happened at the first place I'd found myself in.

When the dead started to rise and attack the living, those of us who were prepared grabbed our gear and ran. We chose to head north to where there were fewer people and so fewer bodies to crawl from what were meant to be their final resting places. After a couple of days, I'd found myself at a farmhouse set into the hills above Loch Ness along with nineteen or twenty others, all refugees from places further south: Fort William, Perth, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh. There'd even been a couple who'd managed to make it all the way up from Newcastle without getting killed which, given the circumstances, was pretty impressive.

The farmhouse lasted two weeks before the dead started turning up – shambling along the track leading to the front door or over the grass-covered hill behind it. I don't know where they came from or what attracted them to us but they came none-the-less. At first they only came in ones and twos and we could keep them under control but gradually the numbers built and we found it more and more difficult to stay on top of the situation. Then came the night they breached our defences. We started to fight back but very quickly it became clear this was a losing strategy and it wasn't long before the few of us who survived more than a couple of minutes turned and fled. This was no organised retreat, it was pure panic; each of us simply picked a direction and ran, hoping we wouldn't crash head-long into any of *them* in the darkness. Some probably died but others, like me, must have got lucky and made it out; if they did, I'd never find out because I knew I'd never see any of them again.

After that, I always made sure I had an exit strategy no matter where I found myself. At least I had until I'd reach the lighthouse at the end of the road. It was so remote and I was so tired that when I'd arrived just as the sun was going down I figured I could wait until the morning to scope out the place in full. Now, with the dog growling beside me, I quickly scan the room. There's three windows in the circular room that forms the base of the lighthouse but none of them are big enough for me to crawl through. I curse myself for mistakenly thinking I'd be safe here but I still can't work out where any dead could have come from. As far as I know, no one's lived this far out since the lighthouse was automated nearly thirty years ago but, then again, maybe I hadn't been the only one to think it might be the ultimate safe house.

Someone could have been injured by one of the risen dead and made it here, or close to it, before finally succumbing to whatever it was that was passed on when one of them bit you.

There's another snarl followed by a short, sharp bark. I try to keep him quiet by holding his muzzle but he struggles free and barks again. There's definitely something out there but I don't know what and there's no way I'm opening the door to find out. All I can do is crouch beside my faithful companion and hope it's not one of *them*.

Author's Note: The Cape Wrath Lighthouse, where this story is set, marks the northwestern tip of the Scottish mainland and while this part of the country was more heavily inhabited before the Clearances, it's now one of the most sparsely populated regions of western Europe. This would make it an appealing location to anyone trying to survive in a zombie apocalypse. If you want to find out more about where it is you can follow this link to see its location in Google Earth: http://www.forthoseinperil.net/files/The_Lighthouse

[At The End Of The Road.kmz](#) (this requires that you have either Google Earth or a Google Earth Mobile app installed on your ebook device). Since 2009 there's been a cafe there, called the *Ozone Cafe*, so it's no longer completely uninhabited (as it was when I was growing up). On the cafe's website, there's a statement that's so at odds with the modern world, it only serves to emphasize it's isolation: 'Unfortunately, due to the remoteness of The Ozone Café, an e-mail address is unavailable.' (quoted from http://www.capewrath.org.uk/10_Ozone_Cafe.htm).

A theme within this story is the benefits of having a dog as a companion in a zombie apocalypse. A dog would almost certainly give you advanced warning of any approaching undead but you may find their tendency to bark at inappropriate moments only serves to draw the walking dead to you. Personally, I think the benefits would outweigh the risks but it would very much depend on the individual dog you had with you.

Oddly, this story was directly inspired by real events – not the zombie bits but the actions of the dog. At one point in my life I stayed in a remote lighthouse on an island in the Bahamas (the one at Hole-in-the-Wall on Abaco) and for a while I was there alone with the exception of a pair of dogs (or potcakes as the local strays are called and which are a mix of every breed that's ever visited the islands). One of them had the unnerving habit of suddenly scrambling to her feet in middle of the night before standing stock still, staring towards the door while growling menacingly. After a minute or so she'd lie down again as if nothing

had happened but it always made me wonder what she was sensing out there in the darkness that I couldn't detect.