



## Chapter 1

### Happy Deathday

It was my birthday really, but it *could* have been my deathday. Very nearly was in fact. Name's Victor, by the way. Victor Gott. I live in Straw House. Not *a* straw house like the three little pigs – Straw House is a block of flats. We're on the third floor. Mum, Dad and me. No brothers, no sisters.

People think you're spoilt if you're an only child, but I'm not. No way. I have to do jobs for my dosh, and I don't get that much even then. I'd been saving up all year to buy one of those tiny computer cameras – a digicam. It

had been like trying to push a peanut up Mount Everest with my nose. All that came to an end on my birthday. I've got this uncle, Uncle Harry, and he gave me a digicam for a present. State of the art it was too – brushed steel and the size of a matchbox. I was well chuffed. Couldn't wait to get outside and click off a few pics.

My mate Barry reckons I'm sad because I like taking pictures, but I don't care. I says to him, "better than smoking like you, or robbing, like your Tel." Barry smokes where his mum can't see him, and his big brother Tel shoplifts and picks pockets and stuff like that. He's been inside twice. What a plonker. Barry thumped me when I said that about his brother, but it's true. Taking pictures doesn't cause cancer, and they won't bang you up for it.

But taking pictures *can* be dangerous. It was for me that day ...

"Where you off to?" goes Mum. I'm by the door, putting on my hoody. I show her Uncle Harry's present – my new digicam. I wave it over my head. "Just off to take a few pics, Mum."

"What'll you take pics *of*?" she says. "There's nothing but streets out there."

"Streets are good, Mum," I tell her. "Lots of people take pictures of streets."

"Yes, and lots of people are daft," she growls. "Don't go too far, it'll be dark soon." You see – it's after school. It's teatime, and I've only just opened my cards and presents. Why do you have to go to school on your birthday? It's not right, if you ask me.

So off I went along the walkway and down the stairs. There's a lift, but it stinks and anyway it's quicker to go downstairs on foot. It was getting dark and it was drizzling. The street shone with light from shop windows and cars. The traffic was going two ways. If