  He got to the ruined shop fronts.  That was when the third and fourth gunshots rang out.  The boy’s rifle.  He was sure of it.  That aggressive bark.  The rifle was alive and kicking.  He pressed against the wall and turned his back to the shop.  He studied the ruined, desolate horizon.  It still looked clear.  That had to count for something.  He moved along the wall, dragging his long coat against the rough face of the bricks.  He got right outside the shop.

    Still no movement from inside.  No more shots either.

    The weight of the gun in his hand made him felt better but he knew it was a lie every gun told you.  Although it felt good to be lied to right now.  Sometimes you needed to believe you were just that little bit more invincible.

    He kept the door to his left, his gun close to the door.  He looked around.  His chest heaving.  His hands shaking slightly.  The car park.  The road.  The fields beyond.  Nothing moved.  Whatever had happened in there didn’t seem to be part of a trap.  In fact the whole world seemed to have fallen silent to the sound of that rifle.

    He shook his left hand as he thought, the gun rattled in his grip.  He had to see what was going on in there.  There was no other choice.  He leant round fast, not giving himself time to think.  His heart was beating fast and hard, as if to prove it wasn't ready to stop yet.  He peered through the cracked glass, past the fractured reflection of his own tired face.  He could just see the dim outline of shelves and a skeleton crew of boxes and tins.  Nothing else.  No signs of life.  He needed a better line of sight.  He needed to cause some alarm.  He pulled back against the wall, took a breath and held the gun up at the glass.  He pulled the trigger.

    A crack of thunder filled his head and his hands.  The bitter crisp shatter of the glass sounded a million miles away.

    He waited, his ears ringing.  He checked around him again.  Still nothing.  Good.

“You in there?” he yelled through the broken glass, taking another fast look.

    He could see through the dust kicked up by the shot.  There was no movement in there.  No sound.  Every nerve in his body was telling him to run but he fought it all down, like stamping out fires.  He was hungry and sometimes the hunger had to win out if you were going to survive.

    He gritted his teeth.  Living alone out here was no way to live anyway.

“I know you didn’t call me.  But I heard shots.”

    Silence.  He cursed under his breath.

“I’m coming in.”

    He spun, grabbed the door handle with his free hand and went in at a stumbling gait.  Grace had never been his strong suit.  He had stepped on his bride’s feet three times during their wedding day.  That’s how graceful he was under pressure.

    The shop was small and dark.  It was also damn near empty.  Gun smoke hung heavy in the air.  A few museum piece tins and boxes sat on shelves liked the last children waiting to be collected from school.  You could smell the age and the neglect in here.  You could feel it bristling against your skin.

    At his feet the older thief found a thin, stretched puddle of blood.  His eyes reluctantly followed it to the counter.  The boy was dead.  Slumped on the ground at an awkward angle.  The rifle still clutched in his hands, blood trailing from his lips.  His pale eyes were frozen, wide open.

    The remaining thief stepped towards him, keeping a watchful eye on the counter.  No movement there.  Just a deep, hard spray of blood covering the wall behind it.  A couple of holes shot deep into the ageing plaster.  It looked like both had hit home, driving through meat and bone before planting themselves into the wall.  The boy had done well.