

A New Dawn

By Dante Harker

Chapter one

A blue pill and shoes covered in blood.

‘Hold on a second, I can hear the lump heaving his fat load out of the car,’ Dawn typed. She added ‘BRB’ to let her friend Laurie from the Psychotic Housewives forum know that she would only be away from the computer for a short while.

Before her husband made it into the house, Dawn rushed through to the kitchen, put on her apron and busied herself until Fred came in.

‘Love, how far off’s dinner?’ Fred called through to the kitchen.

‘Great,’ Dawn whispered under her breath. Partly because he hadn’t asked her how she was or for that matter even said ‘hello’ – instead he’d just plonked himself in front of the TV – but mostly because it was clear from the slur in his

voice that he'd been drinking. It was not that this was unusual but, over this last year, Fred had gone from being hammered only at the weekends to now pretty much every night. If he hadn't have been self-employed as a taxi driver, Dawn was sure her husband would have been fired years before for being drunk on the job.

'Did you hear me love? I'm hungry in here.' Fred called, his voice starting to tinge with anger.

'I'm just serving up now.' Dawn called back as she pulled a shepherd's pie out of the oven.

'Did you not hear me?' Fred asked, this time not from the living room but from the entrance to the kitchen. His hulking nineteen-stone frame filled the doorway. Most of the nineteen-stone bulk was formed by his ever- expanding beer-gut, which looked like an over-inflated beach ball forced under a grossly inadequate t-shirt. His gut, desperate for escape dripped like a lump of molten wax over the top of his jeans. His stretch marks, like train tracks, were highlighted by the lobster red he'd managed to colour himself by sitting, shirtless in the pub's beer garden for the best part of Saturday.

'It's all ready for you, I was just about to fetch it in.' Dawn scooped a large helping of the pie onto a plate and offered it to her husband.

‘What’s that muck?’ He asked, his growing temper flushed his face, forcing blood to make his split cobweb veins vibrate.

‘Shit, shit,’ Dawn thought, ‘this can’t happen now, I’m not ready, this isn’t the plan!’

‘It’s your favourite darling; I know how much you like shepherd’s pie.’ Dawn did her best to keep her voice calm, she could see Fred wobbling, he was more than a little drunk today and perhaps a soothing tone might placate him.

Fred wasn’t soothed. ‘It used to be my favourite, but when you serve it every fucking night what am I supposed to do?’

Dawn cringed at the ‘f’ word; she hated swearing, always had, and Fred generally respected that but, when he drank, he was a different person. He certainly wasn’t the person she’d married nearly thirty years ago. Back then, Fred had been sporty in a doing, not just watching, kind of way. He had been an apprentice mechanic, keen to have his own garage one day. But that ‘one day’ never came and, if it had, Fred would have been too drunk to see it.

Dawn watched her husband’s eyes, he was waiting for her to say something, but she had nothing left to say, at least not out loud. In her head her thoughts were popping, her mind

scrambled, torn between anger that this was happening today, when all her plans were in place for tomorrow and a desperate bid to find a way out.

The silence was gasoline for Fred's temper, he wacked the plate out of Dawn's hand and screamed, 'now look at the fucking mess you've made.' Dawn looked around, the pie had gone everywhere. She watched a blob of mashed potato drip off the Formica worktop and explode like a raindrop in slow motion as it struck the white, tiled floor.

Fred, clearly expecting his wife to cry and beg for him to stop, was thrown by her continued hush. With a need to fill the accusing silence, he grabbed Dawn's hair, pulled her face close to his and, before throwing her to the floor, screamed 'this place isn't going to clean it's shitting self. Get your scrawny body down there and sort it out. '

As he screamed a jet of tobacco and beer-smelling spit sprayed over Dawn's face but this was the least of her worries. The side of her head hit the cupboard as she was thrown to the floor. Dazed, Dawn managed to get to her knees and look up. Fred's fat was still vibrating; his face flushed darkest red – darker than Dawn had seen before.

Without any cloths and unwilling to reach up to the sink to get one, Dawn started to scoop the pie into a heap. When she looked back up at her husband his look had changed. A

leer had cracked over his face, making him look like a beetroot that had been left out in the sun to crisp and decay.

‘Some bloke gave me a blue pill to try down at the pub; he said it’d perk up our sex life.’ Fred said, spit again hitting Dawn’s face.

The statement made Dawn want to laugh, but she knew better. Apart from his ridiculous timing, Dawn knew it would take more than a magic blue pill to perk up their long-dead sex life.

‘Seems to be working’ Fred said looking down, not that he could actually see his penis over the swell of his belly, but then he didn’t need to see it, he’d placed his hand on it and was outlining it through his jeans for Dawn’s viewing pleasure.

Dawn felt sick. She couldn’t remember seeing Fred’s penis for well over a year, his fat acting as a perfect cover for something that had never been of note. And the idea that he could still get it erect brought vomit up into her throat. Again, Dawn wasn’t sure what to say, though as much as she’d promised herself that she wasn’t going to beg this time, the look on her husband’s face told her she might want to reconsider.

Fred pulled at the buttons on his jeans. He was desperate to free his manhood, though the first few buttons just released more fat. Eventually, and with a gasp of accomplishment, he managed to set his cock free. It stood proud, not proud of his gut or for that matter proud of his orange peel thighs, but it was at least erect. The blue pill had given Fred his first erection in months; his penis looked like a ghost-white pencil with a glistening purple grape for a rubber.

Fred took a step towards Dawn's face and said, 'while you're down there love.'

Dawn didn't move. Her eyes darted around looking for a solution, for a way out, again she cursed that Fred couldn't have lasted one more day without an outburst. 'I have plans,' Dawn thought and then her eyes fell on the broken plate.

Not letting his wife's unwillingness be an obstacle to emptying his load, Fred stepped forward until he'd pinned Dawn in a corner. 'Come on love, I know how much you like sucking it!' Fred said, the anger slipping back into his tone.

Dawn wanted to scream, 'that's a lie, I never wanted to suck it, it always smelled like gone off mushrooms, even the thought of it makes me want to gag.' And the thought of it did make her gag, this time the sick made it up into her mouth and Dawn had to swallow hard to stop her vomit covering

her husband's shoes.

Even when they had first got together Fred's dick had smelt, he used to say it was due to all the sports training he did but, when that stopped, the smell didn't. And the more he gained weight the worse it got, in fact the last few times Dawn could remember blowing her husband, she had convinced him that it would make his cock tingle if she sucked a mint first – if it did or not she didn't care, it just filled her nose with a scent more bearable.

Fred thrust his cock forward, but this did nothing to get it nearer Dawn's mouth, instead his stomach hit her in the head and forced the back of her head to hit the cupboard behind.

'Come on love, suck it, don't make me force you; it's a shame to let this go to waste.' Dawn looked at the tiny purple-ended cock being thrust towards her, a grape with an eye that was dripping ooze.

This had gone on too long, plans or not, this had to end now. With one hand Dawn took hold of a piece of broke plate; it was hand-sized, smooth on one side, razor shape on the other. With her other hand Dawn worked her way up her husband's inner thigh, parting his legs.

‘That’s it, love, you get in there,’ Fred took her actions as a way of getting into position. He obliged by spreading his legs and bending his knees slightly. Then, as he leant back, his cock was free to move into Dawn’s mouth. For a second, Dawn thought about giving it one last suck, as a sort of goodbye but, as the offending item dripped thick ooze onto her blouse, she lifted the makeshift knife into the new opening between Fred’s thighs and manoeuvred the cutting edge against the fat. Then after summoning up years of repressed anger, Dawn sliced deep into her husband’s thigh and, in one swift movement, she severed his femoral artery.

Bright red arterial blood, under pressure, jetted from the wound. It shot across the room, like water pumping from a hose. The blood soaked the refrigerator, covering the pictures pinned there. Dawn’s heart sank as she watched the fluid soak the most recent picture of her only daughter and the granddaughter she’d never seen – a daughter who’d had the good sense to emigrate to New Zealand as soon as she was old enough.

Fred’s legs gave way and he fell forward pinning Dawn against the kitchen units. With a huge effort she pushed him backwards and he dropped back onto his padded behind.

‘What have you done?’ he asked. The draining blood took Fred’s strength. He was in shock, his face pallid. Dawn didn’t answer; instead she struggled to her feet. In life she

had always been flighty, worried about everything and everyone. As her heart raced with worry so had her metabolism and, even as she'd watched her husband balloon, she had only gained the slightest amount of weight in their thirty years of marriage. As the sun set over the playing fields their house looked onto, the room filled with an amber glow. Shards of fading light brushed over Dawn and her husband. They held each other's gaze, neither believing what was happening. The blood jetted from Fred's body so quickly that shock took him before he had time to scream, before he even had time to reason what was going on – though the look on his face, in his eyes as he held Dawn's, left no doubt that he knew he was about to die.

The bloody sight and the coppery smell of freedom, left Dawn's mind momentarily empty and from her mouth, without any thought, drifted Frank Sinatra's famous ballad.

'Somewhere beyond the sea Somewhere waitin' for me My lover stands on golden sand....'

Chapter Two

You'll need salt to get that out!

'Are you there?' Dawn typed, even after scrubbing her hands her fingers still left faint red smudges as they hit the

keys.

‘Of course, you were gone a long time – what’s the matter, did the wide-load give you some abuse again?’ Laurie’s words appeared in the chat box with the deft speed of a touch-typist.

A tear rolled from Dawn’s eye, the last she would shed for her husband. This moment had been a long time coming and, though it was a day earlier than planned, it felt strangely good.

‘I’ve done it, Laurie – I’ve killed him!’ Dawn had been talking to Laurie for over a year. They had met on a chat forum designed for stressed- out housewives. The site’s aim was to enable women to swap recipes, share money-saving tips and gripe about their husbands. The name of the site Psychotic Housewives turned out to be apt. After declining an invitation to a ‘coffee morning’ on the grounds that her husband didn’t like her going anywhere without him other than her work, Laurie had sent Dawn her first private message.

It had turned out that Laurie too had a controlling husband; she was in an abusive relationship that she was desperate to escape. From that first message they had become firm friends; they chatted online most days and though their friendship had never left the online realm – both feeling that

they could share more if they knew they would never meet – the relationship blossomed.

Laurie's pause was almost too much for Dawn; she needed a reply, needed validation.

At the bottom of the little chat box a message read, 'Laurie is typing.' Dawn held her breath; this is what she had been planning for a year. Well, not exactly this, in her plans there had been less of a mess and Fred wasn't due to die until the end of tomorrow – there was so much else that needed doing first.

'Then it's all stations are go then – it's a shame that bastard couldn't have been your last victim, but still, he's dead now and that's all that matters. What have you done with the body?'

Dawn hesitated to write 'nothing' but, as that was the truth, she was left with no option. But so she didn't sound weak or ill-prepared she added after the nothing, 'I wanted to tell you what had happened first, as soon as we've done chatting I'll move him into the freezer like I planned and give the place a good going over.'

'Excellent. And tomorrow? Do you have everything you need prepared?' Dawn watched the letters appear on the screen,

the deep red text, smooth font and considered wording offered comfort and made her feel ready for what was to come.

‘I’m set, I have all the tools I need and I’ve even made a check list, so I can keep a tally.’ Dawn made a mental note to print off the check list before work tomorrow. Dawn was about to ask Laurie if she was set also, a quick question given that Laurie only had one person to despatch, when Laurie asked:

‘A check list how does that work then?’

‘Well first there’s ‘The Angel of Death’, Beverley Allitt – she’s my first check point at four killings.’

‘Ok, and then?’ Laurie typed.

‘I have to kill at least five to match Myra Hindley’

‘Though she did have help,’ Laurie offered.

‘That she did, and of course she killed children, I’m not going to harm any little ones. Plus I want to keep my tally to only those who deserve to die.’

‘That sounds fair. And after Myra Hindley?’

‘Rosemary West at ten, but again she had help; I don’t know what it is about female killers they always seem to need a man on hand.’ Dawn clicked around her computer screen until the melodic tones of her favourite singer – Mr Sinatra – flowed from her speakers and filled the room. The house had seemed quiet, creepily so, she was so used to having her computer time accompanied by Fred’s thunderous snoring – him having eaten then fallen asleep in front of the TV – that she found the silence unsettling.

‘Well that’s all about to change; tomorrow you’ll be the UK’s greatest female serial killer – no man needed. So, after Rosemary West who then?’ They had talked about female serial killers many times, done hours of research, subscribed to countless part-work magazines exposing the lives of the world’s worst killers. But somehow going over the old ground helped keep things clear in Dawn’s head.

‘Well then it gets a little tricky, there’s Amelia Dyer, a Victorian baby killer and then two working together – Amelia Sach and Annie Walters – again child killers. The problem is that no one knows how many they killed. One, two, five, fifteen? It’s all very unclear, so I’ve put Ameila Dyer at twelve and the other two as my fifteen marker.’ As she wrote Dawn broke occasionally into song, singing as if she was wearing ear phones and, though she didn’t want anyone to hear her sing, at times she couldn’t help but sing a few words – the song at the moment was ‘I’m a fool to want you.’

‘And I guess that brings us to the grandmother of Great British serial killers – Mary Ann Cotton – now there’s a lady who knows how to rid herself of a pesky husband.’ Laurie wrote, adding a smiley face to emphasise her amusement.

Dawn glared at Laurie’s message, miffed by her beating her to the climax of her list. Mary Ann Cotton was the woman Dawn had to beat if she was going to get the title of ‘Most Prolific British Female Serial Killer’. Beating this particular crazy Victorian meant that she would surely get a part-work dedicated to her and her alone.

Still, she let Laurie’s faux pas pass and wrote, ‘that’s her, the arsenic widow – shame that once again she couldn’t just kill people who deserved it, she had to kill babies, too. Some people are just sick! Still at twenty killings she’s at the top of my ‘to beat’ list. And here’s me, still stuck at number one – still, tomorrow will be here soon enough!’

Chapter Three

Thank goodness for flat shoes.

Judging by the lack of traffic on the roads, most people were doing what they were supposed to do on a Sunday morning – taking a day of rest. Dawn was on her way to work; she had a part-time job as a travel agent and, one weekend out

of four, she worked on Sunday.

Dawn looked down at her hands and when she found them still free of blood she promised she wouldn't look again. She had already washed them five times that morning. Plunging them into scalding, bleach-filled water for as long as she could bear – which seemed just long enough to form red blisters on the back of her hands.

After saying goodbye to Laurie, Dawn had set to the task of cleaning. She had been stock piling cleaning products for the last few weeks – just in case – and running down the chest freezer to make sure there would be room. It had taken the aid of a sack barrow to get her husband's corpse moved out to the garage attached to the house. And then she had used the winch that Fred had set up years before, when he had enjoyed tinkering with old cars and needed a rig to help him remove the engines. Still, once he was in the freezer and covered with bags of frozen food you couldn't even tell he was there at first glance.

The kitchen had taken a lot more work than lugging Fred's bloated, reeking body. The blood had gone everywhere; the curtains were ruined, but soon replaced – when Dawn had got them in last winter's sales she'd had the presence of mind to buy two pairs. Not because she had worried that she might get her husband's blood all over them, more because they were nice and it saved wear and tear to swap them

from time-to-time.

The blood-soaked pair, along with a ruined towel and eventually the cleaning cloths were all bagged up and with the help of a good dose of petrol they were burnt along with some general household litter, in the back garden. Bonfires were a common practice in Dawn's little country town and it didn't draw any undue attention.

Dawn glanced over at the huge scarlet bag taking up the passenger seat and smiled. Its ribbed cord exterior housed three separate compartments crammed to the brim with supplies for the day. Its contents were meticulously planned and packed – eBay and Google made some things so easy. She only hoped that its size didn't draw any unwanted attention.

At the carpark in town where Dawn always left her car was only one solitary parked car that looked lost against the vast gray tarmac. Driving past the lone silver Ford near the entrance – with a carpark the size of a football pitch it seemed silly to park right next to the only other car – Dawn parked. Walking towards the exit, Dawn noticed the Ford wasn't empty. As always when walking in public Dawn had her umbrella up, a quirk that often got her looks, but she hated being watched from the skies by God – or from lampposts or telegraph poles for that matter.

When closer, Dawn saw a woman get out of the car, then lean back in through the window, give the balding man sat in the driver's seat a kiss, thank him and then head off towards the exit.

The driver seeing Dawn's judgemental expression started the engine and left; his tyres leaving the faint smell of rubber in his haste to leave.

'What you looking at?' the woman yelled. A slight breeze caught the front of Dawn's yellow, flowery dress and lifted it slightly. The same breeze caught the woman's dress, but hers was barely more than a denim belt and even a hurricane would have to offer a £20 to lift it!

Dawn didn't reply; instead she focused on her dress's little uprising and waited for the thirty-something year-old whore to walk on. She did and as she reached the exit of the carpark she hesitated for a second before making the decision to use the toilet that stood at the carpark's entrance.

'I can't believe we get people like that in our quaint little town', Dawn said, adding, 'the sign reads- "Historic Market Town" not "Historic Whoring Town"'. Dawn chuckled at her play-on-words and sighed that there was no one around to hear her.

Reaching into her bag Dawn pulled out her day planner. Inside she found a list entitled 'Acceptable Criteria' and, running her finger down it, she paused at 'a bad person' but that was just a little too ambiguous. With a mind for expedience, Dawn pushed on because though she knew that even a woman with makeup as thick as the whore's could be in the toilet an age – application taking time – She couldn't stay in there forever. Dawn moved her finger down the list until she found 'Low Moral Values'.

That was more than enough; Dawn closed the planner, put it back in the bag and marched towards the toilet block. The building was old, probably Victorian, its bricks were red and worn and the years of use had left a stench so strong that it forced Dawn to screw up her face as she entered.

In the doorway, Dawn reached into her bag and put her hand on her tool of choice.

'What the fuck do you want? You some fucking do-gooder here to save me?' The woman was stood at the wash basins fiddling with her beached-to-death hair. In the blue fluorescent light the woman looked worn out – years of use and abuse. Her arms were lined with tracks and her wrists bore the thick scars of failed suicide attempts.

Dawn had a pang of guilt, how could she kill someone who had so clearly been ravaged by the worst the world had to offer? The pang soon passed. 'Think of the list!' Dawn's compulsive thoughts reminded her. 'Does she fit the criteria?' Knowing that she did Dawn said:

'I'm just coming to use the loo – I'm not here to save you.'

Dawn expected a fight, or at least some more verbal abuse but the woman, obviously tired, just grunted and went back to preening in the mirror. After taking three steps towards the cubical behind the woman, Dawn swung around and as one hand reached up and took a hold of the back of the whore's hair, the other hand pulled out an eight-inch hunting knife. Then with all the energy her tiny frame could muster, she slammed the knife deep into her victim's lungs. And, just as the SAS manual had informed her, the punctured air sacks were unable to issue the air needed for the prostitute to scream. Still pulling hard on her victim's hair Dawn kicked her foot into the back of the dying woman's knees and used the momentum of her fall to throw her off balance and into the open cubical.

Dawn, glad she had taken 'women's self defence' classes in her dinner hour and studied up on using your victims body weight to your advantage – a must when you're as tiny and petite as she – completed the entire offensive without getting a drop of blood onto her pretty summer dress.

Falling backwards, the whore hit her head on the toilet bowl and then lay moments from death in the stench of the hundred-year old toilet. Unable to scream, blood dripping from the side of her mouth she used her eyes to beg for it to be over. But Dawn hadn't quite finished.

Laurie had said that there was no point Dawn just stabbing the odd person here and there, or taking a gun to a bunch of people. That wouldn't give people a reason to remember her after the initial headlines. She would be nothing better than one of those crazed students or postal workers who lose it, kill as many as they can before ending their pathetically small lives. No, that wasn't for Dawn, that wouldn't make her a serial killer – she had to do more.

Reaching into her bag Dawn pulled out the 'more' – a clear bottle, with a red skull and crossbones on the top, marked Sodium Hydroxide. Dawn had searched the internet for flesh burning acid and though she had managed to compile a comprehensive list, further research had led her to a base solution instead of acid as it turned out these are much better at dissolving organic materials.

The prostitute tried to kick out with her feet, tried to back further away, but she was moments from death, her wound bleeding out onto the cold, dank floor.

Taking the stopper out of the bottle Dawn tipped the clear liquid onto the dying woman's face. The internet was right, on contact the fluid bit into her skin, like wretched fingers with inch long nails the liquid tore at the victim's skin. A last attempt at a scream caused nothing more than bubbles of blood to form around her dissolving mouth. The once pleading eyes first lost their lids and then with a milky pop the eyes themselves burst, dripping ooze instead of tears down the crater-strewn face.

Dawn's heart raced, she felt like a bee who had just found a mother load of pollen. After the second eye hissed and burst, Dawn glanced at her watch and noted she was going to be late. After nipping back over to the sink to clean the knife, Dawn placed it and the bottle back in her back. She then pulled out a thick black bin-liner, placed it over the whore's head and thanking God she'd worn her flat shoes today she stamped until she felt skull crack under foot.

Then with the agility of a woman half her age, she locked and climbed out of the two cubicles at either side of the one housing the dead woman – the growing blood pool had already run into both adjoining cubicles and by locking the doors discovery of the body could be delayed. After going back into the bloody cubical and locking the door behind her, Dawn pulled a small brush, a carrier bag and a pair of pumps out of her bag. Placing the pumps on the toilet seat, she stepped out the old pair – whose bottoms were covered

in blood – and one foot at a time stepped up onto the toilet seat and into the new footwear. Reaching down Dawn brushed away any foot prints before placing the soiled items into the carrier bag, tying it off and placing it back in her bag.

Once up and over the loo door, Dawn checked to see that no blood was running out from the cubical and with number two ticked off her list, she breezed off to work humming all the while.

Chapter Four

That's really not how you should use a claw hammer!

'Wow, Dawn, that's a big bag; you carrying a body around?' Gail, the store manageress asked before Dawn had even had chance to close the door behind her. Gail was stood in her usual place, behind her desk, eating a bagel and pawing her fat sticky fingers over the shop's latest sales figures.

'I know, I just have to drop some clothes off at the charity shop later,' Dawn replied, her reason prepared in advance.

Having worked at the travel agents for the last five years, Dawn knew the ladies there well. The store had a standard compliment of seven gossiping fish-wives, plus Gail, Dawn and Katie, the nineteen-year old office junior. Their lives

revolved around whichever reality TV show Heat magazine had told them to watch. They longed to be size zeros, dieting sporadically in accordance with the latest trends. For the last week it had been the Cambridge diet, a diet that suggests you can eat almost anything as long as you don't eat more than a thousand calories a day. This almost laughably low figure had led to a tetchy few days. Plummeting blood sugar levels had left the ladies feeling tired, agitated and inclined to be mean.

Gail, the worst of the bunch for fad dieting – a woman who would never lose any weight until she gave up her bottle or two of wine each night – had exploded late on Friday afternoon. Though the explosion had not been literal, the women in the office had certainly felt the impact. The weekly sales figures had come back and were woefully inadequate, which had led to Gail keeping them all twenty minutes after closing time while she berated each of them in the name of staff development.

Dawn had been told that she needed to spend less time flitting around tidying up after everyone and more time answering the phones. It was a ridiculous charge as, one, Dawn never let her phone ring past the regulation four rings – never – and, two, if she didn't tidy up after the slovenly occupants of the office, no one else would.

‘Your makeup bill must cost you a fortune – walk into another door?’ Helen, a recent divorcée asked, her face contorted into a sneer that really said – ‘we’ve been telling you for years, Dawn, to leave that bastard of a husband of yours but, as you haven’t taken our advice, we’re just going to make fun of you for being weak.’

‘I’ll show you who’s weak, let’s hope you die first!’ Dawn thought and then just smiled, rather than answering and made her way up to the staffroom on the third floor. As she passed a stack of old boxes, Dawn’s mind flicked back to the criteria list in her diary. Thankfully Helen ticked most of the extensive list but, as with the now dead prostitute, the tick in bold would be at the side of ‘low moral values’ – for the last year, since her divorce Helen had regaled the office woman with tales of her conquests. Her husband of 25 years had been her first love and, until their divorce, the only man with whom she’d had sex – something two or three men a week had soon put right.

Every Monday morning or, that very day if she was unlucky enough to have shifts on the same weekend, Helen would captivate the girls with stories of her conquests. Dawn found the idea of a 46-year-old woman hanging around with her two daughters in bars and nightclubs repugnant – especially when the eldest daughter, at 22, already had three children of her own.

This was a view that only Dawn seemed to house; she had once asked why Helen couldn't just enjoy being a grandmother, rather than doing God-knows- what with men her daughter's age. It was a question that found only dissent from the other women. 'Why can't Helen enjoy herself? Why should only men be able to go out with younger partners? What's too old these days?'

Dawn had acquiesced. She just smiled politely and made more coffee. What she'd wanted to say was, 'of course Helen can have fun, but pouring her fat sagging body into one of her daughter's slutty outfits and having sex with teenage boys at the back of a nightclub, before eating then throwing up a kebab is not fun – it's sick and deserves to be punished!'

Dawn always made the coffee and this morning was no exception. She switched on the kettle and then took a box of homemade muffins out of her bag.

'What are they?' Katie asked as Dawn pulled out a small box of what looked like teabags.

'Oh, they're coffee bags,' Dawn said, trying to sound blasé, 'I've seen them a few times in the supermarket and thought I'd give them a try – let's not say anything to the others, I want to see if they notice.'

Katie smiled her agreement and went back to setting up the circle of chairs for the customary staff meeting – or at least the ten slurred minutes of Gail, usually hung-over from a little too much wine ('well if you have a second bottle it seems silly not to open it') giving a pep-talk about the need to boost sales.

With the kettle boiling, Dawn reached inside her bag, grabbed her mobile and without removing it speed-dialled her shop. As per routine when the shop wasn't yet open, all calls were diverted up to the training room at the side of the staffroom. The training room housed a cheap answering machine that only had two minutes of space. Gail didn't want the women spending all morning answering customer queries when they should be selling, which is why she'd never installed answering machines on the phones downstairs and wouldn't allow more than two minutes of storage space.

As always the space had been used up, either that or it had not been emptied from previous calls and it rang way past the answering machines answer point of five rings.

'I'll get it,' Dawn said to no one in particular. Though other members of staff had started to drift into the staff room, no one had any intention of answering a phone before the doors opened.

‘It was for you Katie, the hospital. It seems your mum’s been in some kind of accident, I wanted to come and get you but the doctor said it wasn’t that serious. Still, he said your mum was asking for you and can you get right over there?’ Dawn liked Katie; she was a pleasant girl and reminded Dawn of her own daughter. Panicked Katie found Gail for her approval and then rushed out the building.

While the rest of the office ladies made their way up the stairs, all chirping like a pack of demented crows as they tried to guess what was wrong with Katie’s mother, Dawn went back to making coffee.

The kettle boiled and she poured water into the eight mugs of coffee and then into her own green tea. After adding milk to each cup – except for Helen who was off dairy – she picked up a couple of cups and gave them a smell. There was no hint of the poisonous tobacco tar that she’d mixed in with the extra strong coffee when she had been making up the perforated bags.

In her earliest planning stages, Dawn had realised the potential of the internet. She had never been one for computers, putting them down as a something only young people played on. But after Gail had forced her on a ‘computers for the terrified’ course at the local college the indispensable resource had become evident. All the

information she needed was at her finger tips. The most useful had been murder, mystery, and horror writer's forums. Without having to ask a single question, the answers were there; details on all types of poisons, access and traceability. Dawn needed one she could put in her colleague's drinks and one to add to their muffins.

It had been challenging to set up a mailbox at the central post office where she could have things delivered. The challenge had been how to set it up in someone else's name; something sorted by a brief stint of volunteer work – befriending the elderly, then stealing a couple of their utility bills, which proved enough to set up a mailbox. The old people had again proven useful in providing Dawn with a means of payment. One particularly chatty but lonely diabetic, who was prone to nasty turns after she'd gleefully accept the sorbet lemons Dawn covertly offered, allowed Dawn access to a credit card. While in a near coma, Dawn rang the card company and asked if she could receive only online bills and, fortunately, the card had already been set up so that it was paid off by direct debit at the end of the month.

Now, rather than steal the card, which might have raised suspicions, through experimentation Dawn worked out that she could keep the old woman in a near comatose state for twenty minutes before she had to force another sweet into her mouth to revive her. Dawn always found it funny how it

took sweets to knock the old woman out and the same poison to bring her back – albeit drastically different quantities. Once out, Dawn could ring whomever she needed, order what she wanted and have them delivered to her mailbox – perfect.

The tobacco leaves had been easy to find. In retaliation to the ‘anti- smoking lobby’ countless websites have been set up in the United States promoting smoking. All a person’s tobacco needs were served. Tobacco seeds were the easiest to get hold off, with the aim of growing your own. Dawn toyed with the idea momentarily and then searched on until she found a supplier of freeze dried leaves. There had been some debate about their effectiveness in creating the end product, but that had meant in the creation of cigarettes. Dawn’s purpose was a simpler one. Boil the leaves down and make nicotine tar – apparently an extremely effective poison. It was a process that gave off a horrific scent; a smell that had secured her a beating from Fred when her ill conceived excuse for its presence was that she had burnt his dinner.

Dried and mixed with strong fresh coffee, even after several tries Dawn could smell nothing more than the expected aroma.

‘Are you coming Dawn?’ Gail called. For a moment Dawn was lost in her plan and hadn’t noticed that everyone was

assembled and waiting. Placing the drinks on a large tray, and quickly emptying the chocolate muffins onto a plate, Dawn made her way over to the circle and put down the tray on the small formica table at the centre of the room. As people reached forward and took their coffees, Dawn breezed over to the door, and making it look like she was shutting it so they wouldn't be disturbed, she clicked the Yale lock and then, pretending to wipe a scuffmark off her shoe, she dropped the security bolt on the bottom of the door.

No one was watching Dawn, they were all involved in their usual 'should I, shouldn't I', banter over the muffins – 'well I really shouldn't' Dawn heard one of the women say, though even without turning around, she knew that her colleague had picked up a cake anyway.

'And that's why you'll always be fat,' Dawn thought and then with the grace of a bee flying on the wind, she moved back over to the circle and took her seat.

'What's wrong with the coffee, it tastes funny.' Gail was the first to question the beverage; her tone laced with its usual animosity.

'It's a new brand, a bit stronger, thought it might be a nice pick-me-up for everyone in the morning – I'm sure if you try the cake, it'll take some of the taste away.'

Gail complied, but before she had chance to close her mouth around the cake she started to cough. She grabbed at the top of her blouse, the poison tar made its victim very hot, Dawn remembered as Gail clawed at the buttons of her top.

Helen stood to come to her aid, but she had bit and swallowed down most of her cake. She took a single step forward and coughed so hard that blood shot from her mouth and covered Gail's face. People screamed.

Helen reached into her mouth and pulled something out, a tiny metal hook shone in the bright sunlight that flooded the room.

Before she could work out what she was holding, Helen dropped to her knees then fell sideways holding her body in a tight foetal position – she shook violently for a second then lay still.

The second poison seemed to work much faster than the first. Dawn had prepared two; it was the only way she could be sure she'd get everyone. Her colleagues were such a fussy bunch that from one week to the next you couldn't tell what they would be excluding from their diet.

The second poison was Curare; one of the world's strongest, it included many elements but most notable were extractions from South American tree frogs and preparations made from the bark of trees in the Loganiaceae family. With the raise in homeopathy, the ingredients were easy enough to find, and orders to several different suppliers had ensured sufficient quantities.

Dawn took her bag and stepped towards the locked door, there she took out and put on a butchers apron before holding back to watch as the poisons went to work. The Curare didn't work by ingestion, it required direct blood entry, so rather than bake it into muffins Dawn had coated tiny fishing hooks in the fluid, allowed them to dry and then forced several into each cake.

After one or two initial screams the collected group had broken into coughing. Two women in their late fifties had dropped in seconds, the nicotine tar bringing on heart attacks.

The Curare had dropped Helen, who had stopped moving, though her eyes were still open. Dawn remembered that the horror of Curare poisoning was that the victim is very much aware of what's happening until they lose consciousness, which can take twenty minutes or more in a strong individual. Watching the terrified look in Helen's eyes, Dawn was sure she could feel every stab of the progressive

paralysis destroying her body.

Including Helen, five of the women looked, if not quite there yet, dead. Gail was on her knees coughing up blood and the last two women who had made it to the kitchen and were fighting over a carton of milk, hoping to soak up the poison. Neither had eaten cake and must have spat out the coffee when they realised what was happening.

Clare and Violet, usually the best of friends, were struggling to get the milk carton back to their lips. Both had taken a large gulp but clearly deemed it insufficient. Dawn's claw hammer caved in the back of Clare's skull, the force of her swing forced the larger of the two ladies forward. The hammer killed her instantly. Violet, now pinned to the floor by her long-time friend, fought to get free. Dawn spun the hammer around in her hand, which brought the large claw to the fore.

Violet didn't have the chance to finish screaming , 'no!' before Dawn brought the claw down, smashing its two heavy prongs through her forehead piercing her brain. Dawn waited for the body to stop jerking then, placing a knee on Clare's back, she used the leverage to free the tool. The prongs snapped away most of Violet's nose and part of her lips compelling Dawn to bash the hammer on the side of the sink. Violet's nose fell with a wet thud against the silver metal. Near perfect, it looked like a donor nose waiting to be

attached to a burns victim.

Realising that she had taken longer than expected, Dawn rushed from colleague to colleague giving one swift blow – two for Helen – on the heads of each. She then dragged them all to the middle of the room and from under the sink she brought out a container of petrol that she'd left there weeks earlier. She'd decanted the liquid into a bleach container knowing that as she was the only one whoever cleaned, it wouldn't be disturbed.

After coating the pile of dead bodies in the foul-smelling fluid, Dawn took off the blood splattered apron and threw it on the pyre – all set to be lit later when she was ready. Then locking the door behind her, she went down the two flights of stairs to the sales area. Smiling on the way down that theirs was the only shop in the row that used the third floor for anything more than storage and then after composing herself, she opened the travel agents for business.

Chapter Five

The only real use for six-inch heels.

'How's it going?' Laurie asked the moment Dawn logged into Messenger. Dawn had long since stopped wondering what Laurie did with her time. She was always there waiting at the

other end of the chat program. If her online friend was to be believed, and Laurie had never given Dawn a reason not to believe her, then she was a receptionist for a quiet law practice. Just one elderly solicitor, who played golf more than he actually worked, but he didn't want to give up the office as that would mean he had to spend more time with his wife. This meant that during a typical 9-5 day, Laurie had the freedom to play online. At night, Laurie's time online was often sporadic. Her husband, another heavy drinker, needed her to be sat at his side if he was in the house and not at the pub. It seemed he couldn't even watch TV without her there for company – still, Laurie had her own supply of Curare and a lunchtime meeting with her husband.

'It seems to be going ok. I managed to take one out on the way to work – a dirty whore who was clearly asking for it.' Dawn sipped her green tea between typing and enjoyed the quiet of the office. She hadn't transferred the phones back downstairs so the place was blissfully silent.

'Just one so far?' A smiley accompanied her question, a face with a confused look and a question mark for a hat.

'Oh no, I've managed far more than one – I've taken out most of my office.' Dawn smiled as she thought about the pile of corpses lying upstairs, 'they all deserved it,' she said to the empty room.

‘Not Katie though?’ This time the smiley had a wide open mouth and little hands covering its eyes.

Dawn found smileys irritating.

‘No, I sent Katie off. It wasn’t nice of me to worry her about her mother but far better than her going like the others.’

‘Was there a lot of mess?’

‘Some, but I put on an apron, and managed to keep it off my shoes – I’ve already changed them once this morning, I don’t want to do it again so soon.’

‘Side note, did you get your copy of Serial Killer Weekly this morning? Mine didn’t arrive?’ For this message, Laurie included her favourite emoticon, a tiny figure wearing the ‘Scream’ costume holding an impossibly large knife.

‘I can’t help you there, I cancelled mine; Serial Killer, Mass Murder Profiles and CSI Weekly – I thought it best, don’t think I’ll be needing them.’ With much regret, Dawn had cleared the hiding place in the garage of back issues the week before – she’d burnt them like her dress last night, though unlike her dress, which had gone up in one session, she had so many back issues that it had taken four fires to get rid of them all. Of course, Dawn could have just had one

massive bonfire but she thought that might have attracted attention. The last thing she wanted was a nosy neighbour poking their head over the fence and catching her with her stash.

Dawn loved her magazines, they fed her compulsion for killing for years without her having to go out and actually kill anyone. However, like any good psychopath she had killed several pets over the years. She had never been entirely convinced of her reasons – was it something she enjoyed or just did because the literature told her she was meant to in order to belong to the club. From a very young age, Dawn had been obsessed by death, spending many hours in the library reading case studies on the world's most evil – though all the time hiding the books in brightly coloured children's fiction.

She'd read many times that serial killers will often start killing pets while they were still children. Dawn had never killed as a child – she'd read this fact early on in life and was determined to prove the psychiatrists wrong. On her 18th birthday, she gutted the Labrador that belonged to her first boyfriend; his cheating on her had felt like sufficient reason. She had taken the dog's heart and eyes. The heart she kept hidden at the bottom of the freezer until 'A' level graduation day, when she wrapped it up in bright gold wrapping paper and sent it to him as a gift. The greetings card with a picture of a lab on the front had felt like a nice touch. Even though

this had been in a time before CSI, Dawn had worn gloves and so given the police nothing to go on. And no one suspected a petite girl such as her.

The eyes, she had kept in a box in her room. She'd wanted them as a trophy, something else she'd read serial killers were prone to doing – she only kept them until they started to smell.

'So, what now?' Laurie asked bringing them back on topic.

'Well, I've passed the first two on my list – Beverley Allitt and Myra Hindley – and after finishing off the staff here that brings me up to ten, so I'm drawing with Rosemary West. Only ten more to go and it's not even ten in the morning. I'm sure I can manage another ten before seven tonight.'

'No worries there, is your booking still on for this afternoon?' Dawn was about to ask which booking she meant, when the smiley of a fit muscled teddy bear jogged her memory.

'Yes, he's all sorted.' Dawn smiled; she had flicked through page after page of handsome fit men looking for one who made her feel the most wanton. She had forgotten what sex felt like. On numerous occasions, Fred had rolled on top of her, thrust for a few seconds, not actually caring that he hadn't quite made it inside her, and then cum on her thigh.

Not that she would have noticed if he had made it inside her, apart from his lack of endowment Fred's immense bulk meant that once he was on top she often feared she would be suffocated. She had made sure the man she'd chosen for this afternoon was only large in the right area.

'Will he have to go, too?' Laurie asked.

'I think he will, it'll help build the number, plus it would seem a bit hypocritical of me if I didn't, given that I killed a female whore this morning. Right, I have to go, Laurie, customers, I'll check in later.'

Dawn logged off just as a smiling couple came through the door. Dawn wasn't entire sure why they were smiling. The woman, in her late twenties or early thirties – it was hard to tell under all the fake orange tan – was wearing a pair of pink Lycra sweat-pants. Dawn didn't believe in Lycra sweat-pants, in fact she didn't believe in Lycra anything. The only people Lycra suited was size zero actresses and only then when the Lycra had been made into a one piece outfit for a futuristic melodrama. The woman, who sat down and introduced herself as Shanty, certainly wasn't a size zero. Her husband, on the other hand did actually resemble a 0. He appeared to have no neck and his limbs looked stuck on like a child's play dough model of a man – Brian.

‘Brian and Shanty’, Dawn thought and just knew there was a Ford Escort somewhere with that plastered at the top of the windscreen.

This was the typical fare for the small travel agents. In Dawn’s mind the people who came in their shop were usually either too stupid to find a better deal on the internet or too intimidated to go into one of the large ‘Travel Supermarkets.’

‘We wanna go somewhere sunny, in winter like, saw that one you’ve got in the window – 200 quid, you still got that one?’ Dawn watched the words crawl from Shanty’s mouth. Each one begging that the wretched woman wouldn’t continue to mutilate their brothers and sisters.

In fear of coming across as a ‘Little Britain’ character, something Shanty and Brian, who was now digging for treasure inside his nose, would surely pick up on, Dawn hesitated and then said: ‘Sadly, all our winter sun holidays at that price have gone – the cheapest we have now are around the £400 mark.’ Shanty’s face dropped, her smile replaced by growling snarl that reminded Dawn of a dog when you’d try to take away its bone.

‘Why do you keep the sign in the window then? That makes no sense, just conning people – who do you think we are that we can afford £400 quid?’ Dawn wanted to say that she

thought the woman was a tramp and that she thought it amazing anyone could save even £200 pounds from their benefit cheques. She didn't, instead she smiled and said 'you're completely right...' Dawn struggled for a second with the name 'Shanty' she just couldn't understand why anyone would call a child such an odious name. '...it's our manager; she makes us leave the cards up in the windows long after the holiday has sold.'

Dawn then offered up her brightest smile, one that stretched her small thin face and for a second made her look completely insane and then said, 'but I'm the only one in today and you know what, you look like a nice couple – come with me, I'll do you a big favour.'

'And society along with it', Dawn added silently as she got up out of her chair, picked up her bag and walked through to the back of the building.

At the bottom of the first flight of stairs Dawn said, 'we have a staff room up here where we keep all the best offers. Our manager likes to give them out to her friends first, so they tend to stay on the board for at least a week before we put the price up and sell them.' Dawn was amazed at how easily the lies were flying from her mouth. She'd practiced how she'd get customers up to the store room many times, but she expected it to feel more stilted. It didn't, it felt exciting, somehow right.

Dawn bounded up the stairs, she was going to let the couple go first but they hesitated at the bottom of the rather steep steps, almost as if they needed to ready themselves before they braved the thirty-step climb.

Inside the room Dawn reached into her bag and took out her weapon of choice. Shanty entered the room first, with only a cursory glance at Dawn she headed for a table holding stacks of out-of-date travel brochures – not to read them, to lean on them as she got her breath back.

Brian followed seconds later, though the sound of his panting breath entered the room long before he did, in the same way as his white-vest covered belly, entered long before his face. At first sight of his gut, Dawn swung the axe from her bag and sunk the blade deep into his stomach. Raking the blade after entry to make sure she did enough damage to his stomach so that the acid there ran riot. Blood started to ooze from the wound; it ran over his fingers which were pulling at the axe, trying to pry the blade free. As he pulled, more and more acid seeped out of his stomach and into the deep, penetrating gash – and then the burning started. The acid began to devour Brian's flesh, a pain so extreme that he dropped to his knees and began to scream. In her delectation of the events unfolding before her, Dawn was grateful that the shop building was old Victorian stock with thick, sound-proof walls. Plus, since the overpass had been build outside, any noise was masked by the heavy roar

of HGVs thundering by. And of course in the times we live, even if someone did hear screaming they were unlikely to muster the energy to do anything about it.

‘Shit! NO! You crazy bitch what have you done!’ Shanty yelled as she too dropped to her knees. She wrapped her arms around Brian and pulled him to her covering her top and sweat pants in blood. ‘Those stains will never come out,’ Dawn thought, and then smiled at her pointless musings.

‘Please, sweetheart, stop screaming, I’ll get you some help.’ Shanty pleaded

‘He’s screaming because his flesh is being eaten away by his own stomach acid. Doctors say it’s the closest thing you can get to being embalmed alive.’ From the noise Shanty was making it appeared that she was trying to outdo Brian’s screams. They were like those babies who cried for nothing, Dawn remembered every good mother’s war-cry, ‘if you keep that up, I’ll give you something to cry for!’

With that thought crisp in her mind, Dawn reached into her bag and said, ‘maybe if you’re going to cry so much you might want to feel what your husband’s going through.’ Dawn’s words were calm and serene amongst the chaos. Shanty looked up at her killer, her tears stopped for a second and the scowl returned.

Stepping up to one knee she started to lunge for Dawn. Before Shanty made it onto both feet a vial of liquid hit her in the face. She raised her hands up to her burning flesh, rubbing at the skin, which did nothing to ease the mind-numbing pain; instead skin just came away in her hands.

‘Hydrochloric acid’, Dawn read off the label, glad that she’d gone to the trouble of buying an acid and a base. From the flesh on Shanty’s hands, she thought it a toss-up which of the two gave the best results. Shanty was back on her knees, bent over her husband who now lay prone on the floor clutching his stomach in agony.

‘What a pitiful sight you both make.’ Neither answered, Shanty was pulling at her face, trying to stop the acid burning further. Her hands were covered in large chunks of flesh and the entire room smelt of sulphur as the acid burnt up the keratin in Shanty’s hair.

Kicking Shanty to one side, Dawn reached down and with a foot on Brian’s chest she freed the axe. Brian screamed and tried to sit up, but the pain allowed him to move his head no further than an inch off the ground. Shanty managed to sit all the way up, but with one swift movement Dawn kicked her in the head, making sure to use the blade of her foot like she’d been taught in her self-defence class. The kick knocked

Shanty back to the floor and dazed her long enough for Dawn to plant the axe in the centre of Brian's forehead. The cracking of his skull echoed around the room rousing a scream from Shanty, 'how could you? What the fuck's wrong with you?' Shanty yelled but the acid had burnt away her lips and most of her tongue so the words were even less understandable than her usual destruction of the language.

Freeing the axe, Dawn wrapped it in plastic and popped it back into her bag. Then from out of her bag of tricks she pulled a sparkling gold stiletto with a metal-capped six-inch heel.

Shanty screamed, 'No', the word mixed with blood and a portion of her tongue and spat onto her Lycra top.

'I'm sorry, Shanty; it has to be this way. The last thing I want to be is predictable. The press are all too quick to label and I don't want them to think I only have one killing style. I don't want to be 'The Ice pick killer' or some other such concoction. I want to be like Mary Ann Cotton.' As Dawn ran through her monologue, Shanty was trying to back away but every movement sent a fresh blast of pain arcing throughout her body.

Dawn watched her victim move, she looked into what was left of her eyes and continued, 'not that I expect you to know who that is but they thought she killed over twenty; but the

best thing is that they weren't sure. I want them to give my murders the full CSI treatment, complete with pointless montages and still not be 100% sure I did them all.'

'You're mad,' Shanty spluttered.

'Wow, and here's me thinking you were completely dumb!' Dawn stepped over Brian, whose evacuations were now stinking up the room and with a vicious stamp, brought her foot down on Shanty's chest – levelling her victim and forcing her to gasp for breath. Without removing her foot Dawn held the spike of the heel just above Shanty's right eye – she went for the eye that hadn't been too damaged by the acid, hoping Shanty would see what was coming.

'Please... please, no, I'm pregnant!' Shanty pleaded. Dawn hesitated for the briefest of moments; debating whether she had time to hack Shanty open to see if she was serious. But the milky look in her victim's eyes, told Dawn that Shanty was lying in one last desperate bid for her life. Without any further hesitation Dawn lifted her foot from Shanty's chest and stamped down on the stiletto. Not that Shanty would hear, the six-inch spike killing her instantly, but as she stamped Dawn said, 'if you are pregnant, then I think I'm doing the poor thing a favour; saving it from having parents like you.' The second half of the sentence accompanied a second stamp – just for good measure.

Chapter Six

Thank goodness for the summer sales.

‘So, what criteria did those two meet?’ Laurie asked, she had clearly been waiting for Dawn’s return.

‘I think they matched two; Degrading the Gene Pool and Destroying the English Language.’ Dawn was back at her desk. She’d moved the two bodies to the centre of the store room and covered them too with petrol. She had then changed her dress and shoes – thank goodness for Marks and Spencer’s spring sales and work providing her with a locker to store several changes of outfit. Then with the storeroom door locked she had returned to work. It was now just after 11am and her visitor would be here really soon.

‘Both of those seem fair enough and that takes you past Rosemary West and well on the way to your target. Have you given any more thought to the reasons you’ll give if you get caught? You know you can’t just plead insanity?’

‘I know, I know, the McNaghten Rules: If I cover up my crimes I know what I’m doing is wrong and if I know the difference between right and wrong I can’t be insane. Poo to that rule. I could have just killed and not covered it up?’ Dawn mused at the idea as she drank another cup of green

tea – it helped calm her nerves.

‘What fun would that be if you just killed randomly, you’d be like one of those common postal workers, who start shooting just because they can’t get their own way – no one wants that!’ Laurie wrote, her smiley, a teddy bear with a rather large handgun.

‘You’re right but it might have been fun just to plough down the high street running over whoever got in my way. But then I’d have no way of checking them against my criteria.’

‘Perhaps you could go down the route of the French nobleman Gilles de Rais; I’m sure when asked why he tortured and killed countless he said, “I did it entirely for my own pleasure and physical delight and for no other intention or end.” How perfect does that sound?’ Again the message was accompanied with a smiley face, this one a yellow smiling face wearing a French beret – for Dawn, each smiley grated just a little bit more than the last.

‘Wasn’t he a paedophile though? I’m not sure I want to steal my reasons from someone who can’t keep his hands off of young children.’

‘Good point, I’m...’ Dawn didn’t let Laurie finish, out of the corner of her eye she noticed Katie walking up the road

towards the shop.

‘Katie’s back!’ Dawn blasted off, unsure what she expected Laurie to do about it.

‘I thought you sent her away for the day?’

‘I did, I thought that once she found out her mum was ok, she would take the rest of the day off – tits!’ Dawn wasn’t accustomed to profanity but she really felt the situation required it.

‘I best go, she’s here, I’ll sort something out.’

‘You’ll never believe this; it was a trick – someone pretending to be a doctor. No wonder they didn’t want to speak to me. I bet it was one of my so-called friends playing a joke.’ Katie said as she stormed through the door.

‘Does that mean your mother’s ok?’ Dawn said, racking her brains for an explanation for the lack of staff.

‘Yeah, my mother’s fine, just a bit upset that someone claimed she wasn’t – I don’t suppose you remember much about the voice?’ Katie took a seat at her desk across the room from Dawn, for the minute she seemed contented to wrap herself in the mystery of the phone call, giving Dawn

time to think.

‘It was a man’s voice, he sounded like a doctor, or at least he sounded like he knew what he was talking about. I can’t tell you any more than that, sadly. Cruel joke though, I thought you might have just taken the rest of the day off? It’s not like you owe our mardy Gail anything.’ Dawn drank down the rest of her green tea, trying to keep her mind from panicking and stopping her thinking clearly.

‘I thought about it, I was just going to say that it was a joke but, by the time I got over to my mother’s to check she was ok, it was too late to come back into work. But you know what Gail’s like, she would have wondered why I didn’t just call mum and then docked me a day’s pay. Where is she by-the-way?’ Katie looked around, finally noticing the empty office and added, ‘where is everyone?’

‘Well the five old dears...’ the politer of the two names given to the five oldest women in the office (women who always backed one another up and woe betide you if you got on the wrong side of any of them as they had wickedly sharp tongues) ‘... the five old witches have gone on a training course, it seems Gail wasn’t happy with how slow they were with the new online ordering system.’

‘Oh, I bet they were happy when she told them that!’ Katie said as she logged herself into the same system.

‘They weren’t and they really weren’t happy to go on the training on a Sunday. Still, it is often a slow day; our place being one of the few shops in the town which actually bothers to open on the Sabbath.’ Again, Dawn was amazed how easily the lies flowed from her mouth; she wondered if this was how it felt to be a man.

‘And the others?’ Katie asked while jabbing at her computer, it doing what it usually did, taking forever to login.

‘Oh it’s been one of those odd mornings. Helen started to feel really ill; I’m not saying she was faking it but she looked ok to me. Still, Gail decided to take her home, otherwise it would have taken her hours on the bus with the Sunday service. And Betty has just gone off to the supermarket – she said she had some birthday presents to get while Gail’s away and all that.’

Dawn was surprised that Katie was buying her story so readily, but then she was still only nineteen and, as a teenager, she had very little concern for things that didn’t affect her directly. Sadly, Dawn thought that used to be true only of teenagers, but these days it could be applied to almost everybody.

‘Well, if Gail’s away, I best go put the kettle on.’ Katie’s words forced Dawn to leap to her feet, a little too quickly, but

Katie didn't appear to notice. If Dawn had thought first she would have known that she was the only person who ever made a drink, so what Katie had meant was 'why don't you pop up two flights of stairs and make me a drink? It's not like you're twice my age or anything.'

As Dawn walked up the stairs she thought that perhaps there was a reason to kill Katie after all. One of the criteria did say it was ok if the person was lazy.

'But I like Katie,' Dawn said to the empty stairwell.

'And I like you, too,' Katie said from behind her, Dawn hadn't noticed her following. Dawn's shocked expression forced the teenager to add, 'oh don't worry, I locked the door and put the closed sign over, if Gail won't be back for a while I thought we could have a nice drink and a gossip.'

Dawn smiled and carried on walking up the stairs. 'Reason two' she thought, 'I don't like gossip, it's vulgar.' Her numerous chats with Laurie flashed in the front of her mind, but she quickly wrote those off as just general conversation and discussions. Gossip used to be just for old people over the back fence talking about what 'her at number 42' had been up to. But now, thanks to women whose lips are anything but loose (Botox having a lot to answer for), gossip is the primary social pastime – that's when people weren't watching other people on TV gossiping.

Dawn hadn't planned for this one, though she did have her bag with her and in it she still had all manner of tricks. Walking up the last flight of stairs, she weighed up her options. She could open the staffroom door, let Katie in and when she'd done screaming she could beat her to death with the hammer, or go to town with the axe – done, and done she thought. Not the Katie screaming part, but then Shanty had done enough of that and Dawn could feel the beginnings of a headache.

'I could let her go,' she thought, but as she approached the top of the stairs her thoughts concluded, 'too late for that.' Then, after pausing a second in the guise of catching her breath, she waited for Katie to reach the step behind her and then, in one complete movement, she spun around, placed her hands on the startled girl's shoulders and pushed. Dawn followed after as the teenager toppled backwards. Katie reached out for the banister, missed, and within a few thunderous moments she was in a pile at the bottom of the stairs – moaning. As she hit the floor the cracking of bone sent a tingle down Dawn's spine. Katie's arm had broken as she'd collided with the floor – bone now jutted through the skin just below the elbow.

'Did I feel polyester in that top?' Dawn asked as she followed Katie down the stairs, 'how can you wear polyester so close to your skin like that – did your mother not tell you only cheap tramps wear polyester?' Katie, battered from the

fall, squirmed at the base of the stairs, drifted in and out of consciousness. Dawn had been hoping that she would break her neck on the fall, saving her having to think of an inventive way of killing her, but that seemed too much to hope for.

‘Oh it’s worse than I thought,’ Dawn said after reaching down and pulled the label out from the back of Katie’s blouse, it read ‘80% polyester and 20% Lycra’

‘Oh... oh... I have an idea!’ Dawn said, after noticing they were standing at the side of the storeroom. She took out the key, and with a cheery smile on her face – one that remained despite the foetid odour Shanty and Brian’s bodies were giving off – Dawn picked up a brochure from the stockpile of back issues.

The thickest was the ‘Far Off Lands’ brochure, which seemed fitting as that was where Dawn had sent so many people today.

Re-locking the door, she watched as Katie struggled to regain her senses. She tried to speak, but nothing more than garbled pleas made it out of her bruised mouth. As Dawn rolled up the brochure she thought about how much she was looking forward to hearing one of her victims beg properly. So far they had all done it through some form of impairment which, for Dawn, put a dampener on the moment.

Katie started to mummer, 'please,' but the word was stifled by Dawn's insertion of the rolled up brochure.

'I saw this on that TV show "Bones" once,' Dawn said. Though Katie was a petite girl, being starved of oxygen seemed to give some people extra strength, which in this case required Dawn to use all her strength to keep the rolled up brochure in place. 'Of course on Bones, the murderer set the girl on fire afterwards but one of the science geeks worked out that the flames hadn't killed her asphyxiation had – clever show that. You about done? This looked much easier on TV.'

It wasn't working properly, the brochure was cutting into the lining of Katie's mouth, and as she choked for air, blood splattered over Dawn's tiring arms.

'You dirty... Dirty little cow!' Dawn screamed as she looked at the mess Katie was making. Some of the blood had even stained her bright flower print dress. Dawn pulled the rolled up paper out of the teenager's mouth and before the girl was able to take in her first complete gasp of air, Dawn threw the brochure to one side and then tightened her hands into hammers and began pounding them into Katie's face. The girl's nose breaking acted as fuel to Dawn's growing fire, forcing her to slam her fists down harder and harder.

‘You dirty, dirty cow; look what you’ve made me do! I didn’t plan to kill you. Too stupid, it’s not my fault you’re too stupid to stay away.’

Pound, pound!

Blood hit the walls around the dying girl, forming patterns a modern artist would claim as a masterpiece.

‘You’re just like the rest of them! They think I don’t have this in me. Think I’m just a tiny wasp, best ignored or batted away!’ Tears welled at the corner of Dawn’s eyes; any ability to cry had long since been smashed off the dead teenager’s face.

Pound, pound!

‘He’s not laughing now, my fat freak of a husband. He beat me for years, and what did I do, I let him get away with it. Let him think he was screwing me, when he was just bashing his tiny thing into my thigh! No more. No one will laugh at me any more’ Dawn looked down at the mess. Katie’s face had vanished; a mix of skull, gray brain matter and blood, lots and lots of blood, now glared back at her. After letting one last fist splash gray mush and bone onto the wall, Dawn stopped as abruptly as she’d begun. Her tears stopped too; she took a breath and said, ‘oh dear, oh dear oh dear – I

think I'm going to need another change of dress.'

Chapter Seven

The golden age of cinema.

'I thought you liked Katie? Still, polyester – you did the right thing. And, so what if you lost it a little, it's good to let go once in a while. Plus, that brings the count up to thirteen, and going a little psycho can only help your reputation,' Laurie typed.

Dawn had explained what happened; how it had taken bleach and elbow work to get rid of the noticeable stains, though her dress was ruined. Still, she'd changed and now felt fresh and summery again. Katie's body now lay on the pile with Shanty and Brian, doused in petrol and ready for the big fire.

'There's a man coming this way!' Dawn typed, her fingers tripping over the letters with hopeful anticipation.

'What does he look like? Young, old, fit?' Laurie replied.

'Tall, fit, short hair – neat, he looks neat, I like neat.' The man was still walking down the hill towards the store. Dawn started smiling, she wanted to make sure the first thing he

saw was her big, bright smile – she looked maniacal.

‘Age?’

‘Young, I’d say around the 25 mark.’ Dawn’s smile widened still further; he was definitely heading towards the shop.

‘That’s young, but then you did say you wanted someone who reminded you of Fred in his prime.’ Laurie said.

‘Believe me; Fred never looked like this even in his prime. Best go, he’s here.’

‘Hi there, I’m looking for Dawn, is she around?’ The man looked more like a boy to Dawn close up. He could barely have been more than 23. His face, though squared from hours in the gym, looked warm and welcoming. To reply Dawn nearly had to extend her neck fully – the boy was tall, well over six foot and well over a foot taller than her.

‘I’m Dawn.’

The rent-a-stud smiled, looked around to make sure they were as alone as the store suggested and then said, ‘I’m here to take you for coffee and perhaps to buy you some flowers.’ This would have seemed like a strange thing to say if you’d been an outsider listening into the conversation. But

to Dawn it made perfect sense, it was in fact the code sentence she'd filled in as the website had requested. It removed ambiguity, allowing both parties to be sure who they were talking to.

'I only have an extended lunch hour, two hours max,' Dawn lied, 'I've booked us into a hotel not far from here, we can walk it if that's ok with you?' The whore introduced himself as Adam and said that all sounded fine. His tone was sure but calming, he made Dawn feel comfortable, but then that was of course part of his job.

'Can you just wait for me outside, I have to set the alarms, and I'm the only one in today.' Adam agreed and went back out onto the street.

With the door closed behind him, Dawn grabbed her bag and rushed up to the third floor. She opened the door, held her breath against the stench. She then threw some simple belongings onto the pyre, earrings, a broach, both of which she'd bound nail clippings to in the hope of melting in DNA evidence, she wanted, at least initially, the police to think that she'd gone up in the blaze. Once done she took a fire lighter out of her bag, lit it and set it on top of the pile of bodies. She thought the fire lighter was best, having read that petrol doesn't catch fire as quickly as the TV would have you believe. Though in this case the TV was right – the pyre went up in a whoosh that forced Dawn back towards the

door. She fought through the smoke briefly to retrieve a bottle of white wine from the fridge. She then watched for a moment, glad given the smoke, that she'd disabled the smoke alarms a few days before and then rushed down to set the second set of bodies alight.

Her work done, she grabbed her umbrella out of her bag – not the yellow one she had used this morning, that had gone on the fire, this was white with yellow daises to match her dress – and then after actually setting the alarms, she went out to meet Adam.

'Is it going to rain?' Adam asked, he was holding a hand to his forehead to protect his eyes from the sun as he looked up at the beautiful blue sky.

'Oh no, the sun's bright today and I burn easily that's all.' That and the high street was plagued by CCTV. The cameras hung on every lamppost; watching, waiting and in some cases they were even fitted with speakers so they could berate passersby. Dawn hated CCTV cameras, she'd read that ancient Indians believed that a photo took away a piece of your soul and if that was the case, what damage must all the CCTV cameras do?

'Talking of burning, can you smell that? It smells like something's on fire, something nasty.'

‘Oh I’m sure it’s nothing,’ Dawn said as she started marching towards the hotel.

In the interest of staving off too much embarrassing small talk, Dawn had picked a hotel just across the bypass from the travel agents.

Her shop was one of the last in the row. The town had two rows of shops, all facing one another apart from the last couple in the row. They faced a road which led up to the bridge over the bypass. The road was noisy and didn’t lend itself to chatting. But then there wasn’t much to say. On the website under special requests/pointers, Dawn had written that too much talking made her nervous, that this was her first time so she would need a man who would take the lead and she didn’t want to be asked about her home life. This had all seemed reasonable requests which Adam had kept to; he just smiled a lot and every so often made simple comments about the weather or the roar of the traffic. The only thing he did ask of note was whether Dawn had heard about the murder this morning, a prostitute in the toilets. The police had apparently said the killing was ‘brutal’ and most likely the work of her last male punter. Given his profession this was clearly an interesting news story for him.

Adam and the hotel had already been paid online – using the old woman’s credit card (a present from a friend if

anyone asked why the name she used at reception was different to that on the booking card) – which took away any awkwardness of having to talk about money.

Inside the plush hotel lobby, Dawn asked Adam to take a seat on one of the many black leather settees while she checked them in. She had chosen the nicest hotel in town; hoping the £120 a night price tag would ensure them some privacy. She had already paid for three nights in advance, and as she wouldn't require room service, she was asked for no more confirmation of the booking than the computer printout. No passport, like the hotel would require from a foreign national, in fact she wasn't asked for any form of identification at all.

After instructing the receptionist to put a note on their file that they didn't want to be disturbed, Dawn walked back over to Adam, told him it was all sorted and then they caught the lift up to their room.

'This is nice!' Adam said after gesturing for Dawn to go into the room first and then following her in. Dawn had to agree, though she preferred traditional to contemporary styling, she did like how neat everything looked: no unnecessary fittings, clean lines. The room was more comfortable than huge. Enough room for the over-sized double bed, two bedside tables, a velvet padded chair and a desk running down the length of the wall opposite the bed, which housed

a TV and internet access point.

Adam took off his shoes and lying out on the bed he said, 'there's nothing like living in style.' Dawn forced a smile, though she was slightly disappointed that the silk bedspread was a dark red colour, she had rather hoped that all the bedding would be white – the sheets were, of course, but she wanted to cover all the bedding in blood.

'I just need to pop to the loo and I'll be ready.' Adam said, hopping off the bed and going through the door that led off the bedroom. Inside, Dawn caught a glimpse of marble, she couldn't see a bath but she really hoped it would be in there as she requested.

With the bathroom door closed, Dawn got to work. She hadn't entirely decided how she was going to kill him, a task that wouldn't be as easy as she had hoped – he was cute and made her feel maternal, which wasn't ideal given they were about to have sex.

She closed the curtains, which had blackout linings that plunged the room into near-darkness. Though she had always kept herself in shape, she was still twice the age of the lad she was going to have sex with and she didn't want him to see her in the full light of day. Rummaging in her bag she pulled out the knife she'd killed the prostitute with earlier and slid it under the mattress. She then pulled out the bottle

of wine, which despite the heat outside still felt chilled, and took the two glasses off the side, grunted that the hotel had only provided tumblers, and then filled them both. Out of her bag she took a small bag of white dust, emptied it into Adam's glass and swilled it around until the powder had dissolved.

Hearing the toilet flush, Dawn went over and sat on the bed, regardless of the colour, the silk felt inviting under her fingers. Adam came out of the bathroom looking fresh faced. He had obviously splashed water on his face and then run his fingers up through his thick, blond hair. At his hairline the water turned the blond a dark shade of gold – Dawn wanted him.

The man-whore, in her head Dawn wasn't sure what to call him, gigolo seemed too old-fashioned, rent boy too cheap and his name, Adam, just seemed too personal. Whore, at the end of the day suited as he was nothing better than the woman she'd put-down this morning. Dawn put the urge to lash out, out of her mind as Adam walked over and stood in front of her. She handed him the glass of wine which he drank down in two gulps.

The whore's tight, fitted t-shirt just met the top of his distressed jeans. Through the join Dawn could make out a faint line of blond pubic hair that led down to where she wanted to be. Adam reached down and placed his hands on

her arms as if to raise Dawn to her feet. She didn't comply instead Dawn placed one hand on Adam's stomach, to signal that she was ok as she was and a second hand went to the button's of his jeans. Beneath the fibres of his shirt Dawn could feel his taut body. She ran her fingers over the humps and lines that formed his stomach muscles.

Warmth ran down her spine, penetrating her body, jetting from her back to the newly moist fire between her legs. The ease with which Adam's jean button popped open made Dawn's morality sensor flare and with the realisation that he wasn't wearing underwear, it was all she could do to stop herself leaping to her feet and screaming, 'WHORE!'

She managed to restrain herself, the erection that bounced free of his jeans, its warm musky odour, proved too much of a distraction. Even after straining her jaw, Dawn struggled to get more than its head into her mouth. Adam's penis pulsed; Dawn's tiny hands making it look even bigger than it's already impressive size. After a few more attempts Dawn resorted to licking up and down the member's length, swapping between wanking with both hands and licking down to his balls.

Being a professional, Adam didn't like to see his clients struggle, he watched carefully making sure she was enjoying herself, poised to move on as soon as she was ready. All of this was a change for Dawn, Adam was fit and

handsome, had a cock big enough so that he didn't piss over three of his fingers and apart from a warm manly odour it didn't smell. Plus, Dawn could actually reach it; she could suck the end, lick the shaft and wrap her tiny hand around it without her finger tips meeting. All the time, it seemed to her like such a shame he had to die – but then a whore was a whore.

Fred on the other hand should have been killed years ago and it was only by some kind of miracle that nature hadn't killed him off decades before given his copious amounts of drinking, his obesity and lack of any exercise bar dragging his fat arse out of his car, a task that often left him severely short of breath.

The last full blowjob Dawn had given him, she'd had to wet her fingers and hold them near her face. Fred had pushed her onto the bed and knelt over her trying his best to force his cock towards her mouth. With his huge bulk and tiny penis, Fred hadn't been able to get his knob close enough for Dawn to actually suck it. But he'd been drunk, and kept thrusting and thrusting, grabbing at her hair and screaming, 'come on you skinny bitch get my fucking cock down your throat.' The only thing Dawn had in her throat was vomit. Wrapping wet fingers around his cock had done the trick, she'd only needed to wet them once, Fred hadn't lasted more than 30 seconds.

Dawn took one last slow lick from base to tip and then looked up at Adam, who had been watching diligently. Every so often he had let out a soft moan to let her know she was doing a good job.

Adam, again put his hands on her shoulders, this time she let him lift her and gently move her onto the bed. He moved her to the centre; Dawn didn't like facing the wrong way, it seemed wrong somehow to lay crossways when the bed wasn't designed for that use. Still, she didn't protest, instead she raised her head to watch as Adam dropped and stepped out of his jeans, he then took off his t-shirt and seemed to hover there for a second, as if to let Dawn admire her purchase.

Adam took off Dawn's white pumps, and then slowly ran his fingers up and under her dress, lifting the material as he went, he pushed forward, Dawn lifted and let him take the dress all the way over her head, leaving her in only a white silk camisole and bra. His fingers, tender and warm returned to Dawn's thighs, closely followed by his tongue. A tongue strong and determined, working its way up towards her damp, wanton hole. Dawn ran her fingers along Adam's strong arms, over his biceps and round past his triceps as they tensed to hold his body in a press-up position as he worked his tongue up her inner thigh. Dawn looked down at her strong man, money well spent. She wanted this, needed this.

Adam looked up at her and smiled, then without warning, his eyes rolled backwards revealing the whites which gave him the impression of a man possessed. His arms buckled and he dropped forward, his face landing on Dawn's stomach.

'No, no! This isn't meant to happen yet!' Dawn screamed at the empty room, 'it's not meant to kick in for an hour! AN HOUR!' Dawn had gone with diluted chloral hydrate as her sedative of choice, she hadn't wanted to be so obvious as to use Rohypnol, or as cheap as to use GHB. Plus, the latter would have ruined a decent white wine, its salty addition doing nothing to complement Australia's best.

'Well, this just isn't fair.' Dawn said as she pushed her way out from under Adam. She checked to see if he still had an erection and if something was salvageable; sadly not.

'Fine! Back to my plan' Dawn said, aware suddenly that she was talking to herself, though having someone else in the room seemed to make it more acceptable, even if they were unconscious.

After taking a couple of gulps from her wine glass, to prepare herself for the upcoming exertion, Dawn took the room's only chair and positioned it in the space between the bed and the desk. She wanted to ensure that she could move freely around it. Rolling Adam to the end of the bed

Dawn placed his legs over the chair, then using them as a lever, she dragged his naked body into an upright position. It wasn't until she'd used plastic ties to bind him to the chair that he stopped falling sideways – his arms tight behind the chair back and legs strapped in place.

After gagging his mouth with a balled up sock – from her bag, she didn't want to use one someone had been wearing – and tying it in place with a thick strip of fabric, Dawn went back over to the bed, lay down and took a well-earned rest.

After twenty minutes of staring blankly at the ceiling, thinking of nothing more than how it could do with a coat of paint, Dawn got up from the bed, took her wine tumbler with her and after rinsing it thoroughly in the bathroom sink she filled it up with water and walked back through to the bedroom.

Standing in front of the handsome prostitute, Dawn wished that her life had been different. She wished that she hadn't fallen for a drunk, wished that her only daughter hadn't left the country as soon as she'd been old enough and most of all she wished that she didn't have a perpetual compulsion to kill. Well not just kill, more she needed to see the pain on the faces of her victims. It somehow made the world seem a fairer place. When she saw someone or for that matter something suffer, her mind calmed. To Dawn the world had always been cruel and unrelenting and killing something evened the score for her.

In the geriatric ward, when she'd sealed her fingers over her father's nose and mouth she had watched with a smile as his eyes screamed for mercy. He was weak, in there because of a second heart attack, though they did think he would recover and at 68 have plenty more years left. He'd been a doting father when Dawn had been a child, always showing her special attention. But after Dawn's mother had died a few years before – in her sleep, natural causes – her father had shacked up with another woman. They were living in sin and, if it was a sin in the eyes of Jesus, then that was good enough for Dawn. Not that she had much time for the good lord, he was letting too many things slide, but she'd decided long ago that someone still had to do his work in these New Testament times.

Adam stirred. Dawn checked the gag and then threw the cold water into his face. He spluttered, shook his head and then dazed, he opened his eyes.

'Hello, sleepy head, I thought you were never going to come around.' Adam regaining his faculties struggled against the ties. He tried to scream and to ask her what she was doing but it only came out as a stifled groan.

'There's no point fighting, those plastic ties aren't going anywhere – amazing things, as if someone invented them for kidnaps and serial killings.' At the suggestion of his own

mortality, Adam struggled again, harder this time nearly succeeding in toppling the chair. Dawn reached across to the desk where she'd moved the knife, picking it up she let the reflection of the blade fall on Adam's face and said: 'Sit still or I'll gut you like a fish,' as she finished the sentence, she moved the blade across his lower stomach, making sure she brushed the top of his penis to add impact to the gesture.

'Oh, I've always wanted to say that line. I love *Scream*, do you love it?' Dawn was smiling again, her face a picture of hell, maniacal and lost. Adam's face didn't register that he had any idea what Dawn was talking about which prompted her to continue: 'You must have seen *Scream*; it's one of the best horror films of all time. That scene at the beginning where Casey, played by Drew Barrymore, has to answer questions about scary movies, or else her boyfriend, Steve, would be gutted. I don't know the name of the actor, not sure he did much after *Scream*, but then I guess you can't when you're dead.'

Dawn looked away, took a few steps, unsure if she was mixing reality with fiction, she turned back and said, 'well, she got the questions wrong, so the killer gutted him – he was sat in a chair just like this one and the knife split the stomach dropping his innards to the floor.'

This time when she ran the knife across as to demonstrate, she pressed a little harder causing a line of blood to appear in its wake. Adam moaned at the intrusion and began to struggle again. He stopped abruptly when Dawn tapped him on his forehead with the blade, and then waved it in front of his face, like a wagging finger telling him to stop. Dawn was still caught up in thoughts of the Scream film, this time near the conclusion just before Billy Loomis went a little power crazed and cut his accomplice too deeply.

‘I know, I’m a little too old to love a teen horror so much – but then who doesn’t love horror? Blood and pain...pain.’

Dawn drifted off again, her original plan for Adam hadn’t worked out and she so wanted to feel a proper man inside her. It had been such a long time since she’d felt fulfilled or at least if she couldn’t managed that she’d settle for just being filled – plastic toys did a pretty good job but she’d paid for a chance at the real thing.

Dawn dropped to her knees and started kissing Adam’s thigh in about the same place he’d passed out kissing hers. She looked up at him and smiled with her eyes, she decided not to give him a full-faced smile as she knew that her best efforts sometimes gave the wrong impression.

She carried on kissing, moving closer to his balls. His thighs were taut, and unlike her departed husband’s you could see

there were two of them, rather than having what looked like two large white garden sacks stuffed with fat and joined in the middle.

Dawn put the knife down within easy reach and then placed one hand on each pert buttock as she worked her tongue up and over his balls. His skin felt soft under her fingers and his balls had been shaved smooth, something she'd never experienced before. With Fred she had left his balls well alone; they were covered in hair so thick it resembled brambles, and she always feared that she would find something living down there – a mouse perhaps, making its nest in the thicket.

The tool of the whore's trade stirred. Moving her tongue along his shaft Dawn liked to think that at least part of the movement was due to her diligent work. Though deep down she knew, given the unfortunate circumstances, the blue pill most male prostitutes surely took was more likely the deal maker.

When Adam was fully erect Dawn stood up, a smug look on her face, 'you weren't meant to pass out so quickly, we were meant to have sex before I killed you.' Adam's face had been calm during Dawn's hard work, as if he believed she was just a kinky bitch and this was how she got off. He took the reality like a slap across the face, but Dawn's expression changed the moment he looked like he was going to

struggle again – it told him he had better behave or there would be trouble.

Delving in her bag Dawn found her purse and took out a silver-wrapped condom. She would have much rather felt skin against skin, worrying that the latex would feel like her home entertainer with a man attached, but then Adam was a prostitute after all, a thought that nearly made Dawn take a knife to his throbbing erection instead of the condom, but she calmed herself and slid on the latex sheaf.

Standing as she was in front of her captive Dawn was glad she'd invested in new bra, cami and pants, the latter she dropped before stepping over Adam's impressive cock and taking a seat. Blood from his stomach wound stained her white silk. It streaked across her top as she rode up and down, shocking crimson red against the white.

'How could I have stayed with that fat freak so long' Dawn thought as she held onto the prostitutes strong, toned shoulders and slid up and down – a man inside her, a fit, hard man. The pleasure of such a big piece of meat mixed with a tinge of pain as she rode harder and harder.

Dawn wanted an orgasm; she wanted to explode, let out years of tension. Feel her body release under the attention of a man not just a piece of silicone rubber. A blank expression took Adam's face; his teeth were gritted as if he

was fighting his orgasm. He seemed scared of what would come next and hating himself at feeling pleasure under such tortured circumstances.

Harder and harder, Dawn forced the prostitute's meat inside her, banging her hips into his. She knew he was close but she wasn't quite there, she couldn't let go, she needed something more, a final push. Sitting down, Dawn took Adam's full length and, instead of riding up and down, she sat and ground him into her, then reaching over she picked up the knife. She knew what would do it for her, what would give her that last push.

Still grinding down, Dawn pulled Adam's head into her chest. Her small frame had little fat, and she certainly didn't have enough fat to fill out a pair of breasts. Still her B cup masked most of the prostitute's face. Dawn debated for a second then adjusted her position so that Adam's head was on her right shoulder allowing her to look down the length of his tanned back.

Adam started to tense, he was close and Dawn knew if she was going to come she would have to get started. With the knife held tight, knowing Adam was bound to start struggling at her actions, she drew the blade up from the base of his spine to his neck. Adam arched his back desperately trying to pull it away from the pain. The first cut wasn't too deep, just enough to let Dawn see blood. The second was deeper

and the third deeper still – she was close.

Placing the blade in the centre of his back, just left of his spine, Dawn started to push. The razor-shape point of the eight-inch blade had little trouble breaking the skin, the wound sent Adam bucking forward, to which Dawn replied by grinding his cock into her even harder. Each time she pushed the blade she felt his spasm inside her. Blood rushed from the wound, the blade had dug an inch deep and now, rather than push, Dawn moved the knife from side to side, doing what she could to illicit Adam's forward defensive response. She had never felt a man so deep, never felt so alive – hot, horny and alive. It was time!

With one hand she took hold of Adam's hair and pulled his head back so she could look into his face. With the other hand she began to push on the knife. She was riding again, bouncing up and down, it was time, it was now – 'yes! Yes! YES!' Dawn screamed, the whoosh of air as the blade made it through the lung, and the look of unadulterated terror on Adam's face had finally brought her to climax.

Orgasmic guilt rushed in with the orgasm, not because she had caused a pleasant young man such grievous harm but at the mess the blood and her juices had made of her silk under-garments.

‘What a waste, what an absolute waste.’ She said to Adam as she stood up and went to the bathroom to clean up, leaving him with tears running down his face that dripped onto his fading cock.

‘Are you still not dead?’ Dawn asked her fourteenth conquest. She had showered and changed and in the twenty minutes it had taken to get herself cleaned up she had expected Adam to have died. Instead he managed to look up as she walked back into the room. He was right in thinking it was too late to plead for his life so instead he had switched off, resigned himself to bleeding out.

After bouncing up and down on the spot, a look of childish glee on her face, Dawn said, ‘it’s a SCREAM baby. No, it really is, I can gut you, just like in the film – such a good film.’ The words didn’t sound right coming out of a menopausal woman’s mouth. In the film they had seemed poignant; in the dark of the hotel room they had seemed sad, though she certainly managed to capture the words’ maniacal intent.

Relishing the unexpected opportunity, Dawn took the knife back out of her bag – she’d cleaned it and put it away, still, she didn’t mind, she was happy to do a little play acting. Then doing her best to keep from getting any splatter on her dress, Dawn watched Adam’s face as she forced the knife deep into the right side of his stomach. Unlike the killer in

scream she wasn't strong enough to slice the blade across; instead she had to spend several, slow, mind-exploding, minutes cutting the knife across the dying whore's belly.

'Disappointing,' Dawn said as she pulled the blade out. She'd expected Adam's guts to fall to the floor; instead they just oozed out like emptying a can of spaghetti into a bowl. Not satisfied, Dawn pushed on Adam's head to open the wound. That did the trick, the push allowing most of his insides to fall to the floor.

Smiling, Dawn grabbed her bag, wiped the knife off on the bed and returned it to a carrier bag and then replaced it in her case. In the corridor she clipped the 'Do Not Disturb' sign over the handle and singing a few bars of 'I Get A Kick Out Of You,' she walked off towards the lifts.

Chapter Eight

Soft centre anyone?

Umbrella up, Dawn made her way across to the rental car company. Hours of thought and endless discussion with Laurie had gone into how she could get a fake driving licence – rent the car as someone else. She couldn't just steal one from the pensioners; the licence had a picture ID. In the end they realised that getting a fake ID might create a

greater paper trail than actually just going and renting a car. The former was against the law and might be traceable; the latter was a common occurrence.

The hired gray Ford Focus was ubiquitous – the perfect unseen car. It seemed a shame to have to pay out and hire a car. But the necessity soon became apparent as Dawn drove past the carpark where she had left her car. The whole area was cordoned off. The body must have been cleared away as there wasn't an ambulance, just four police cars and two dark blue transits, which Dawn guessed must have been for the forensic unit.

A tent had been set up, a base of operations, and from the traffic lights opposite where Dawn was held at red; she could see the police were asking people returning for their cars to come in for a chat. The news on the car radio had said that the local emergency services were over-extended. With two serious incidents in the one day, they'd had to call help in from the next county. There had been no mention of any bodies in the shop yet, on the last news it had only been reported as a severe fire – still, Dawn knew it was only a matter of time.

'Supermarket, services and the airport – nearly done,' Dawn said as she headed up the bypass for the hanger-sized out-of-town supermarket.

As casual as the day is long, Dawn browsed the store, moving from lane to lane picking up the odd item here and there. Within ten minutes she had shopped and was back in her car. Having parked with her bonnet close to the perimeter wall, and having checked on a number of occasions Dawn was in the best space to hide her actions from the killjoy CCTV cameras and any passersby.

Putting the rest of the arbitrary purchases in the boot, Dawn took out the huge box of chocolates, plus a smaller bag of individually wrapped chocolates and then went back and sat in the front.

Out of her bag she pulled a red pencil case covered in blue embroidered anemones. Inside were five identical syringes, each filled with a dirty brown solution. Dawn had always had an interest in poisons. She loved that it could be subtle and secretive, taken as part of a romantic pact, both parties just drifting off to sleep in each other's arms. And by complete contrast it could be explosive, deadly, killing thousands horrifically, people coughing up blood, bleeding from their eyes, dying in minutes while praying it would take seconds.

Research began early, back when her daughter still lived at home, even before Dawn knew she was going for the female serial killer record she had spend many hours digesting whatever she could find on poisons. While her precious daughter was young, Dawn would spend time reading

copious amounts of horror novels, where poisons formed part of the plot. Each year she would get the latest serial killer and murder part-works, always investing most of her time in those who chose to use the 'silent killer.' 'Silent killer' being the common strap-line used by many part-works, though from Dawn's experience this morning, she'd found her poisons of choice anything but silent.

Without removing its tamper-proof cellophane covering or opening it, Dawn turned over the large box of dark chocolate, soft centres. With a deft hand she took one of the syringes and poked the needle through the base of the cardboard, through the plastic base and with a certain practiced precision she squeezed in a measure of poison into each chocolate. It had taken several purchases before she had been able to find a box that didn't have too much wrapping and one where the chocolates weren't spread over several layers. Having Fred out at work all day and out at the pub most nights gave plenty of time for practice and preparation. She had done this so many times before she was confident that she could inject each chocolate without needing to see what she was doing.

The box contained thirty-six chocolates. It was a box aimed at lovers, rather than a box for the whole family to enjoy. On Dawn's criteria lists she had included the sin of greed. In her mind buying a box this size for two people to share was just plain greedy and the people who bought it deserved to die.

The poison of choice, more of the Curare. This time, because metal hooks weren't a practical delivery method, the poison had been mixed with dishwasher fluid. Horrendous if swallowed at the best of times, a poison that had killed many old people in nursing homes when it had inexplicably been mixed with flavour masking blackcurrant juice. It seems in recent years, bed-wetters, constant complainers and those who stink of death are no longer given the pillow treatment, instead dishwasher fluid is the disgruntled care-worker's weapon of choice.

To kill a person, a larger quantity than could be injected into chocolates, would be needed. But from the many websites that list the effects of poisons, Dawn had learnt that dishwasher fluid would quickly burn into the flesh of the throat as it's ingested, which would allow a perfect in-route for the Curare.

Injecting chocolate after chocolate, Dawn smiled at how far she'd come. As a teenager she had tried hard to lead a normal life. Her urge to kill had always been there, but society continually told her that one should fit in. Dawn tried; she married, had a child soon after marriage and busied herself with housewifely duties. In the early days, Fred had worked hard, he had drunk, but rarely to excess. Dawn had always known that it was best for her to minimise the number of people she associated with; the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, through his play 'No Exit'

said, 'hell is other people', and to Dawn there was no more certain a fact. Sartre also said, 'there is no "right and wrong" apart from human needs,' which was why Dawn was such a fan of his work. Her need was to see pain, see it in the eyes of others, cause it, to even out life's disparities. But society judged, said there were rights and wrongs, it ignored her human need. Dawn knew that if she spent too much time in the company of others her needs would have to be satisfied. As it were, Dawn had still found ways to cause pain on those who deserved it.

Neighbours, for example, who made too much noise or played their music too loudly had found their tyres slashed or bleach thrown on the bonnet of their new SUV. As a doting mother Dawn couldn't risk experimenting with poisons while she had a child in the house, only research. But when Fred's drinking drove her daughter to leave home at sixteen and leave the country altogether at twenty, the planning started to pick up.

By the time her baby left for New Zealand, Dawn had already created most of her 'Acceptable Criteria' list. And though she had never touched Fred while her daughter was at home, with her out of the country she knew she had to act. But then there was the list, there were so many things on there, so much bad in the world, and she just couldn't get her head around how killing one man would make a difference. Plus, if she got caught, her killing would end at

that man.

So the planning started. First came the part-time job. Her plans needed money and though Fred didn't care what happened to his earnings as long as he had enough to get hammered each night and his dinner was on the table, skimming from the house keeping budget didn't yield much.

The travel agents had been perfect, twenty-five flexible hours a week. This allowed Dawn to save, to take classes in her lunch break, such as self-defence, keep-fit and Chinese firework making. It gave her an excuse to be out of the house during the day, whenever she wanted, not just on a Monday to do the grocery shopping – it was perfect. Dawn worked out how much money she needed, how much time she needed for research, which picked up and improved no end when she bought the home computer – she told Fred it belonged to the travel agents so she could work from home now and then. He didn't understand computers and hated that she did. When he had first beaten her till she was unconscious it had been over the computer. Fred had seen something on the TV about women finding lovers online. He thought with all the time she spent on there that she was doing the same, and he beat her so 'you know what will happen if you ever leave me!'

The morning after that first beating Dawn had mixed his cornflakes with rat poison. She got halfway to the table

before she managed to persuade herself that she had made a plan and when you make plans you should stick to them.

It was Laurie who had first said ‘well if you’re going to kill lots of people, why don’t you make sure you kill enough people to be the UK’s greatest female serial killer.’ It was an idea that had lodged deep in Dawn’s compulsive mind and from that thought today’s events were playing out.

The box of chocolates finished, Dawn pulled a set of pre-addressed envelopes out of her bag. The A5-sized envelopes were made of plastic, a mix of bright colours and each covered in pictures of presents. Dawn had found them on a Christmas website, she wanted to find envelopes that looked professional and that could have been sent from a marketing company.

In each bag Dawn placed compliments card that said ‘Free Trial – Please Enjoy Our New Deliciously Special Chocolates.’ Then after filling each of the individually wrapped chocolates with the same poison as the others, she placed four in each and sealed them shut. The envelopes were all lick and stick. This was for the same reason that she’d left the condom on the prostitute. His murder along with the ones from the chocolates needed a way of being traced back. During the planning stage murders had been classed as ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’. The ‘seen’ murders involved Dawn taking the lead in the killing, for example, smashing

her co-workers heads in with a hammer or gutting a prostitute. The problem with only going with 'seen' murders was how difficult it would be to kill over twenty people in one day without someone stopping her – or as so often happens, the killer stopping themselves. Even if she succeeded, she would be running the risk of only being seen as a mass murderer. If Dawn mass murdered, like the postal workers, or the parents of the children in America who allowed their kids access to guns, then her classification would change. Dawn didn't want to be seen as just another mass murderer, anyone could do that – governments did it on an almost daily basis – she wanted to be a serial killer, she wanted her own issue of Serial Killer Weekly and this is where the 'unseen' murders came in. These were murders that took place over time, where she wasn't actually at the scene of the crime. Dawn knew that some of her actions would be seen as mass murder – poisoning all her work colleagues for one, and what she had planned for later this afternoon. And the more Dawn reasoned it out the harder it got to make the distinction between being a mass murderer and a serial killer. She just felt that if the people she attacked didn't all die on the same day and if she chose a number of ways to kill them she was sure to get on that coveted magazine cover.

With the chocolates finished Dawn had to move on with her plan. She had the receipt for the chocolates and had only been gone from the store for ten minutes. At the customer services counter she would tell them that she'd bought the

chocolates as a gift, but her husband had just phoned to say he had bought the exact same gift and could she please return them. The chocolates would go back on the shelf and would go to work soon enough. The envelopes were addressed to several of Dawn's neighbours, the ones without kids, like choosing chocolates aimed at grownups, Dawn chose the neighbours who didn't have or didn't see their kids to minimize the risk of killing children. Dawn had chosen neighbours using her criteria list: cheating husbands with wives who let it pass, owning cars big enough to herd sheep, when they weren't a farmer and so on.

On her way back from successfully returning the chocolates, Dawn posted the ten envelopes. If the police did their job they would link the poisons used in both locations and she would get credit for all the deaths.

Chapter Nine

Do you have anything in a wool blend?

Very few cars kept Dawn company on her trip to the motorway services. But then it was a Sunday after all, a time for family dinners, for all day drinking. A time for good catholic priests to hear confessional, for sinners' cries and God's servants' prayers to get God's suggestions on new ways to push the collection plate. Priests around the world knowing the collection plates will need to ring loud if they are

to replace the two billion dollars their church had paid in compensation to the victims of hundreds of the paedophiles in priests' clothing.

Dawn had been to confessional. She wasn't catholic, it was research. While looking for reasons why she had to kill, at least reasons that she could tell the courts if she was ever brought to justice, Dawn had tried out a number of religions. 'God told me to do it', seemed a common war cry of many modern day psychopaths. And it was a path she was going to follow until an American president used it as justification for war. When she had watched the man on TV, looked into his eyes as he spoke, she really didn't want anyone thinking about her in the same way that she and, she was sure, many others thought about him.

In the end, Dawn believed using a God as an excuse to kill people was just too trite. It had been done for centuries; when men were still living in caves they were killing one another because their gods told them to do it. For Dawn, using God as an excuse was something only a man would do. She often wondered if men could actually cope with the guilt of killing another or the guilt of killing thousands of others if they didn't have a higher power on their side. If there is no God, then there is only man and that's far too much guilt for your average weak-willed hero with a machine gun or army to balance on their shoulders.

So blaming it on religion was out. Other than the usual stuff, Dawn had no issues with her mother. Her dad had wandering hands, but using that as an excuse would just make her appear a man-hater and, with the body count so far, men were faring far better than woman.

From what Dawn had read, the most commonly accepted profile of a serial killer was: a white heterosexual male, in their twenties or thirties who is sexually dysfunctional with low self-esteem. It had always seemed funny to Dawn that the social group which had the most chances in the modern world were the ones most likely to be serial killers. Out of that list, Dawn only really matched two of the criteria – she was white and heterosexual. She was in her late forties, had no issues with sex, she'd just been stuck with a man too fat to get it for too many years. And as for a low self-esteem, well, Dawn knew who she was and was okay about it. Plus, she had always known what kind of person she would become. It had only been through having a daughter that Dawn hadn't blossomed many years before.

Dawn drove the Ford Focus into the carpark of the motorway services; she still didn't know what she would tell a court, though she wasn't sure she cared. Yet perhaps she might blame it on the notorious 'glass ceiling', the figurative ceiling that keeps women from progressing further. Maybe, her actions were just rebellion at being held back for so long, serial killers were predominately men, and surely that was

unfair – Dawn was just acting for women's rights everywhere.

Dawn smiled at her own musings, then after pulling out a wig and small make-up case she gave herself a quick makeover and headed for the main building.

On entering the services, no one gave Dawn a second glance. Not a cleaner or security guard, not even the floor manager, who looked her right in the face and didn't show a hint of recognition. Three months before Dawn had taken a week's holiday from work, because three-and-a-half months ago she had applied for the job as a cleaner at the services. She didn't tell the travel agents or her husband what she was doing, instead she gave false details to the services, she wasn't planning on staying long enough for it to be an issue, and as far as Fred was concerned she was going to work as usual.

It had only taken three days to find out the information she had needed: which areas of the carpark were missed by the CCTV cameras, how often were the toilets really checked and did they contain a CCTV camera.

With her face powdered to an ashen gray, an equally ashen wig and a hunched over walk, Dawn made a passable old person. If nothing else she looked inconspicuous, another face in the crowd. From the few days that she'd worked

there, Dawn had noticed just how many old women came through the service station. Coach after coach dropped off hundreds each day, all desperate for the loo, most unable to make it there without at least a little leakage.

Dawn had parked on a space she'd identified as a blind spot for the CCTV cameras, and after ten minutes of waiting she followed a coach load of old women into the centre. It was now nearly 4pm and though the toilets were meant to be checked every fifteen minutes, they were usually checked around 3pm and then not again till after the rush hours had passed. A camera watched the corridor the toilets but there was no camera in the toilets themselves. Plus, the corridor was usually so busy that it was hard to see who entered and left.

Walking slowly, Dawn made her way down the amenities' corridor. She was heading for the disabled toilets, but she had to go slowly, so to keep in character and to make sure it was empty on her arrival.

It was, and once inside, Dawn put the lid down on the loo, sat down and took stock. What she was about to do had caused the most heated of discussions with Laurie.

'You surely can't justify killing someone disabled? Which criteria do they come under?' Laurie had asked when Dawn had first mentioned her plan.

‘Well... They don’t contribute to society,’ Dawn replied, not actually believing what she had just written. She did get annoyed that disabled people got parking spaces nearer to the supermarket than her, when in her opinion they had more time to shop and thus should get free parking further away. But other than that, as a group, disabled people didn’t fit the criteria, Dawn had different reasons for using their toilet she just hadn’t wanted to explain for fear it sounded callous. Laurie hadn’t believed Dawn either and had shot back with:

‘How can you say that, what about Steven Hawkins? Did he prove there wasn’t a God? You said you liked him for that, said it made things far easier. He contributes, so if not that, then what?’

‘Well...’ Dawn paused; she didn’t want to give her real reasons as they went against her overall plan of only killing people who deserved to die.

‘Come on, Dawn, tell me.’

‘Well, I have no reason for wanting disabled people dead, it’s just a lot more convenient to use their toilet rather than the women’s. I don’t think I’d get out of the women’s toilets before my plan was executed. There’s bound to be a queue, and I might not make it out in time.’ Dawn’s other reason she

didn't bother explaining, it being just a little too depraved even for Laurie. Dawn knew that if she killed a disabled person then she would be vilified even more highly, and that would surely guarantee an issue of Serial Killer Weekly all to herself.

'Collateral Damage' Laurie typed the text accompanied by a smiley – a buff teddy bear with huge muscles and a large syringe hanging out of its bum.

'What, that dreadful movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger? I didn't see it all, fell asleep!' Dawn replied, her eyes still fixed on the hateful smiley.

'Not the movie, you're right it was dreadful, I think Schwarzenegger made the right move into politics when he did, his films have gone downhill since that lovely one he did alongside that small bloke.'

'Who, Danny Devito?' Dawn replied, unsure where the conversation was going.

'That's him, anyway, that film's point... I think... was that sometimes people will get killed in the cross fire, it's one of those things. Some men are lost in the mission – the ends, and the means and all that.' Huge smiling teddy.

‘That’s what I thought but I really did want a reason for killing them.’

‘Well the hope is that you’ll kill several people, so there’s a good chance you’ll get someone who really deserves it and, in reality, you’re actually more likely to get some lazy sod who can’t be bothered to walk the extra feet to their own toilet.’

‘And, if I do that, then it’s a win/win,’ Dawn was happy with all the reasoning. Plus, there was that woman who drove her electric wheelchair past the shop each day. A huge woman who had changed chairs three times. Dawn had heard once that the woman’s disability was overeating, and the only reason she was in the chair was because her thighs had gotten so fat she couldn’t walk anymore. One day Dawn had been on the phone and the fat woman had wheeled by, on her way past she had shot Dawn a wobbly smile and it took all Dawn’s willpower to not rush out side and beat it off her face.

All in all, Dawn would be happy if she killed someone like the fat woman or someone who shouldn’t be using a disabled toilet in the first place, or at the very worst the death count was high enough to ensure sufficient criteria could be ticked off her list.

From her bag, Dawn had taken out a heavy container about half the size of a shoebox. Opening her legs Dawn moved so she could place the box on the seat. It was too heavy to place on her knees, its contents, three-inch nails mixed with sliver drawing pins were packed tight. Insulation tape covered the entire outer surface of the box, several layers to keep everything in place.

Dawn hadn't wanted to be called a 'nail bomber'; she certainly didn't want to be known as a nail bomber who targets disabled people. This was why the box contained the drawing pins; Dawn wanted to be little inventive. So, in the interest of being that, she had used the drawing pins and the contents of the box had all been soaked in yet more Curare – Dawn had ordered in bulk and hadn't wanted to see it go to waste. Plus, at risk of being called the 'Curare Killer', Dawn knew the repeated use of the poison would tie all her killings together.

It had been clear from Dawn's first foray with the internet that any research she did online could quite easily be monitored. She had no doubt that if she entered 'nail bomb' into a search engine, it might very well trigger some form of surveillance. Of course the town she lived had several internet cafes, so whenever came time to research a contentious subject she had paid one a visit. Of course it hadn't taken Dawn long before she had tracked down a couple of valuable resources that hadn't required the use of

the search bar. The first had been the websites of her favourite serial killer magazines; there was always more information online, extra details that helped any budding serial killer get a head start. The second was mystery writer's websites; there were no end of people wanting to know about poisons and bombs, all in the name of researching their latest book. Dawn didn't have to ask a single question here, just hang around long enough and they all got answered. The last was eBay, that wondrous auction site where given enough time all the best things come up for sale.

It was from a writer's website that Dawn read how you can make your own explosive charge. In fact it was quite simple; at least the website led you to believe as such. In fact, the explosive was nothing more than a glorified firework connected to a pull trigger. Initially Dawn had bought a box of Chinese fireworks from the auction site, taken them to pieces and experimented in her cellar when Fred was out at work. In the beginning she had only actually managed to send the nails a foot away from the box and make a hell of a bang.

It took an adult learners' taster course, run during the summer, called 'how to make your own Chinese fireworks – dazzle your friends and amaze,' to sort out her explosive issues. It was a course for bored housewives, it was meant to get them out of the home during the long summer

holidays and to give them time away from the kids. Only Dawn and one other, elderly lady, turned up – Gladys. Gladys managed to eventually blow off ends of her fingers, leaving Dawn to pick the brains of the tutor. By the end of the day, Dawn knew what she was doing wrong and had contact details for a firework store where she could buy a pull trigger. Apparently, the course had run for years without disturbance, mostly because only a few people had ever turned up. It had also flown under the Health and Safety Executive's radar – until the Gladys incident of course, when they promptly banned any future courses.

Later attempts within the cellar worked out better, not for the neighbour's cat that Dawn had used for her last experiment, but for the overall plan at least. The pull trigger was a wire that ran from under the firework, you could do as its name suggests and pull the trigger to set the firework off when ready. Out of the top of Dawn's bomb a thick metal wire was all set to be pulled.

Using more of the black insulation tape Dawn strapped the box to the top of the toilet seat; it needed to be held firm so that when the wire was pulled it didn't move, just explode. Then after wiping the toilet down for finger prints – she wanted people to know it was her, but not too soon – she attached the other end of the wire to the inside door handle. There was enough leeway in the wire for Dawn to squeeze through without looking suspicious, but the moment the door

was opened more than a foot the bomb would explode.

‘I wouldn’t go in there if I was you, someone’s done something pretty nasty.’ Dawn said to an able bodied man on exiting the loo. He grunted in disapproval and marched off to the men’s toilets. Dawn grunted, too, he would have made a perfect candidate, but she had to be clear of the corridor before the bomb went off.

It went off just as she was reaching the exit, it sounded like a one- man-band exploding, crashes of metal, screams and blood. The explosion had dropped Dawn down onto one knee; her ears rang like cymbals had landed inside her head. Looking back Dawn watched as the dust settled. Half a toilet bowl lay in the corridor, the rest of it had shattered and added to the many lacerations suffered by the thirty or so who’d filled the packed corridor. This was again a mass murder, though Dawn did hope that at least some people would die over the following days in hospital to add weight to her serial killer credentials.

Through the horror and the screams Dawn nearly asked herself, ‘what have I done?’ But then the intoxication of others’ pain swallowed her up. Her spine tingled. A certain wetness returned between her legs and, as she watched, Dawn was glad she’d decided to wear the old person’s cardigan she got from the Oxfam as it covered her now erect nipples.

Then the poison got to work. There were those who had been killed outright, shrapnel severing major arteries or, like one woman Dawn could see, a nail had gone in through her eye and was now the only thing holding her up as it held her fast to the wall.

Even those with only the slightest of grazes started to fall. Their bodies paralyzing as the Curare went to work. There was so much screaming; though not from the poisoned, the Curare had their tongue.

Dawn took a deep breath, held it for a second and then forced herself to leave the carnage. She wanted to stay, to help out, to see the dying, hopeless looks on the faces of the soon-to-be-dead. But she knew she had to go, from a rough head count she could see that she was now the UK's number one female killer. A smile beamed across her face and then left as quickly as it arrived. Police would be examining the CCTV tapes here soon enough and she didn't want to give them anything to go on – she had a flight to catch.

Chapter Ten

Coming in at number thirty four we have...

The TV in the airport departure lounge was showing BBC News 24. There was no sound, but the copious and some would say intrusive strap-lines that streamed unabated across the bottom of the screen gave Dawn a clear idea of what was going on.

The melodramatic wording read 'FIFTEEN DEAD AT MOTORWAY SERVICES! MANY MORE TAKEN TO HOSPITAL! TOO EARLY TO SAY HOW MANY MORE WILL DIE!

Dawn didn't mean to smile, but the news was showing so much pain. As she sipped at her overly-sweet coffee and moved her head from side-to-side to see around milling passengers, Dawn felt a growing sensation inside. She knew the feeling, it had been there most of her life, but today it was stronger than ever, it wanted her to act, needed her to kill one last time.

In between showing one grieving relative after another, the news said that the police suspected this was a terror attack and that people needed to be extra vigilant.

'A terror attack,' Dawn thought, 'it won't be long before they are raiding mosques.' And then as if the news channel had heard her thoughts, the strap-line announced 'SEVERAL MOSQUES RAIDED IN THE SEARCH FOR TERROR SUSPECTS'.

‘That should keep the police busy and out my hair,’ Dawn thought and smiled again.

‘One more kill, one more kill,’ a voice in Dawn’s head kept repeating. But this was an airport on the day of a terrorist attack, there was no way she could get away with something here. ‘Stab someone and leave them in a cubical!’ The compulsion told her, to which Dawn replied ‘I can’t, they’d surely find the body before my plane lands. It’s a 12-hour flight; I could never keep a body hidden for that long’

‘Poison someone!’ The inner voice continued. ‘The same issue,’ Dawn told herself, ‘I could never keep the body hidden. I’d be a suspect; they could detain the plane at the other end.’

The feeling inside Dawn wasn’t listening; it grew, called to her, a compulsion, telling her, commanding her to act. Dawn got up and paced towards the toilets. She had to stretch her legs, give herself time to think. Checking the board on the way past told her that she should make her way to her gate. The plane was due to leave in twenty minutes.

In the toilet, Dawn splashed water on her face. Again she splashed, then again, the cold water bit into her face but still the compulsion wouldn’t be quieted. ‘One more kill, you have to, one more kill, you need to, ONE MORE KILL!’

A girl, no older than eighteen, walked into the toilet. She was talking a little too loudly on her mobile phone. Bragging about a boy she'd pulled last night, how it 'so wasn't like me to spend the night at a stranger's!' That was something Dawn seriously doubted. In front of the mirror the girl fiddled with her shirt. She pulled at the pink crop-top, trying to get it to cover at least some of her belly but without much success. On its front, in sequins, the word 'Easy' didn't help the girl's continued insistentences down the phone that she 'ain't a slapper.' Dawn wondered who the girl was talking to, 'probably her mother,' she thought given the day and age in which we live.

'She's perfect,' Dawn thought, she ticks so many boxes; whore, no moral standards, too fat for skinny jeans etc.

'One more, just one more kill,' Dawn's compulsion screamed at her, 'the girl is perfect' Dawn agreed. One hand inside her bag, Dawn reached around for a weapon. She had wiped clean and dumped anything that wouldn't pass through the airport metal detectors. She had nothing left, she thought, until her hand fell on a pen – one hard thump and the pen would enter through the eye and piece her brain.

'Job done,' Dawn said, she had meant the words to be thoughts but lost in the planning they had echoed around the bathroom eventually reaching the girl's ears.

‘What’s that? What job’s done?’ The girl asked, and then added to her caller ‘not you, just some woman, no, don’t know what she wants, one second.’

‘You all right love? You’ve got a strange look on your face?’

Dawn’s fingers wrapped around the pen. The hook of the ballpoint that would be used to clip it to a pocket dug into her hand. She felt stinging as the metal broke through her flesh. ‘Do it! Do it now!’ Dawn’s compulsion screamed. She had no choice, she had to act, had to kill the wretched girl.

As Dawn drew her hand from the bag, the airport’s tannoy broke the tension. The mention of Mexico, her travel destination, broke through Dawn’s fixed intentions. The world rang around her head, screaming ‘you don’t have time, you have to do something but you don’t have time!’

Dawn turned and fled the bathroom.

‘No, some crazy woman, she’s gone now, just ran out... I know, stupid cow,’ the girl said down the phone with no idea how close her life had come to ending.

‘Six, seven, gate...’ Dawn counted the numbers out loud as she marched down the airport corridor looking for the number the tannoy had announced.

Inside, Dawn's emotions screamed. Her compulsion, her need to kill, to see pain, whirred round her stomach. Like acid in a washing machine, her emotions whizzed, spinning, making her feel sick, the emotions eating their way free, and if they make it through to the surface they would have to be satisfied.

At the gate, boarding card in hand, Dawn finally gave in, and in a calm inner voice she told herself. 'Before I next lay my body down in a bed to sleep, I'll kill again, just one more, the last of this run – I promise.'

* * *

'Wow you made it at last! I'm so pleased to see you.' Laurie said. On arrival at the five-star hotel in Mexico, Dawn had been told that her friend was waiting for her on the private beach.

'And me you, how was your trip – I take it you are now husband free?' Dawn asked. She had brought with her two drinks from the all-inclusive bar. Laurie was laid out on a sun-lounger. A portly, middle-aged woman, with a bright orange tan-from-a-can – 'tick, tick' Dawn thought.

Laurie spoke continuously for ten minutes; to Dawn it seemed like she did it without taking a breath. She certainly

did it without taking a sip of the drink Dawn had brought her.

‘And you, how are you?’ Laurie asked at last.

‘I’m just really tired, it’s been a long day, I really need to get some sleep.’ Clear water lapped around the base of the two loungers. Dawn was sat on the edge of hers, waiting. The white of the sand reflected the heat upwards, and she was starting to sweat underneath the wig.

It was the middle of the day and most sensible people had moved to the shaded loungers around the hotel pool. The two hundred metre private beach housed no more than eight people, all spread out like lobsters on a barbecue rack.

‘Of course you’re tired, let’s finish up here and then go for a nap. Laurie sat up and then following Dawn’s lead she downed her bright orange cocktail.

‘So what’s the final tally?’ Laurie asked.

Dawn smiled her bright maniacal smile and said: ‘Well, there’s Fred, the whore in the toilet, nine staff at work, that awful fat family, the man- whore. No wonder I’m tired, it’s been such a busy day. That’s not all of course, there’s the yet unknown number from the supermarket, and the chocolates sent to my neighbours, if I say one from each of

those just to be really conservative. Then, at last count, seventeen had died in the services, so...' Dawn thought for a second and then said '...that's 33. And you, of course.'

Laurie didn't reply, the poison in her drink, mixed with a hint of ground up glass to allow the poison access into the blood stream, had paralysed most of her body by the time Dawn had finished adding up the death rate.

Dawn got up and lay her friend back down in her lounge. Laurie paralysed but not yet dead begged with her eyes – not for her life back, she knew it was too late for that, she wanted to know 'why?'

'I know, I know, Laurie,' Dawn said looking down on her friend, 'it would have been great to be here in the sun; find some nice Mexican men, travel around all these warm countries that aren't keen on extradition – I know, perfect. But surely you realised I couldn't let you live? So you killed your husband? That's one killing – nothing! If you live, and we get caught, you'll get some of my limelight – you'll be an accomplice. You'll share my issue of Serial Killer Weekly, and that just won't do.'

'Still, there was a point where I thought having a friend for my future adventures would be good, outweigh the cons but all those damn smileys – why? Why did you have to post a stupid face with every message you sent. The last straw was

the teddy Arnold Schwarzenegger; I just couldn't let it pass!

Dawn put the novel Laurie had been reading on her chest to make it look like she'd just fallen to sleep. Though not technically dead yet, the poison taking twenty minutes or more after the paralysing stage, Dawn was still able to close Laurie's eyelids without objection and leave her there to bake in the sun.

'I'm sorry, my friend,' Dawn said as she walked away.

In the toilets, Dawn took off the black wig and washed the whitening makeup off her face. She also changed her clothes, and by the time she left the washroom she looked like a vibrant forty-something in a bright summer dress and a million miles away from the dowdy old spinster she'd arrived as. The booking in the hotel had been for a twin room for Laurie and guest, so there were no records of her ever having been there.

Dawn got into her hire car and set off for a nice drive along Mexico's coastline. In the passenger seat she had her trusty cord bag. In it was a collection of passports; a man had been waiting for her at the airport and handed them over in a brown paper bag, 'amazing what money can buy you,' Dawn had thought. And she had no shortage of money. Before leaving the UK, just before the credit crunch, she had taken out a mortgage on their house, one she had no intention of

paying back the bank had almost thrown money at her.

With money, passports and a bright maniacal smile, what more did the UK's greatest female serial killer need – other than the title of world's greatest serial killer of course.
