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The Author is **Blake**'s second novel.

His first novel is *Endurance*.

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The Author

T. J. Blake

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The Author

The Move

Today's the day, the big day, the move. It's finally arrived. Here I am, with only my rucksack of clothes and my laptop bag. I begin making my way up the drive, trudging along the dust smothered gravel path. The disturbed dust creates a haze that hovers an inch above the crunching gravel and clings to my brown leather shoes.

The bricks are dark red; the polished windows catch my attention but the reflection of the sun shines straight into my eyes. I look away from the glare, to the sparkling maroon door in the porch.

As I stand on the slope in front of my new home, I shuffle on the spot, looking at my new surroundings - a quiet cul-de-sac in Surrey called 'Mulberry Lane'.

I look around and spot the house opposite mine which is painted white. The lawn looks well-maintained, as do the bushes and the ivy which grows around the outline of one of the upstairs windows. A black Audi sits on the patchy wet concrete drive.

To the left is another house, similar to the first. Next to that, is the last house at the end of the road, which looks smaller than those that surround it. Its lawn is overgrown, the windows are stained by green mould and the curtains look like they're kitchen tea towels.

I look away from the grimmest house in the cul-de-sac and turn to examine the other houses on the slope alongside my new home.

They all look the same as mine; same bricks and same architecture.

To my right; the trees muffle the sounds of a park. The swings creak and children giggle, accompanied by an occasional roar of laughter from adults.

The house to the right of mine looks empty, with no movement within and no car on the drive. I guess they're away on holiday.

My surroundings are different to what I'm used to. My wife, Tanya, and I, and our two children, Sammy and Alex - used to live a few miles from here. That house was much bigger, with an extra bedroom, conservatory and a swimming pool. It was also surrounded by a seven-foot wall with electric gates at the front. Obviously I don't have that here, which makes me feel uncomfortable and slightly insecure.

As I turn to enter, I hear a noise inside. I pause to listen again. Silence. I take the key to the front door from my pocket and slowly unlock the door. I gently push it, which creaks the more it opens.

Then I listen again; nothing. I shrug it off and step inside, the house is freezing.

I silently close the door; place my rucksack and laptop on the floor and begin to look at the layout of the house.

To my left is the dining room and through the doorway I spot a wooden table with six chairs.

Directly in front of me are stairs with a door on the side, which leads down into the basement.

To the left of the staircase is the kitchen and opposite is the entrance to the garage. The décor in this open hallway and in the sitting room looks like it hasn't been changed in years. The ornaments, chairs and tables are all old-fashioned, wooden and varnished, just like the floor.

A forty – something man used to lived here, I can never remember his name. He must've liked his antiques.

I step cautiously on the tips of my toes as I continue my tour around the house. I poke my head round the sitting room door but all I see is a green sofa, an armchair and a TV in the corner of the room.

I go back to the front door, put the latch on and lock it. If anyone's in here they're not escaping without a fight.

I head towards the garage, it's locked. Surely, no one's gona be in there then?

As I make my way to the kitchen, the door under the stairs catches my attention. It's standing ajar. It creaks and I stare as I walk slowly towards it. The handle is cool to the touch. I yank open the door and for a minute I could've sworn a shadowy figure appeared in front of me. It disintegrates into thin air. I step under the stairs and look down at the wooden stairs that lead into darkness. My body feels numb with fear as my eyes search the shadows. The hairs on the back of my

neck stand up. I do not like the feeling of this basement; it could be a good place to film a horror movie.

I back out and shut the door firmly. It latches and I step back. I stare at the door handle, waiting for it to move and the door to fly open, but it doesn't. It's funny what the mind can do.

I open it with more confidence this time. I stand at the top of the stairs for a moment and then walk down. I stare straight into the darkness and it feels like its staring back at me. I look at my feet and step cautiously down to the fifth step from the bottom. Deja vu strikes, it feels like I've done this loads of times before.

I spot a light switch to my right, I press it and wait for the lights to flicker on and reveal the basement. My nerves simmer down and I can breathe easier now I can look around at the layout and see what's in here. I go down the last few steps and walk into the centre of the dusty atmosphere. As I step onto the concrete, there's that sense of familiarity again. It feels as if I've been here before, done this before. I've only been down here once, and that was when I viewed the house. Machinery hangs on the back wall opposite the stairs, and to the left is a metal stand with more machinery, like tools and books on mechanics. The rest of the basement holds old toys that are covered in dust and a rocking horse that sits in the corner, casting a shadow on the wall. Small bikes on the ground have

stabilisers still attached. There's a bucket of toys with a small brown teddy bear sitting on the top, staring at me. One eye and an ear are missing. Its paws rest either side of it as it sits upright, its eye staring into mine. There's a pink plastic table under the wooden stairs, with four pink plastic chairs placed around it. As I look around at my surroundings, I hear footsteps from above. I freeze where I'm standing and hold my breath. I can hear a faint whistling sound, like a kettle being boiled. I look up from the bottom of the stairs but I can't see anyone.

I walk out of the basement, switching the light off as I walk past. When I reach the top, I shut the door firmly behind me.

The temperature is so different up here, it's so much colder. I hope the central heating kicks in quickly. Standing outside the kitchen door, I listen carefully but only hear the kettle continuing to whistle.

I gently push open the door and poke my head in. The kitchen is modern compared to the sitting room, with black tiled walls and matching black and white flooring. I look to the white surfaces that run along the walls and spot the kettle. The steam coming from the kettle swirls into different shapes that curl at the top and disappear. Two mugs are placed in front of the kettle; one empty and one with a tea bag in it.

"I've been expecting you, Mr Milligan." A voice booms from behind me. I jump and

turn so quickly that I over-balance. My breathing speeds up and my hands shake.

“Sorry to startle you. I’m Simon Cann, you can call me Simon.”

“Why are you in here?” I sound abrupt and rude. Simon looks at me, wide-eyed.

I start again. “Sorry, you just frightened me, that’s all. I’m Ryan, Ryan Milligan. It’s good to meet you.” I put my hand out to him and Simon smiles and shakes my hand.

“Good to meet you, Ryan. I’m here because I’ve maintained the house since Andrew left. You know, doing a bit of gardening here and there, trying to update the house a little.”

“So Andrew was the guy living here before, then?” I thought his name might be Andrew but better double check.

“Yeah that’s right, Andrew Myers. He was a good friend to me, been pals for years.”

“So why did he leave? Did he not like the area?”

“To be honest, I don’t know why he left, that’s *if* he left. The police searched for ages trying to find him. They searched the area, this house, his work, everywhere, but they never found him. They pronounced him dead and called off the search after seven years. Andy had written a will, he left me a set of keys to this place and another set to someone else. He also wanted that person to receive the money from the house when it was sold. Andy was a nice guy. Anyway, no one’s moved in the house since. I don’t know why,

it's a real nice place. The estate agent, Mike, you met Mike, right?"

"Yeah I did, he showed me around the house once, very quickly."

"Yeah, well, Mike said every time someone came into the house, they stared at the basement door. Then after showing them around, he'd show them the basement and they would never want to see it. They would always reject the house before even going down there. Not sure why, maybe it's the basement door." I look confused.

"It's a bit dodgy, sometimes it locks and you can't open it, but after you leave it for a while, it opens." Simon chuckles and then continues.

"To be honest, I do feel odd when I come into this house. Maybe it's the spirit of Andy. Anyway, what do you like, Tea? Coffee?"

"Tea, two sugars please."

"Brilliant, same as me. Make yourself at home Ryan; it is your home after all."

I nod to Simon and go over to the wooden table next to the wall. There are black leather cup and plate mats and a fruit bowl sits in the centre with no fruit in it. The kitchen is the same as any other, a fridge freezer, a sink, a dishwasher, and cupboards all around the walls. I have time to study Simon. He's not the most fashionable guy. He wears white Umbro trainers, denim jeans and a dark green jumper. His scalp is balding at the back and his grey and brown patchy hair is receding. I suppose I can hardly talk, I wear a blazer, shirt and tie every day. My black hair and stubble

has recently attracted the grey, so that my hair has a smattering of silver within the black. Simon brings the mugs over, the steam rises, creating condensation to hang around the rim of the mugs.

“It’s a bit hot.” Simon says.

“I can see that, thank you.”

Simon places the mugs on the coasters and sits down. He takes a sip from the mug and gasps. “That is bloody hot.”

I let out a chuckle and bring the mug toward my face and begin to blow gently into it. Simon’s phone rings and he answers it, leaving me to sit in silence, drinking my scalding tea. After a couple minutes on the phone, he continues talking to me and drinks his tea quickly.

“Sorry about that Ryan, it was work. Anyway, when Andy left, Mike’s estate agents took the house. Mike asked me to help him out; he’s busy all the time with work. He has two jobs and a family to look after, so I offered to maintain the house for him and when someone eventually moved in, to help them out and show them the ropes. That’s why I’m here. As I said earlier, me and Andy were really good friends, so I was doing it for him too, you know, in case he decided to return. You okay with that, Ryan?”

What if I wasn’t okay with it, I wonder what he’d say? “Yes I am; I need help with this place.”

“Okay. Well you have the keys you need; the garage key is in the cupboard above the kettle,

hanging on the nail. I'm sure you've lived in a house before right?"

I chuckle. "Yeah, I used to live in a house a few miles from here, more like a mansion though, double the size of this." Hope that didn't sound like I was boasting.

"Oh, right, okay. I would stay and chat longer, but I've got things to do, places to be. I'm sure you have things to do, unpack your stuff, yes?"

No, not really. "Yeah, I do."

"Okay. Well, I live across the road; my house is the one opposite with the Audi parked on the drive. So, if you need any help, knock on my door. I live there with my wife; she's there pretty much all the time. I'll get her to come round to introduce herself soon."

"Okay; that sounds great." I stand up in sync with Simon, and we shake hands again. "Was nice to meet you, Simon."

"You too Ryan, hope to see you again soon. Before I forget, all of Andrew's stuff was left here, so you might find some things of his. It's up to you what you do with it. All of upstairs is boxed up. Someone will come buy to get rid of it, if not me, then probably Mike. Don't worry, we won't just let ourselves in like we have done the last few years, you won't be startled again"

"Okay, thank you."

"So, here are the spare keys that we had." Simon puts the keys into my hand. "See you around. Remember, I'm only across the road."

“Well, thanks for your help, I really appreciate it, looks like you’ve done a great job here.”

We walk to the front door; I unlock it and open it. We shake hands again and he walks out and down the path. I shut the door and hear the gravel crunching under his footsteps.

I go back into the kitchen and finish my tea, ugh it’s cold. My throat tightens in disgust as I swallow it down. I place my mug next to the kettle and put Simon’s in the dishwasher.

I look out onto the garden from the kitchen window, it’s much smaller than my last, but at least it backs onto woodland. The trees line the fence, reminding me of a barricade to protect my home.

I boil the kettle, make myself another cup of tea and continue my tour of the house. I go to the stairs and up the first two steps. I turn right with the small landing and continue climbing up carefully, trying not to spill my tea. I pause halfway up to take some slurps from my mug, so it’s less likely to spill. It burns my tongue.

I get to the top of the stairs, walk past one of the windows which looks out on the front of the house and see a door to my right; one of the bedrooms.

There’s a bed to the right, a window straight in front of me and a desk beside it.

I turn right out of the room, along the landing, which is a long corridor with a window at the end. It looks out onto the garden and woodland behind. There are two

doors to my left and one to my right. The first door is a toilet. The door on the right opens onto a bedroom. As I look in, there's a single bed with toys scattered across the floor. I shut the door and look to the last bedroom.

This is the biggest bedroom. It has a double bed but the wallpaper could definitely benefit from a change from its wet tea bag look to something a bit more appealing. The big window looks out onto the back garden and the trees.

I turn my back to the bed, face the window, stretch out my arms like I'm Jesus Christ, and fall backwards onto the bed. It's nice and spongy. I like this bed; I'll definitely be sleeping here.

I head back downstairs to pick up my rucksack and begin to unpack.

As I reach my new bedroom, I lose the willingness to unpack, so instead I just throw the rucksack on the bed and leave, feeling like a lazy teenager.

I go to the kitchen and place my mug next to the kettle. I pull the keys out from my pocket and unlock the back door to go into the garden. I step outside into the fine English summer and look at the grass. To the right is a brown shed matching the fences, I can smell paint carried on the light breeze. The wooden fences border the garden; the end of the garden is wire fencing with a wooden gate half way along the fence. I walk right to the end of the garden and look back to the house; it

looks just as good here as it does at the front. Simon has done a good job.

I go around to the front of the house. It's so quiet here, the only noise being the occasional muffled park sounds. I look at the neighbours' homes again, Simon's home, then to the neglected house at the dead-end and then to the houses that are identical to mine. As I stare, the realisation sinks in that the most activity in this cul-de-sac are my eyes, moving around, until Simon's front door swings open. Out steps a woman with golden curls bouncing as she jogs toward me. She has a good physique; her tight crop-top shows her slender shoulders. She crosses the road and runs up my gravel path.

Out of breath, she says: "Hi there. I'm Sandra, Simon's wife, nice to meet you."

"Hi, I'm Ryan Milligan,"

"Yeah, I know who you are. Simon didn't realise that you're an author. We've both read some of your novels, they're always very good."

"Why, thank you very much." She seems very nice, Simon is lucky to have her; she's not just a pretty face.

"I was wondering, would you like to come round tonight for dinner, or maybe tomorrow? I understand if you don't want to, but it would be great to get to know you, we are neighbours now after all"

Dinner already? These two are either really friendly or just creepy stalkers. "Dinner would be great," I reply.

“Oh, brilliant, I’ll tell Simon the good news. What do you like, anything in particular?”

“I’m not fussy, Mrs Cann, What were you thinking of cooking?”

“Oh please, call me Sandra. Actually, it’s Sandy, call me Sandy.”

“Okay, Sandy.” *She is either a big fan or a suck up.*

“Well, I was thinking some pasta? Do you like pasta?”

“Yeah, sure do.”

“Brilliant, Bolognese good for you?”

“Bolognese would be lovely.”

“Great, well I’ll leave you to do whatever you’re doing. When do you want dinner, tonight?”

“Whenever suits you two, I’m free tonight and tomorrow.”

“Tonight would be best.”

“Okay sure. See you both tonight.”

“Great, see you later.” She turns and runs down the slope and across the road. She pauses on the grass outside her house and tracks to her right to walk up the drive and to her front door.

She seems really nice; they both seem like a happy and kind couple. They will definitely be a good pair to get friendly with. I’ll be able to rely on them, if need be.

I walk back into the house and pick my laptop off the floor. I then go into the kitchen, unzip the bag and take out the laptop and its charger. I find a plug socket under the table where I plug in my laptop to charge it.

I'll take a quick look at the news, my emails and my author blog and then get ready for tonight.

The Cann's

With spam emails and no interesting news, I close my laptop and go upstairs to find something to wear tonight.

I pause in the doorway of my room and look at my rucksack on the bed. With a sigh, I walk toward the bed, but bypass the rucksack.

I stand at the window, staring into the garden. This seems like a familiar occurrence, looking out on this view; the grass, the fencing, the trees.

Sighing once again, I go back to the bed and unzip the rucksack. I pull out my collection of white, grey, and black shirts, along with my black, red, and blue ties and my black trousers. I place all the clothing on the bed and look to the wardrobe. I open it to find some plastic hangers and begin to hang my shirts up in the wardrobe.

After the exhausting job of unpacking, I come to the conclusion that I will wear the clothes I have had on today. Luckily, I have a white shirt and black trousers on, so at least I look half decent.

I go to the chest of drawers opposite my bed and pick up my Calvin Klein aftershave. I squirt my neck and my fingertips. As I slap my face with my fingertips, my face stings a little, thanks to my shave this morning.

I find the three bottles of whiskey I packed at the bottom of my rucksack.

“Least I’ll be able to sleep tonight.” I say out loud.

I pick one of the bottles up and look at the packaging. I hope Simon and Sandra like Jack Daniels.

As I walk downstairs, in the open hallway, there’s a mirror hanging on the wall to the right of the door. I’ve been so distracted that I haven’t even noticed the mirror until now.

I stand in front of the mirror, alter my collar and pull my shirt down, tucking it further into my trousers.

I pull a false smile and mouth a ‘hello’ followed by a ‘how are you’. I stop smiling and stare at my neutral expression. I lean in toward my face and tilt my head.

“More wrinkles, more grey.” I sigh and place my hands on my stomach. “And a beer belly, God I’m getting old.”

I stare at my combed-over fringe and see a streak of grey; I use my fingertips in an attempt to cover the strays. I strum my fringe like I’m playing a guitar sideways; the grey strands gradually become camouflaged within my dark brown hair.

I turn away from the mirror and open the front door. As I do, the chilled night breeze slithers under my shirt and caresses my skin. I step out of the house into the cold night air and lock the front door.

The cul-de-sac looks as peaceful as it did during the day. Not like I was expecting it to become a ghetto during the night or anything. Ha.

I walk down the path of my drive and stand on the pavement. I check left and right for cars, and begin to cross the road.

Suddenly, there's a loud banging sound coming from my left. What the hell's that? I pause in the middle of the road and look to the grubby house at the end of the road. I can just about make out a dark figure using a slab of wood to hit, what sounds like, something metal. He stops and turns around to meet my curiosity with a glare. He tosses the piece of wood aggressively onto the road, which makes a sharp, hollow sound that echoes around the cul-de-sac.

I stare at the man. He wears a long green and black patchy jacket, which hangs shapelessly above his black, moss-encrusted boots. His face and head are smothered by a grey beard and long, greasy grey hair. His beady eyes look me up and down. His tiny claw-like hands clench. He walks away from his house towards me and stands on the pavement. He doesn't blink or take his eyes away from mine for a second.

Limping back to his house, he slants from left to right checking over his shoulder as he unlocks the door. He opens the door, steps into his house and stands in the doorway, staring back at me for a moment and slams the door shut.

"What the..." I say out loud.

I feel uneasy as I walk towards the Cann's home, still looking at the odd house on the street. I see the curtains twitch. I pause again,

straining my eyes to see the grubby house. I stand on the pavement outside the Cann's home, and continue to stare. The curtain twitches again, and the front door slowly opens. It stops opening and the feeling of someone watching me makes the hair on my neck stand.

All of a sudden, a fox runs out and the front door slams shut and makes me jump.

I begin to take cautious steps in the direction of the house.

"Hey, Ryan!" comes a shout from the Cann's, making me turn quickly.

"Simon," I say, relieved.

"Hello. Come on in. What you staring at?"

"Oh, I saw a fox."

I walk up the drive and tread on the corner of the lawn. Simon looks in horror as my shoe flicks some dirt onto the path to his house. Simon comes away from the doorway to shake my hand.

"You know how to make me jump don't you?" I say jokingly.

"Sorry for startling you again, buddy."

Simon keeps a hold of my hand while leaning to flick the dirt back onto the lawn.

"Go right in Ryan, make yourself at home."

I walk into the house, still holding my bottle of Jack Daniels. The house has a different layout to any other house I've seen. I see the kitchen to my right. Four poles stand out to me; they come out from the ground and reach to the ceiling. They're positioned around the kitchen and throughout the whole lower floor.

There are no walls separating the rooms, just the pillars. I assume they must be where the walls used to be.

Next to the kitchen is the dining room, it's linked with the sitting room to complete this lower floor. The spiral staircase reaches up through the ceiling in the middle of the room.

Sandra is lighting a candle in the middle of the table, which has three plates and three sets of cutlery.

She wears a black dress, the hem floats just above her knees. Her hair is straight and has a golden glow to it. She turns around and smiles as she sees me.

"Hello Ryan," she says as she walks up to me, wrapping her arms around me. "It's lovely to see you, hope you like my cooking tonight."

"I'm sure I will, Sandy, don't worry about that. Thank you for inviting me round for tonight."

"That's no problem at all. Si and I wanted to meet you and get to know you. You seem like a lovely guy."

"Thank you."

Simon walks in from outside and shuts the door.

"Ryan, do you want a drink?"

"Yes, please. Oh that reminds me, I have some whiskey here. I know it's not the normal bottle to bring round as a gift to the hosts but that's all I had, hope you both like JD."

Simon and Sandra both laugh.

"That's very kind, I like whiskey. We'll have to crack it open later on." Simon says.

“I like whiskey too, but only with Coke. Diet Coke of course.” Sandra laughs.

“We have wine, Champagne and whiskey, what do you fancy?” Simon says.

“Oh err.”

“Sit down buddy.” Simon interrupts me and walks into the kitchen.

I walk to the neatly presented table and ask: “So where do you want me?”

“Sit wherever Ryan. What do you want to drink?” Sandra asks.

“I’ll just have what you two are having thanks.”

“Okay, bear with me; I have to go dish up. There’s wine on the table if you want it, just help yourself, it’s been opened.”

Sandra walks into the kitchen and I help myself to wine. They can’t be used to having guests round; they seem a bit nervous. Sandra looks nice, though. Simon is dressed the same as me so that’s reassuring.

He walks back into the room holding two glasses of whiskey with ice cubes in each glass.

“I got us boys some whiskey. Down that wine Ryan, we’ll stick to the whiskey, shall we?”

“Yeah sure.” I knock my head back and gulp the wine. I put the glass aside and Simon places a glass of whiskey in front of me.

“Good lad. I just find wine bitter sometimes. It doesn’t beat whiskey on the rocks.”

“I know what you mean there,” I say.

“The house you were staring at earlier, you met the guy or seen him yet?” Simon says.

“No, I haven’t met him yet but I did see him. Funny looking chap. Scruffy, a bit like a tramp.”

“Yeah that’s him. He’s not all there I don’t think. We moved to Mulberry Lane about twenty years ago and he’s been here as long as we have. When we came to see the house, his house wasn’t so grubby, but he did come out to see us. Spoke about Mulberry Lane and how much it’s changed. He seemed a nice guy, just a little odd and over-friendly. He’s a curtain-twitcher, always looking out, watching people.”

“That’s not such a bad thing, though.”

“Well yeah, that’s true.” Simon takes a sip from his glass and gasps and licks his lips. “Tastes good. He had some trouble with some kids before. He ended up punching one of them. There were three kids, they were shouting and throwing stuff at his house. He came charging out and took them all on. They never came back and the police got involved. Did feel sorry for the guy.”

“Has he always been alone?”

“Yeah, since we’ve been here, he’s lived on his own. Never seen anyone come visit.”

“Poor guy,” I say sympathetically.

“Yeah, he did tell me that his wife died and then he lost his son; I didn’t dare ask how. He seemed emotional about the subject.”

“Here we are,” Sandra says as she enters the room holding two plates.

She puts a plate in front of me and one in front of Simon.

“Eat up boys. I’ll be back in a second.”

“Thanks Sandy,” I say.

Simon begins to eat straight away, but I wait for Sandra.

After a minute or so she walks in holding her plate, smiling. She sits down and picks up her cutlery.

“How is it Si?” Sandra asks Simon.

“It’s real good,” he replies.

“How about you, Ryan?”

“Oh it tastes great, thank you” I say.

Even though I haven’t started eating it yet, I can tell that it will taste good just looking at the deep red sauce and the big homemade meatballs. I take my first mouthful of spaghetti.

“It’s so delicious, Sandy.” I say.

“Oh thank you, I’m so relieved you like it.”

“You may have to make me a massive pot to take home.” I say, half hoping she will say she will for me.

“I’d be happy to.” She smiles as she chews.

“Top up?” Simon asks me as he looks at my empty glass.

“Yes, please.” I hold my glass towards him and Simon pours in more whiskey. As he does so the ice dissolves.

“So Ryan, tell us a little about yourself,”

Sandra says.

“Well, what would you like to know?”

“Sorry if that question sounded like you were having an interview.” Sandra begins to giggle.

“Tell us about your family.”

“Well, there’s a lot to say about my family. Where do I begin?” I hesitate for a few seconds. “I haven’t seen my wife Tanya, or my kids Alex and Sammy, for four years. They left one night while I was sleeping.”

“Oh my god, I didn’t know, I’m so sorry.” Sandra says.

“No, don’t worry you weren’t to know. I woke up and wondered where Tanya was. So I went into the kids’ rooms and they were gone. Their drawers were all pulled out and they were empty. I ran back into my room and all of Tanya’s clothes had gone. I looked under our bed and the suitcases were gone. So I ran downstairs and saw a note. Tanya wrote to me, saying she and the kids needed some time away from me. I didn’t understand why they needed time away, I hadn’t done anything wrong. I tried to call Tanya’s phone so many times, but it always went straight to answer phone. I didn’t understand why they left and still don’t to this day. I have no idea where they are.”

“Terribly sorry, Ryan.” Simon says.

“I’m so sorry; I wouldn’t have asked if I knew.” Sandra says.

“Don’t worry it’s fine, it was a long time ago and in a twisted way, I’m used to it now. Police haven’t found them yet but they’re still tracking them. Tanya’s family don’t even know where she is to contact her. I’ll never give up on them. You know? I’ll keep looking and keep an eye out for them. They know

where to find me. I just have to keep hoping that they come back to me.”

There’s an awkward silence, which I hate.

“So is there anything I should know about the house?” I say to break the tension.

“No. Except no one liked the house for some reason, they all said it gave them bad vibes.”

Simon says.

“Bad vibes? In what way?” I ask.

“Like I told you when we first met, no one wanted to go into the basement when they were viewing the house. When the door was opened to the basement, they would just leave. The house has been empty for a good while since Andrew left. I went round to the house one afternoon, because we hadn’t seen him for a while. I knocked on the door and heard movement inside. I shouted for him but no one came to the door. So I looked in the windows and saw some people. Andrew lived at the house on his own, no wife or kids. His wife left him a year before and they never had children. So I went to the back to find a scruffy looking man who was smoking. I asked what he was doing and he said ‘I’m smoking’. I told him to leave but then another two guys came out and they threatened me. I called the police and they got them out, turned out they were a group of squatters, they had rights but the police dealt with it.”

“Bloody squatters,” I say in disgust.

“Yeah, I couldn’t believe the cheek of them. The house was sorted for Andy, but he never

came back. So it was put up for sale, and people have been coming to look at it for a good four years without any takers. So I did the house up to try and make people like it. Didn't work though, I did some work to the kitchen and the garden and people still weren't interested. That is, until you came along. You weren't scared of the basement and Mike knew you were the one to move in."

"I think it's a nice house, it's homely and familiar. It felt like I already knew the house and had been there before, like in a dream. I'm comfortable in familiar surroundings even though they aren't actually familiar because I've never been in the house before. Sounds strange doesn't it?"

"Yeah, that is odd." Simon says.

"I don't think it is." Sandra glares at Simon. "Maybe you've dreamt of a house similar to it? Do you get Deja vu in there?"

"Weirdly, I do. It's an odd feeling I have, walking around the house, but it's a comfortable, familiar feeling."

Silence descends again until I ask Sandra and Simon questions about their lives. How they met, the house, previous homes, their child and their work.

Sandra is a housewife and Simon is an insurance executive, describing it as a job where he checks up on insurance companies to monitor whether their customers are being treated fairly.

As we finally finish our meal, Simon slumps in his chair, Sandra pats her mouth with a tissue and I sip my whiskey.

“That was great, thank you so much.”

“That’s okay, anytime,” Sandra’s words slur slightly.

“I’ll clear up don’t worry, you sit yourself down girl,” Simon says.

“Do you want a hand?” I ask.

“No, don’t be silly, mate, you just sit there and talk to the tipsy Mrs.”

Simon clears the table and walks into the kitchen with our plates and cutlery, leaving me and Sandra at the table. I continue to drink my whiskey. I lean over the table to pick up the whiskey bottle, and pour more into my empty glass.

“Do ya, miss your wife?” Sandra slurs.

“Yeah course I do, and my kids.”

“You’re such a lovely man Si, I mean Ry. I hope you want to come round for dinner again soon.”

“I sure will. You’ll have to whip up some more Spag Bol.”

I look to Sandra’s eyes. There are bags and dark circles under them. She lifts her wine glass to her mouth with a slow and shaky hand and sips the wine.

“I’ll do it for you” she says.

“Good, can’t wait.”

She finishes her wine but continues to sip from the empty glass. Looking puzzled and disappointed at the lack of alcohol in her glass, she tips it upside down just to double

check it's empty. She sighs and picks up another bottle of wine. Simon walks back into the room and looks puzzled as Sandra stands up, holding the bottle of wine.

"Darling."

"Yes, Si?"

"Where are you going?"

"To bed. I'm a bit tired."

"Okay darling. Say bye to Ryan."

"Bye-by-b" Sandra slurs.

She comes staggering over to me and hugs me tight. She pulls away and looks at me, squinting. She sticks her lips out and kisses my nose.

"Er... Night, Sandra," I chuckle.

She walks to the bottom of the stairwell and drunkenly crawls up the spiral stairs.

"Bless her." Simon laughs.

For a moment there is silence as we both sip from our glasses, savouring the burning whiskey in our mouths.

"So why did you decide to make the downstairs like this?" I ask.

"I don't know, it was a joke at first but Sandra really wanted it. So you know, gotta keep the wife happy."

"It looks good, I've never seen anything like it before."

"Interesting, isn't it. It's nice to just be able to walk and get to wherever you want easily. Well...apart from getting upstairs drunk"

We laugh and continue to drink.

"Oh. I've just remembered," Simon gets up from his chair, goes to one of his

bookshelves, picks out a book and brings it over to the table. "Could you sign this for me and Sandy? We loved this book of yours, *Menace*. It's one of my favourite books."

"Yeah sure, do you want me to write a message?"

"Mystery is my favourite genre. No, that's okay just sign it. There, please." He says pointing in between the title and my name.

"There you go." I say, handing back the book.

"Thank you so much, that means a lot to us."

"The pleasure's all mine, I'm glad you like my books."

Simon puts my book back and returns to the table.

"So have you got anymore books to come? It's been a while hasn't it?"

"Yeah it has been quite a while. Since Tanya left I haven't been able to write properly. Luckily one of my pieces, *Killing for Your Love* is ready. I'll look to get it published soon and..."

"Can I read it?" Simon interrupts me. "Sorry to interrupt, Ryan. Can I read it first? I've read all your books and I would be happy to tell you if I like it and whether you should publish it. Of course it will be good, but I can act as an editor or reviewer." Simon stares at me wide-eyed.

I might as well let him read it, he seems like an honest guy, so why not.

"Yeah, sure, I'll let you read it. I already have it prepared as a manuscript so I can give it to

you tomorrow if you like. Have a read, then let me know what you think of it” I say.

“It would be an honour. My god, thank you, Ryan.” Simon says ecstatically.

“No problem. Just promise you’ll be honest with me, I’d appreciate some feedback.”

“Oh I will. Thank you. Can I ask? What genre is it?”

“Well.” I clear my throat. “It’s a mystery action novel. Without giving too much away, it’s about a married couple, Daniel and Lizzie.” I take a deep breath. “We follow their lives for a while, see Daniel propose and their marriage ceremony. But one morning, after a couple years of marriage, Daniel wakes up to find Lizzie gone. He’s worried and dreads telling the kids that he can’t find her. He goes to their rooms to tell them but they’re both gone too. He decides to call the police, but they don’t do enough for Daniel’s liking; he feels like the villain as they question him. He decides to investigate the case himself. With no demand of ransom, Daniel works out there’s more to it.” I pause for a moment.

“So Daniel is going to kick some arse to find Lizzie? Simon says excitedly.

“Yes that’s pretty much the story.”

“Sounds good to me; a good action novel. If you don’t mind me saying so, it’s pretty similar to your situation?”

“Well it’s actually based on my fight for Tanya and the kids. Obviously, it has been dramatised a little, but I would fight for them and will continue my fight to find them till the

day I die. It shows what I'd go through to reunite with them. You know when you think about how far you would go for the people you love and care about?"

"Yeah, I know the feeling."

"Exactly, you know when you think, 'I would kill for my love if I had to'. That's what the novel is based on, love, fight, endurance and killing."

"Wow." Simon says while staring at me.

"Beer?" he asks.

"No thank you. I should probably get going" I stand up and hold my hand out in front of me. "Thanks for tonight, I had a great time. Please thank Sandra for dinner, it was delicious. I'll bring the manuscript round tomorrow."

"No problem mate. We'll do this again soon." Simon shakes my hand firmly. "Can't wait to read the book. Do you want me to walk you home?"

We both roar with laughter.

"I'll be okay Simon, thanks for the offer though."

He walks me to the front door and opens it. We shake hands once again and I step outside into the cold.

"See you tomorrow mate, thanks again." I say.

"See you tomorrow," Simon replies as he shuts the door.

I turn away from the house and look up to mine. Wow it really looks good from here.

I walk into the middle of the road and look over to the grubby house. My blurry vision takes a moment to focus, but I can see the beaten piece of wood still lying on the ground.

I walk up the slope, which proves to be a challenge. The whiskey is definitely taking affect.

As I unlock the door, I feel eyes on me. I step inside and look behind me. I look to the Cann's' house, the neighbouring homes and finally the grubby house, one last time. No one's there, must be the alcohol playing tricks on my mind. Mulberry Lane is silent, as it always seems to be. I stagger inside, as I do so, something by the tree line that borders the park catches my attention. I can make out a dark figure in the distance, standing in front of the tree line with his arms folded. I stare at him for a moment. He's wearing a black hoody with the hood up, I can't make out his face. I continue to stare, assuming he is staring back, although I can't see his eyes. He unfolds his arms and begins to slowly walk towards the road.

I quickly shut the front door and charge up stairs. I get to the top and run along the landing. I peer out of the window that looks onto Mulberry Lane. The figure has disappeared. I scour the area, starting from the Cann's', to their neighbours, then the grubby house. The figure is nowhere to be seen.

I put my back against the wall and move across the window, so I can see my

neighbour's front gardens. Again, the figure isn't in sight. I breathe easy and go downstairs.

I step into the kitchen and pick up my laptop bag. I rest it on the table and go into a back pocket of the leather bag. I pull out my manuscript of *Killing for Your Love* and leave it on the table.

I walk back upstairs. I take a quick glance outside. Mulberry Lane is still silent. Everybody's lights are off. That's definitely a sign for me to try and get some sleep.

I walk into my room and see myself in the reflection of the glass from my window. I walk up to the window and look at my tired face. There are dark slugs under my eyes. Is that old age or tiredness?

As I look in the mirror, something catches my eye, movement at the end of the garden. I look down to the tree line and notice two golden orbs staring back at me. My eyes take a moment to focus, whilst I look into the gold eyes. I can just about make out four legs, four white paws and an orange frizzy tail. It's probably the same fox that the scruffy man had in his home. I knock on the window and the fox runs away into the woods.

I walk back to my bed and lie on top of the covers for a moment. I pull out a photo of me, Tanya, Alex and Sammy. I look at Tanya's brown eyes, her straight blonde hair and her pale skin. I look at Sammy and her brown locks. She's a brunette, but a splitting image of her mum. Then I look at me and Alex. I spot

my hands under his arm pits and look to his
ecstatic face. He looks like his old man, poor
kid.

Mulberry Lane

Killing For Your Love Chapter 1

I look at her undulating blonde hair blow as we walk against the breeze.

"You look beautiful tonight, Lizzie," I say to her.

"Oh thanks, Daniel." Comes her timid reply.

We stop walking and stare into each other's eyes for a moment. I place my hands on either side of her cheeks and stroke them softly. I look into her brown eyes, concentrating on the hazel pools that surround the black hole in the middle of her striking eyes.

We cannot be interrupted here; I can do what I want and tell her anything without fear.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath. I open my eyes and our stares meet. Her neck stretches towards me. Her red lips purse, reaching for mine. They stroke mine. After the first lip encounter, my lips are smothered until I push her off. I hold her mystified face in my strong grasp and whisper.

"I love you, Lizzie." As I say as I go down onto one knee...

The smell of musk enters my nostrils. My face is cold. I come round, trying to remember the dream I just had.

I remember seeing Tanya. We were walking somewhere, somewhere dark. I saw the kids, they were playing. I looked to Tanya's smooth skin, her thick blonde hair and her blushed cheeks... I looked over Tanya's shoulder and saw a broad-shouldered figure. Tanya disappeared from in front of me. I looked to the kids, but they were gone too. I turned around to see the shadowy figure. He began to walk towards me, his face blurred. He stood right in front of me, the same physique and height as me. He stared into my eyes for a moment, until my thoughts stopped.

I try to get the image of Tanya and the kids back into my mind, but I can't.

This happens every morning. I have had this same dream and similar thoughts almost every night for the last four years. I can always remember my dreams, as if they were events of the day before.

I open my eyes and see under the dusty bed. Great, so I've been sleeping on the floor all night. No wonder my neck feels strained.

I stand up and look to the bed; the covers haven't been tampered with. I didn't even make it into bed. Oh well, one less job to do, I guess. I shower, in an attempt to wash out this hangover, and get changed into a fresh shirt and trousers.

I walk downstairs to properly evaluate the house. First, I go into the kitchen and put the kettle on, priorities. I walk out and head into the living room. I chuckle to myself, looking at the old fashioned layout and furniture. I

definitely need to do this room up, that's for sure.

I look at the dated green furniture then at the bookshelves and chest of drawers. The bookshelf is empty so I look to the drawers. I open each one, but they're all empty except for the bottom one. It has a small, black metal box in it. I try to prise it open but it's locked. I shake it in hope of a clue as to what it may be, but it makes an ominous, quiet, scratching noise. I shut the bottom draw using my foot and put the box on the top of the drawers.

"There must be a key," I say to myself.

I go into the kitchen and look in the cupboard with my keys. I take the house keys out and put them in my pocket. There's another set of house keys and a small key. I grab the small key and put it beside my cup and shut the cupboard. I'll quickly make myself a drink then I'll open that box.

I make my tea and walk into the sitting room. Putting my mug next to the box, I insert the key into the padlock but the key doesn't turn.

"OH ffff," I sigh to myself while I attempt to turn the key.

I take the tiny key out and look at it. I can't see what else it could bloody open. I leave the key next to the box.

It's bloody cold in the kitchen, there's a breeze blowing lightly on my face. I look down to my tea, the swirling steam blows away from me. Where the hell is this draught coming from?

I look to the window but it isn't open.

“Oh shit.” I whisper to myself as I realise the back door is open.

I must have been left open the whole time I’ve been here. I pull my keys out of my pocket, shut the door and lock it.

I finish my tea and go back to the cupboard to grab the spare keys. I’ll just run them and my book over to Simon. He can have the spare key to look after the house if I ever need to go away for a while.

I leave the house and walk over to the Cann’s’. As I do, I look to the trees where the figure was last night, no one’s there. I look to the grubby house, no activity over there either. That beaten piece of wood is still on the road though. That looks nice...not.

“Do you ever not look smart?” I hear a female voice shout.

I look to the Cann’s’ front door but there’s no one there.

“Up here.”

I look up to see Sandra looking down at me. She has wet hair and a towel around her.

“Oh hi, how’s the head?” I ask.

“Well, I’m not feeling one hundred percent but I’m okay. How about you? Simon feels groggy.”

“I’m okay, actually,” I laugh.

“Aww good. Guessing you want Simon?” Sandra smiles and turns her head to bellow into the house: “Simon! Ryan’s outside” She turns back to tell me: “He’ll be down in a second. See you soon.”

“Great, thanks. See you soon.”

After a few seconds, Simon walks out the front door wearing a burgundy polo top and jeans.

“Hello, mate,” he says.

“Morning, Simon. How’re you feeling?”

“Not too bad, bit rough, but that’s what happens if you carry on drinking after the guests have left.”

“Yeah, I know that feeling. I’ve come here to give you this” I hand over the manuscript.

“Oh, and I found this spare key. I wondered if you’d be able to stash it somewhere, just in case I get locked out or go away or whatever?”

“Oh brilliant. I’ll read that soon.” He takes the manuscript from my grasp. “And we’ll happily look after the spare key. Me and Sandra can look after the house whenever you like. We’re here for you mate, remember that.”

“Thanks, that means a lot. Got to ask quickly, is there a shop nearby? I need to get some food.”

“Yeah, there’s one up the road, in the town. Do you want me to come with you and show you where it is?”

“No, that’s fine, you’ve got your stuff to do and I don’t want to hassle you.”

“Okay, well just go to the end of the road, turn left, go past the park and keep going till you come to an industrialised area. There are some shops there.”

“Okay, Cheers. Well, I’ll leave you to it, have a good day.”

“And you. See you soon,” Simon says as he turns and walks back toward the house.

As I cross the road to head back to mine for my wallet, I notice the beaten piece of wood has disappeared. I pause and look over to the house at the end of the cul-de-sac. I can’t see any movement at all. That house and the grubby man unease me, he gives me the creeps.

I walk into my house and put my jacket on. I pat my pockets feeling for my wallet.

“Oh where did I leave it?”

I search the kitchen but realise that it’s in the inside pocket of my jacket.

I leave the house and walk down the road along the tree line, looking through the leaves and branches and spot the park. As I get to the end of the road, I turn left and see a metal fence bordering a stretch of grass. As I walk further along the path, I get a full view of the park, with children playing on the climbing frames and adults chatting in a circle.

I walk past a row of detached houses, calling ‘good morning’ to the men cutting lawns outside their homes, and occasionally waving to the wife standing at the front door. The people around here seem really nice and welcoming.

Eventually, I find the shopping centre. There are quite a variety; corner shops, hardware shops and cafés. I’m able to stare down the

aged, cobbled road and see a ‘Tesco Express.’ Perfect, that’ll do.

After I’ve finished the food shop, I head back to Mulberry lane carrying three bags mainly containing ready meals and whiskey. What has my life come to, I miss my Tanya.

I get to the park, which is empty now. The swings sway in the wind, the screeching noise echoes over the climbing frames and the fence.

I look at the tree line which hides Mulberry Lane and see something moving from within the trees. As I try to focus, the sky darkens as grey clouds are forming. They turn from white to grey, then to a dark ash colour in a matter of minutes.

The temperature drops. The sun has been smothered by the clouds for the first time in days. I look back to the trees and see movement again. I jog home awkwardly with my carrier bags, right up to the door and look back round to the trees, but this time I see no movement.

I put the shopping down in the middle of the hallway, and run back outside in the pouring rain, towards the trees. I can hear the rain pattering on the leaves and slapping the concrete.

I duck into the line of trees; it’s clogged with rubbish. The stench of urine rises to my nostrils, and my nose wrinkles at the stench. I look towards the park; I can hear the rain hitting the metal and the plastic there.

I search my surrounding, turning three hundred and sixty degrees on the spot, but there's no movement. I make my way out of the tree line. Then I hear leaves shuffle and a branch snap just behind me. I turn around quickly but there's no one in sight. I walk towards where the sound came from, pushing the branches and leaves out of my face. I hear another branch snap behind me. I turn again but once again can't see anyone. Picking up a wet branch from the ground, I continue to walk, clutching it tightly, holding it up by my head.

More branches snap ahead of me. I follow the sounds and charge out of the tree line, and end up back onto Mulberry Lane. There's no one running away from me.

"What are you doing?" A voice booms from within the trees.

I turn around and see Simon exiting the tree line. I quickly drop the damp branch on the grass.

"What are *you* doing in there?" I ask him.

"I'm asking you the same thing. What were you doing?"

"I felt someone's eyes on me, so I went to see who it was. Was it you?"

"I only went in there after you. I saw you running across the road, thought you were coming to ours at first, but then you ran into the trees."

"Oh." I pause as I look at Simon, not sure if I trust him so much now. "How long have you been in there then?"

“The same amount of time as you. Do you want to come round for a drink and dry off?”

“No, I’m okay, thanks though. Think I’m just going to head home. No idea what it was in there, though.”

There’s more rustling from the trees, making us both look toward the sound.

“What’s that?” Simon says.

“I don’t know.” I say as I reach down to pick up the branch.

A fox trots out from the tree line and sprints away from us towards the grubby house.

“Jesus Christ!” Simon laughs. “Sure you don’t want to come round?”

“Yeah, I’m sure, thanks for the offer. See you soon.”

I nod to Simon and throw the branch into the trees and run home.

I walk into my house and lock the door behind me. I fall back onto the door and slump down onto the floor. Breathing heavily, I look down at my hands. The hand I held the branch with is damp, the skin smeared with green moss.

I go upstairs into the bathroom and wash my hands. As I finish drying them, I use the towel to dry my head and I take off my soaked clothes.

I walk into my bedroom and change into clean underwear and my dressing gown. I put the damp towel back in the bathroom and go downstairs to unpack the shopping.

I walk into the hallway and reach down to pick up the shopping I left earlier. Outside,

the rain has come to a stop and the clouds have begun to clear up. I can see the outline of the sun burning its way through the thick clouds. Hopefully, it will come out soon.

I unpack the bags in the kitchen and finally sit down.

Sitting at the table with a cup of tea, I pick up the local paper I just bought and the headline catches my attention 'Missing Dr Myers'. I look at the article and read about the investigation, headed by Detective Samuel Cann. Wonder if he's related to Simon and Sandy?

The article reads: 'We are still heavily investigating the mysterious disappearance of Doctor Andrew Myers. At this moment, there is no more news to report, but I plead to the local community to speak out if you have any information regarding the disappearance. Doctor Myers was last seen by his neighbours at his home, on the day he disappeared. There is some evidence that suggests his disappearance may be linked to a murder investigation. If you know any information which may benefit the investigation, please come by the station or call us on the number below. Any information will help.'

So Andrew Myers was a doctor, Simon didn't mention that.

I continue reading the paper and see an article titled: 'Mysterious behaviour of our local foxes.' I immediately think of the grubby, old man. I wouldn't be surprised if he captured that fox, and is capturing more.

Especially after the encounter I had with him last night, he seems unstable. The next article speaks about the crime rates in Surrey having dropped. Apparently, the areas within a 10 mile radius of Mulberry Lane are the 'safest areas to live' in Surrey. The last major crime reported was the suspected murder of Doctor Andrew Myers. What an odd story to report on.

I laugh to myself and throw the paper aside. I lean back in the uncomfortable chair and shut my eyes for a moment.

"Ryan, darling what are you doing?" Tanya says as I attempt to clear the basement.

"I'm cleaning the basement, getting rid of this junk." I tell her.

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy," Sammy looks at me with her big, sparkling brown eyes.

"Yes, Sammy?"

"Can me and Alex have ice squeam in a minute?" She says while looking into my eyes.

"The ice squeam man is here Daddy."

"Did he play his music?"

"Yeah, he did Daddy."

"Well darling you know what that means; he's run out of ice cream."

"No, he hasn't Daddy. I'm not that silly."

"Oh, really?" I ask and laugh. "Well I don't know darling, I don't think I heard the magic word."

"Daddy, please can I have a ice squeam."

"I'm not sure, baby, let's see if I have some money." I put my hands in my pocket. "Oh

no, I've lost that money I had for ice cream. Oh, wait a second. Did you steal it?" I look at Sammy as seriously as I can.

"No, Daddy, I promise I didn't."

"Well what's that behind your ear?" I reach across to her ear, touch the top of it and pull one pound from her left and repeat it for her right, which makes Sammy and Tanya laugh.

"Thank you, Daddy," Sammy says, as she runs up the stairs from the basement.

I look back to Tanya. "It's not going to last long; I won't be able to do stuff like that with them, soon, will I?" I say to Tanya.

"No, they're growing up so fast."

I lean in to kiss Tanya but she pulls away.

"Not now, Ryan. We're in a dirty basement. I don't like it here."

"What's wrong, Tan?"

"We need to leave. We need to move away from here, leave Mulberry Lane, leave Surrey and leave this country. It's for the best."

"I don't understand, I thought you liked it here?"

"No, I don't." Tanya's voice is raised. "I don't like it here, this house haunts me. I want to be far away from here with you and the kids. I think I'm going to leave."

"No, please don't baby, I love you, don't leave me. I couldn't cope without you and the kids."

"You are coping without the kids, I'm sure you can cope without me."

"What do you mean? The kids are still here."

"Where are they then?"

“They went to get ice cream.”

“Oh really? Look behind you, then.”

I look behind to see the figure standing directly behind me again. My vision blurs, I turn to look at Tanya, but she’s gone. I’m in the basement, on my own.

I awaken on the kitchen floor, short of breath. I try to remember my dream as much as I can, I try to remember Tanya and Sammy but I can’t.

I stand up and drink water straight from the tap. I lean over the sink, full of rage. I pick up a glass and grip it as hard as I can, the shards fall into the sink. I sit back down in the chair and try to calm myself down.

I breathe deeply, count down from ten and try to hold back my tears. I can’t break down; I need to stay strong if I ever want to find them again.

I walk out the kitchen into the open hallway, and notice the basement door is slightly open. Why? I haven’t been in there today.

I open the door and take a look down the wooden stairs, they fade into the darkness.

I walk down the creaking stairs, pausing on the sixth step as I hear movement from within the basement. I stare into the blackness and wait for my eyes to adjust. I walk down two more steps and listen again. I hear more movement so I quickly switch on the lights and charge down to the bottom. As the lights begin to flicker, the shadows pulsate along the

walls until the lights stay on and I can finally see across the basement.

I can't see anyone, which is disappointing. I was hoping there would be a conclusion to it so I wouldn't be constantly paranoid that something's down here. Why couldn't there just be an animal down here?

After searching around the basement one last time, I go back upstairs into the kitchen and make myself dinner. Well, I say 'make', all I've got are microwavable meals, so it's heated up Spaghetti Carbonara tonight.

After finishing my very small meal, there's a knock at the door. I get up to answer it. It better not be a sales person or a religious group begging me to go and pray with them, I'm really not in the mood.

Through the frosted glass I make out the familiar shape of the caller. It's Sandra, holding a plastic bowl in her hand. I open the door.

"Hey there, Ryan."

"Hello Sandy, how are you?"

"I'm good thanks, you?"

"I'm good thank you. Don't tell me, is that for me?"

"Yep, I made it especially for you, seeing as you liked it so much last night. So here you go." Sandra says as she hands me the plastic bowl. "Enjoy it."

"Oh I will, thank you so much for this. Do you wanna come in for a drink?"

“No, I should probably go back, got things to do, people to see.”

“Okay then, fair enough. Thanks again Sandy” As I finish my sentence, she smiles and walks down the path. I look at her legs. “Was good to see you” I shout after her.

“And you, Ryan.” She smiles again as she turns around to look at me.

I continue to look her up and down until I see a car come down the road. It’s actually the first time I’ve seen someone driving round this estate.

The black Mercedes Benz speeds towards Sandra. I take a deep breath as she steps out into the road without even looking. As I prepare to shout, the car puts on its brakes and comes to a stop in front of the Canns’s home. Sandra pauses in the middle of the road. After a moment, she goes over and hugs the young man who steps out of the car. He can’t be any older than twenty-five.

After they hug, Sandra leads the way and opens the door into her house, welcoming the young man in, too.

I take the Spaghetti Bolognese into the kitchen and put it in my half empty fridge. I put the kettle on and look out into the back garden. I haven’t had a chance to properly look around the woodland yet, might as well go and check it out.

I quickly get changed and walk out into the garden, through the damp grass and stand in front of the dripping wire fence. I walk along the fence to the gate; it creaks as I open it and

swings shut after I'm through. I continue to walk through the wooded area. There doesn't seem to be anything here other than vast woodland.

I walk further in, dodging the branches and vines that sag down from the trees and caress my shoulders.

After a while, I decide to turn back, this just goes on and on. I'll just look on Google Earth when I get home to see what it backs onto. I guess it'll probably just lead to a nature reserve or a farmer's field most likely.

I turn around and walk high-kneed over the trip-hazard branches on the ground. I crack branches and drag my feet in the damp mud and crinkled leaves.

My foot stomps down onto the squelching mud and I hear a branch break behind me. I stop. The bottoms of my shoes are thick with mud and moss.

I start to walk again and hear another branch break. I pause, turning slowly. I stare into the opening of the woods. There's nobody there, not any form of life. Why do I feel so paranoid here?!

I turn back towards home and get the familiar feeling that somebody's following me. More branches break behind me so I quicken my pace. I look only forward, as the branches begin to snap closer to me. The leaves rustle right behind me. I want to look but I can't. I speed up. I can see the gate to the house; I'm so close, I'm nearly there. As I make it up the slope, I step on a branch and stumble. I

recover and make the gate. I'm through and safe. I get into the garden and slam the gate shut behind me. Now I can get a proper look. I look into the trees and see movement. I hear the branches breaking, but this time, they're distant.

Headlines

Killing For Your Love Chapter 2

I lie with my bare face on the wintery ground. My heart is sunken and bruised. I don't know where she is. I don't know what to do or where to go.

She's been taken from me, there's no explanation or reasoning, just snatched from my grasp.

We've been married for years. I remember the moment we first set sight on each other. I remember proposing on the beach. I remember our wedding like it was yesterday. Our relationship was perfect, but now, she's gone.

I don't have the heart to tell the kids that their mummy has been taken. They're in England and I'm here in France, they won't feel safe without me.

I need to find her. I need to get my Lizzie back. I will kill for my Love, my desire and for justice...

I walk into the safety of my house and open my laptop, which is sitting in its usual place on the kitchen table. I sit down, log on and get on to Google Maps. I type in 'Mulberry Lane, Surrey' and see the cul-de-sac straight away. The images are definitely not up to date. My house has a car out the front, children's slides in the back garden and a paddling pool. Hmm, that's weird, as far as I know Andrew Myers doesn't have any children.

What strikes me as even weirder is that the grubby house on the end of the close isn't grubby at all. It actually looks normal. It still looks like a shed compared to the houses surrounding it, but at least it's well maintained. The grass looks cut from what I can see on the satellite shots.

I move to the back of the house using Google Maps and look at the vast woodland behind it. I move above the tree line of the woodland, into the direction I was heading in earlier. Just like I thought, it simply leads to a field which backs onto more woodland.

Lucky I didn't waste my time with that long and pointless journey.

As I finish up on the computer, a strong, stale stench creeps up my nose. Right, I've had enough, this is disgusting. I take the lid off my bin. Inside, there are empty tubs of ready-meal packaging, leftover food and half-eaten fruit. Bloody hell, when was this last emptied Simon?! I pull the rubbish bag out of the bin, tie a knot at the top and take the rubbish bag to the front door and leave it outside, against the wall.

A glint of light catches my eye. The glistening Mercedes Benz still parked outside the Cann's' home. I may have to go over later.

As I turn around to go back inside, the scrunched corners of another local newspaper on the floor catch my attention.

"What a waste of trees," I say to myself.

I go into the sitting room with paper under my arm and fall onto the bouncy armchair.

As I look over the headlines, avoiding the endless advertisements and unimportant school stories, I see 'blonde woman' written all over the page as headlines and sub headings. My eyes focus and I begin to look over the articles.

A headline reads, 'Blonde, middle aged woman found dead.' Really? Around here, in quiet and peaceful Surrey? If Tanya was here, I'd be the overprotective husband right now. I'm sure Simon will be with Sandra.

'Riley Clark, 42, was discovered by her daughter in her home.'

There are some sick people in this world. I continue to read the collection of stories in the paper.

Riley Clark was killed in her own home after being 'brutally raped and strangled to death.' If she was raped then surely there would be some prints or DNA? The police are useless.

Another name pops up: Amanda Holmes, 35. She was discovered dead in her home after 'suspicious smells' and 'a large mass of flies at her window.' She was found on her living room floor where she was 'cut to death.'

Unfortunately, I know how she was cut and where. This wasn't just in the local paper; this was on all the big tabloids. Her stomach was cut open and her veins were cut out from her hands up to her elbows. It was a really vicious crime and was told extensively though various news reports when it first happened.

Another victim, Mary Cole, 46. She was found in the street, tied to a lamp post. She was beaten to death and raped.

I look at the articles and then the names and pictures of the women who were killed. I wish I could find out who did this to these women. This type of person probably took Tanya and my kids away from me.

I begin to think of Tanya and when I do, I sense a pair of eyes staring at me. I look straight ahead, not focusing on the newspaper in front of me. I see the blurred word 'Blonde' written in capitals. As I move the paper down slightly, I see the top of a blonde woman's head. I shut my eyes and look again, but she's disappeared. I move the whole paper away from my sight and look ahead. I get up, out of the chair and look at the ground where the woman stood.

I hear something drop outside the room. I turn toward the door and leave the sitting room. I stand in the open hallway and listen carefully. Did that come from upstairs? I can't figure it out.

As I walk towards the stairs I hear a clop sound come from the kitchen. Clip, clip. It sounds like a woman in heels. Maybe Sandra is here.

"Hello?" I shout.

I walk to the door and rest the back of my hand on it.

"Hello?" I ask.

I push the door open slowly so that it creaks. Straight away, I spot the back door open. I must have forgotten to shut it again. I shut the door and turn around to see Tanya sitting at the kitchen table.

“Tan? Where’ve you been?”

“Here the whole time.” She snaps. “You know that anyway, don’t you?”

“Wh... I haven’t seen you. Where are the kids?”

Tanya’s skin is white. Her head turns away suddenly and then it turns slowly towards me.

Her eyes look tired; it looks as if two dark purple slugs sit below her eyes. As her head turns, she smiles eerily; her eyes darken, her lips shrink and her sharp teeth gleam.

“They’re outside, playing.”

I turn and look into the garden. The pink plastic table from the basement is outside with three chairs around it. To my disappointment, the kids aren’t there. There’s only the brown bear from the basement, sitting on one of the chairs.

I turn back to Tanya and she startles me, she stands face-to-face with me, millimetres away. I stare at her. She leans in even closer. She tilts her head and puts her mouth by my ear. I feel flicks of her warm breath touch my neck. As I relax, I can feel her breath in my ear.

She’s whispering, but I can’t hear her.

“What’s that Tan?”

She whispers again, but I can’t hear anything. I can only feel her breath tapping my ear with her lip movement.

“Say it again, Tan.”

“Help me,” she says clearly and firmly.

“Ryan, you need to help me. You need to help. The kids need you.”

Within a blink, she disappears. I look straight ahead for a moment. Why am I imagining her in so much detail? It’s like she was really here.

I only ever usually dream of her and the kids when I’m drunk. I talk to her then, but never like this, never.

I look outside and the table has disappeared.

I walk back into the sitting room and look at the paper again. I look at a statement that a leading investigator gave about the murders of blonde women in Surrey. I look at the young guy, standing behind his podium, holding his speech notes. I recognise him; where have I seen him before?

I look down to the quote next to his picture which reads: “This criminal will be stopped, we are doing everything we can to protect our community. To all women who are blonde, take extreme caution. Don’t ever be alone and do not trust anyone.” Lead detective on this case, inspector Samuel Cann speaking at...’

Sam Cann

Killing For Your Love Chapter 2

I push myself off my cold, musky bedroom floor and sprint upstairs to my kids' bedrooms.

As I get to the door to Sophie's bedroom, I look at the 'Dora the Explorer' sticker on her door above the 'A princess lives here' sticker. It releases my worry a little and makes it ooze out of my body. I knock on the door lightly and whisper: "Sophie? Morning, darling it's Daddy."

I push the door open to be left in dismay. I take a step onto the pink, bouncy carpet on which is scattered Sophie's clothes and possessions. Her wardrobe and drawers have been opened and her clothes are all over the floor. As I study the room, I see that a photo frame with a picture of me and Sophie has smashed. I walk over to the frame and pick it up. I study our elated faces. I throw the frame into the wall and watch it smash into segments.

I leave her room and run to Danny's room, his is in the same condition as Sophie's; his stuff has been emptied and searched through.

I walk downstairs and pick up the phone. There's only one thing I can do. Report them all missing. Once I've done that, I'm going to find them, and make whoever is responsible pay...

Chapter 3

... Here I am, sitting on my bed after answering the questions from the police, it felt like an interrogation.

I stare around the room and something stands out to me. Our room hasn't been trashed or searched like the kids' rooms. It's very tidy and normal, as if Lizzie left with her consent.

I stand up and look in her empty underwear drawer. At a glance, it looks empty, but there is one thing left, a photo of me and Lizzie together on our wedding day. Not just any photo, it's the one of our kiss on the big day.

My heart sinks. The feeling of dread fills my entire body. I overload with emotion - mostly distress and depression; I fill up so much that it seeps out from my eyes, creating tears which slide down my face. For a moment I feel as if my life has ended, until my fists clench. I feel myself change, my mind has adapted in some way. I feel angry and ready to get my family back at any cost, any cost...

I stand at the window for a few minutes wondering how I am going to meet this guy. I can't just wander on in.

I might as well give up and just be patient. Oh, wait a moment.

The Cann's' front door opens and he steps out.

I open the door and quickly pick up the rubbish bag. I don't even look over, Sandra will call me over.

I walk down the path towards the black bin at the end of the path. I lift the bin's lid up and drop the rubbish into the bin and close the bin and make my way back up the path.

"Oh, Ryan! Mr Milligan," Sandra shouts.

I smirk just before I turn around.

"Hi Sandy. How are you?"

"I'm great, thank you. Come here, I've got someone for you to meet."

I walk towards their home and come face to face with a young lad. I can smell his aftershave halfway across the road from Sandy's house. His tailored suit fits around his well-toned body. I look at his face; he looks like a male version of Sandra. He has her face, but his dad's dark hair and eyes. I look at him as I stand in front of him and put my hand out towards him.

"Ryan, this is my son, Sam. Sam, this is our new neighbour, Ryan Milligan."

"Nice to meet you Sam, I've heard a lot about you."

"Good to meet you, buddy. Likewise," he nods.

"So Ryan, this is Sam, he's a detective and at the moment he's..."

"Mum stop, I can tell Ryan about myself if he wants to know," Sam says, interrupting Sandra.

“So you’re a detective, are you?” I ask, even though I already know who he is and what he’s up to at the moment.

“Yeah, a senior constable; and I’m sure you’ve heard there have been murders around here lately, attacks on blonde women and I’m the detective working on the case. I also worked on the Myers case.”

“Don’t call it the ‘Myers case’. Andrew was a loyal friend and cared about us.” Sandra says stubbornly.

“Yes, he was, sorry mum.”

“So what’s the update on Andrew Myers and the latest investigation?” I ask.

“Well, with Andy, we had nothing to go on. We can’t find him or contact him. We thought that it must be because he doesn’t want to be found for whatever reason. Usually they come back in their own time, so it’s just a matter of waiting. The latest one however is an odd one. It’s been happening for a while now. In the last few weeks, women have been killed, for whatever reason. We have our suspects, we’ve just got to be patient and try to stop whoever is doing this.” Sam pauses as he stares at me. “You need to keep an eye on mum, especially as Dad is going away. They seem to trust you.”

“Oh Sam, I’ll be fine.” Sandra nervously laughs.

“Mum, this killer won’t let you off because you’re nice; he’s killing blonde women who have done nothing wrong. They’re all like you, they’re mums and wives.” He looks away

from Sandra and looks at me. “Mum and Dad trust you and really like you, so can I trust you to look after Mum?” Sam pauses as he stares at me.

“Of course I’ll look after Sandra. I’m always looking around from the house so I can keep an eye on her.”

“Okay great, thanks Ryan. I’ve got to go.” Sam kisses his mum on the cheek and gives her a hug, then holds his hand out to me.

“Thanks Ryan, I can relax a bit now I know that you’ll keep an eye out for her.”

I hold my hand out and Sam grips it tightly. I tighten mine and he then tightens his more, so I tighten to the hardest hand shake I’ve ever done.

“No problem Sam. It was good to meet you.”

“Good to meet you too, sir.” He nods to me and I return the nod. “Speak soon. Bye Mum.”

“Bye darling, I love you.” Sandra shouts.

Sam jogs to his Mercedes, opens the door and looks at his phone before getting into it. He shuts the door and switches on the growling engine. He does a U-turn and drives away at some speed.

I look at Sandra and smile.

“So where’s Simon going?”

“He has a business trip to America. He’s going to speak to insurance companies and to watch presentations and other stuff that I don’t really know about. It’s a trip for his boring job pretty much.” Sandra laughs as she finishes her sentence.

“Okay Sandy. Well, I’ll leave you to it. Have a good day.” I stroke her soft arm and turn around. As I begin to walk across the road Sandra shouts.

“Ryan? Can I talk to you about something?”

I turn around and walk back to Sandra.

“What’s wrong?”

“I didn’t want to tell Simon or Sam but I’m scared about these murders.” She looks at me and edges closer, she whispers: “Blonde women are being targeted and I was wondering whether you wanted to come round tonight? I can cook you whatever you like, you don’t even have to talk to me but I would just appreciate a man in the house.”

I smile. “Of course I can come round and I will talk to you. Do you really think that I wouldn’t talk to you?”

Sandra giggles and blushes. “Well no, but, you know, I don’t know.” She laughs and her neck flushes to match her cheeks.

“I’ll come round later. When do you want me?”

“Come round this evening let’s say, six o’clock?”

“Yeah, sure. Do you need anything? I’m going to the shops in a minute to get myself some stuff.”

“No, it’s fine, but thank you for asking.”

“Right you go inside, take care. I’ll see you later on.” I smile as I lightly squeeze her shoulder.

“Thanks Ryan. See you later.”

I walk across the road and turn to watch her go inside.

I walk into my house and look at the time. I have three hours.

I walk up to my room and lie down on the bed.

“Why am I feeling so drained?”

I get my phone out and set an alarm for 16:30. At least I’ll have an hour and a half to go to the shops and get some stuff and buy Sandra something.

I put the phone by my bedside and shut my eyes.

As I shut them, the thought of blonde women being targeted haunts me. What if that is something to do with Tanya? Yes it’s only been the last few weeks of murders in Surrey, but what if it has been planned a lot longer and Tanya was the first victim?

Maybe the kids got in the way and that’s why they were taken too?

I do hope that Sandra isn’t harmed. I need to look after her like I should have looked after Tanya.

17:00

Killing For Your Love Chapter 5

The police lack the capacity to find my family. They don't know my wife; she would never run away from me or cheat on me with another man. The forensics team couldn't find anything so it's easier to just blame my wife.

I've been interrogated on more than one occasion. I've been asked if anyone has a vendetta against me or my wife. The answer's no, why would anyone hate a normal man and wife with a normal life and normal children and, more importantly, a happy family?

This is a job for the police, another opportunity for them to fuck it up.

This is my job. I'll find them, I'll get them back and whoever has taken them will pay...

Chapter 6

... I stand in the room of a dead woman. Her body is sprawled out on the bed. She's been beaten to death and most likely raped.

I look at her rope-burnt wrists and ankles, her scratched thighs and arms and her swollen face. Her lips have split; the skin from her lips has lodged onto her bloody teeth that are attached to her swollen gums.

I put on my leather gloves to move her red stained hair, which reveals her lumpy face.

To my relief, it's not Lizzie and there's no sign of the kids.

It's good that I'm looking in people's properties; I wouldn't have found this woman otherwise.

The police can't find out I was here, they'll try to pin this murder on me.

I need to move on and keep looking. I will find them...

I set the alarm for 16:30 and it goes off at 17:00? Ridiculous.

While my eyes try to adjust to the light, I look on the 'alarm lists' on my phone. As I go through the different times, I spot something that is confusing.

02:30 Alarm ON

03:15 Alarm ON

05:30 Alarm OFF

05:45 Alarm OFF

06:00 Alarm OFF

07:15 Alarm OFF

07:30 Alarm OFF

17:00 Alarm ON

Why do I have two alarms on for that time in the morning? I scroll to the top two alarms and switch them off. I then look down the list.

“What the fuck?”

My 16:30 alarm is nonexistent - where has that gone? Could I have done it in my sleep?

Oh well, I need to get a move on to get to Sandra's on time.

I scramble out of the warm duvet and run downstairs. I go into the kitchen to grab an apple. I take a crunch out of it as I'm just going down the hall. As I chew, I hear something in the kitchen over the crunching. I look back behind me into the empty kitchen.

I finish my mouthful and poke my head through the doorway. I feel a gentle breeze brush my face and hair. I enter the kitchen and the back door is open.

I walk out into the garden and see the back gate wide open. I walk across the grass and right up to the gate. I look into the woodlands. The leaves are undisturbed and the trees move in the wind.

I hold the gate and pull it closed. I lock it in place, pull and push to see if it's locked. I look down to the side of the gate to see some ginger fur on the ground and some blood. My whole body stiffens. I look back into the woodland. Still, there is nothing in sight.

I turn around and look at the lawn. I notice flecks of blood spattered on the grass.

I follow the flecks of blood that go off to one side, leading me to the shed. The shed door has splats of blood on it too. The grass surrounding the shed door is bathed in blood. I walk up to the bloody grass and stretch to grasp the handle on the door without treading in the blood. My body stiffens again. I clutch the handle as hard as I held Sam's hand. My

arms straighten and my wrist turns. The door opens and a stench hits me in the face.

“Hi there, neighbour.” A deep cheerful voice bellows from behind.

My heart skips two beats; I slam the door as I turn to look behind. A man is poking his bald head over his fence, looking into my garden.

“Hi, I’m Paul Brooke. I live here with Leanne, my wife, and my two children.”

“Oh right, hello, I’m Ryan Milligan, it’s good to meet you,” I say half-heartedly.

“You know if you ever need any help, you can always ask me, I can help with anything. Especially DIY, I’m a plumber, ex-mechanic and the handy man of the family.”

I give him a fake smile. “Thank you for the offer.”

We both stand in silence for about four seconds.

“Well, I’ll leave you to it; you look busy.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry Paul; but we’ll hopefully speak properly soon.”

“Oh yeah definitely, speak soon... Ryan.”

His head drops behind the fence and I hear him whispering; most likely to his wife, and shuffling along the grass. I continue to wait until I hear the back door shut.

I look back to the shed. I know there’s something dead in there, or someone.

I grip the handle and begin to breathe in through my nose and out of my mouth.

I turn the handle. The door loosens and even before the door is open, I can smell it; it’s so strong I already feel nauseous.

I open the door and I look into my shed. It is drenched in blood; it looks as if the blood has been sprayed on everything inside.

Hanging down from the roof of the shed is a decapitated fox. Its fur is clumpy and clotted from all the blood. The paws are untouched but the legs are twisted and broken at the joints.

I look down to see the pulsating, maggot-infested head. All its teeth are shattered and scattered across the floor along with one eyeball; the other is most likely trodden and mashed in along with its intestines and blood.

This was not an animal attack, this has been done by someone and he has put it in my shed. But why? Is it a warning?

Someone doesn't want me in this house. Why was nobody interested in moving into this house?

I continue to stare at the fox; I can't take my eyes from it. My eyes begin to follow the flies flying around the fox's body. They fly at a speed, weaving from left to right, occasionally landing on it, to then back-flip off and continue to fly.

I look down to its face. The eye sockets are bursting with fat, white maggots and I notice a black rubber strap next to the face with something smashed to pieces next to it. It looks as if it was a technological object. I want to go and see what it is but I'm not going in there, no way!

I have no idea what to do. I can't call anyone, because it would look like I had done it. I

hesitate for a moment. I shut the shed door and walk shakily back into the kitchen.

I stare straight ahead. Although my eyes are locked on the kitchen floor ahead of me, I can't think of anything else but the fox. I've got to go to Sandra's and pretend I'm okay. I have to pretend nothing has happened and I most certainly cannot tell her about it. But for now, I might as well go to the shop, get some wine for tonight and get some food in. I need to act normal, as if nothing has happened.

I walk up to my room and grab the whiskey bottle by my bedside and gulp straight from its neck.

Now it's time for the shops.

I leave my house and look out onto the cul-de-sac. There is no one in sight. I look at the Cann's' to see all the blinds are shut. I look at the grubby house which is also shut up. I look at the houses on my side, once again nothing.

I begin to walk down my gravel path and feel off balance all of a sudden.

"Jesus."

I put my hands out, palms facing away from me, I feel faint. Must be because I haven't eaten all day and I've just swigged down all that alcohol.

I carry on walking and hear a door shut.

"Hi Ryan." I hear the voice and know immediately that it's Paul Brooke.

"Hi there, Paul."

"This is my beautiful wife, Leanne." Paul says, resting his hand on her back.

I look at Leanne. She wears a yellow blouse and denim jeans. She has strawberry blonde hair, pale skin and light blue eyes. Paul is right; she most certainly is a beautiful woman.

“Hi,” she says, smirking as she puts her outstretched hand out in front of her, bending her elbow and keeping her hand and outstretched fingers in between her waist and chest.

“Hi there, nice to meet you.” I say as I shake her hand.

“We best be off; speak soon Ryan,” Paul says. “Bye.”

I swerve across the pavement. My sight is blurred and I have double vision.

I hear the cars occasionally passing me by. I hear swing chains clatter and children laughing and screaming as I lurch past what I can only assume is the park.

I continue on and I know I’ve reached the shopping centre. My balance is better and my sight has regained some clarity, but it’s still impaired. I can smell the bakery, I can hear doors opening and shutting to the shops, the heels of women walking past me. I get a waft of their sweet perfume. I hear conversations about prices: petrol and tax mostly. I hear ‘sorry’ repeatedly, I’ve never realised until this point how often we say sorry.

I keep walking straight ahead; the mini supermarket is at the top main road through the centre.

I get to the supermarket and feel worse. I need to sit down, now. Before I... I stumble, putting my hands out as my legs give way. Using my right hand I push myself back onto my feet.

Trying to find a bench, but with my blurred vision I can't find one. I spot something long that looks as though I can rest on it. I walk up to it and fall onto my buttocks. Luckily, it is the hoped-for bench.

I sit for a moment. I feel so anxious, as if I haven't had enough sleep or food and too much alcohol. I look ahead to see a figure standing across from me. I try to focus my sight on him. He wears a long coat and clumpy boots. I try to focus, and as I stand, he disappears. Where did he go? I try to look around the groups of people, but I can't find him.

Who was that? Is that who put the fox in my shed?

I need to get out of here. I need to get the flowers and wine for Sandra quickly, and then I need to get home.

In the supermarket, I buy some food for home, a mixed bouquet of flowers for Sandra, white and red wine, and some whiskey for myself.

I begin my return home and feel much better, although the two shopping bags containing my very few items feel heavy.

I get to the park around the corner from Mulberry Lane. The park is empty which seems odd, the weather is okay today.

I walk toward the park bench. I put my shopping bags down next to me.

I look down at my watch. 18:02. Great, I'm late, I need to get a move on.

As I stand up from the bench, I look across to the tree line, there's an opening in the greenery. The branches ping back into position as I begin to stand up. I grab my shopping bags and run to Mulberry Lane.

I turn onto Mulberry Lane and look down the cul-de-sac. There is no one in sight. I look to the tree line and the Cann's. Then I look over to my house, all seems well, until I look over to the grubby house. The curtains twitch. Is he following me?

"Ryan." I hear Sandra shout.

Looking over to the Cann's, I see her, poking her head out of the window. "You're late."

"I know. I'm so sorry. Let me run these inside, then I'll be straight over."

"Sure. See you in a minute."

She shuts her window and I quickly pace to my house.

I get inside, run into the kitchen and toss my bags on the kitchen table. I pull out the flowers and wine and then turn to the fridge and put the shopping bags in it.

I look around as I leave the kitchen, and notice my table has moved. It has been turned around. The side that was facing the wall is

now facing me. I take a glance at the kettle; it has changed plug sockets and also faces a different way.

As I look at the table again, I notice something, on the end of the table. I run my hand along the smooth edge until I reach a rough patch.

What's that?

I kneel down and look at the rough patch of the edge of the table. I brush over it with my index finger, it's not a stain. Scratch marks. Where would those have come from?

I take a closer look. It's writing!

Someone has come into my home, moved my furniture and scratched a message on the edge of my table.

I take a closer look. The writing isn't completely clear and the message makes no sense. It reads: 'beaten hints me'.

What does 'beaten hints me' mean?

I stare at the scratches for a moment. Who could have done this? Who could come into my house without any trace and without forcing an entry? The hairs on my neck stand up, my stomach lurches and twists as several thoughts process in my mind. The thoughts are fretful and fearful. My head spins.

Someone or something wants to scare me.

I go out of the kitchen and look around the house. I look in the sitting room. I go up to the bedrooms; all are normal except mine. I step in; the floorboards creak louder than I remember. I continue to look at the end of my bed. How the hell did that get there? It

wasn't there when I went for my sleep, I don't remember it there, but then again I was in a rush.

The old teddy from the basement sits at the end of my bed, facing my pillows. The bear used to have one eye but now it has two red pins for eyes. I walk over to it and pull it off my bed. I hold the back of it and look at its dusty ear and pinned eyes.

Is this meant to mean something too?

I walk downstairs with the bear. I go towards the basement door and notice it's open - just two millimetres, but open nonetheless. I pause then slowly step towards the door. My silence is ruined by the flooring that creaks as I balance my body weight. I walk over and swing the door open. I step under the stairs and through the doorway. The light in the basement is already on.

"Hello?" I shout, but there is no reply. "If someone's down here, come out now and I'll let you leave unharmed."

I stand in silence.

I begin to walk down the groaning stairs. I get to the bottom and look around the basement. There's nobody there.

I look at the bear and toss it onto the pink children's table under the basement stairs and leave the basement.

I slam the basement door to make sure it is shut.

Right, now it's time to go over to Sandra's.

Sandra Cann

Killing For Your Love Chapter 8

Lizzie and the kids are still missing. The police are trying to pin this on me, I can tell.

I'm staying undetected.

I'm searching for women that match Lizzie's description by going to morgues and viewing the dead bodies. If I am able to find Lizzie, that will be the end of it. I will search for the kids if they aren't with her and I will search for the killer...

Chapter 12

I look up to the tall and thick-set, ebony-skinned man, who says: "Are you ready?"

"Yes I am."

We walk into a room with white walls and a window looking into the morgue. A bed sits in the middle of the room in front of our window. The bed has an uneven green sheet covering the body.

A bronze-skinned fellow appears from nowhere wearing a white lab coat and latex gloves.

The woman is blonde, 5'6. She was strangled and was then chucked into a skip, that's all I know.

"Prepare yourself son." The ebony man says to me.

"I'm used to this." I reply.

The man glares at me and then looks back to the window.

The man through the window lifts off the cover to reveal a blonde woman. Her neck is dark purple with red blemishes, made by what was used to strangle her. Her skin is pale and her veins are dark purple with a tint of green. She looks as if she was a beautiful woman.

"This isn't her." I say as I leave the room...

Chapter 13

I look at the enormous white American style house from my car. I see her; I think it's her, it's Lizzie. She walks up to a house, but whose, I don't know.

She wears a long black coat and heels with her hair straightened.

She saunters up to the door, I see her hand move against the door and then hear the one second delayed knock.

The door opens and I cannot see who answers. She stands there for a moment, nodding. I see a dark silhouette of the man who answers. He is hidden by the night. She looks behind and I see her face for a second. My mind goes blank, is that Lizzie?

She steps into the dim house where no lights are switched on. The man stares in my direction. He stands still. He stays as still as I am. I try to focus on his face. Who is this man and was that Lizzie? Is she in trouble? He continues to stare but all of a sudden, he slams the door.

I get out of my car and shut the door. I lean against the car, waiting to see if anything happens.

The house stays dark for a moment. The neighbourhood is silent. The street is silent. I feel the breeze brush past me from different directions.

I hope Lizzie isn't in some sort of trouble. I look to my right to see an old man. He pauses mid-stagger and looks at me. I look away, back to the house to see that a light has turned on upstairs.

I walk up to the dark house, looking around to see if there is anybody around, there isn't.

I walk right up to the door and try the handle. The door is locked; I'll go around the back.

“Hiya Ryan glad you could make it.” Sandra says as she opens the door with a beaming grin.

“I'm so sorry I'm late, I got distracted, very sorry, but I'm sure we'll still be able to have a great evening.”

“We will, don't you worry.” Sandra looks down as she steps to one side to let me in.

“Drink?” She asks as she welcomes me in.

“Oh yes please, open this if you like.” I pull the bottle of wine out of my shopping bag.

“Oh thank you Ryan, you didn't have to.”

I walk past her and I get the scent of her sweet, recently-sprayed perfume. I look into the open lay-out of the house and look back to Sandra shutting the front door.

“Right, do you want the wine you’ve brought or do you want something stronger?” she says, twiddling her thumbs.

“I think I’ll start with the wine actually.”

“Okay, well come in to the kitchen, dinner is ready, we’ve got steak tonight.”

“Nice, I love steak.” I say as we walk into the kitchen.

Sandra serves up the food and we start our meal. At first it’s silent; until I ask: “So how long have you and Simon been married?”

“Oh god, well it’s been around eighteen years now. We had Sam when we were quite young but we weren’t married, much to the dismay of my parents. I wish I could go back to those days when we were first together.”

“Oh? Why would you want to go back? You have your own house and you don’t have to work, he’s obviously a wealthy man.”

“Yes it’s all very good but,” Sandra pauses and stares at me. She downs her glass of wine. “Don’t worry about it Ryan, this isn’t your problem.”

She stands up to get another bottle of wine.

“No you can tell me Sandy. What’s wrong between you and Simon?”

Sandra returns with another bottle of wine. She pours it into her glass then places the bottle in the middle and says: “Help yourself darling.”

Sandra looks at me and smiles. Her eyes stay in the same position, her lips move, and her

cheeks flush. Her eyes look watery as she looks at her glass.

She picks up her glass and knocks it back to finish the wine and pours herself another one.

“Sandra you can tell me,” I say as I hold her hand across the table. “I don’t like seeing you like this.”

“It’s nothing Si...” She looks up, her tongue clicks and she continues. “Ryan... it’s nothing, don’t worry.”

“I may be able to help. Come on, you can tell me anything.”

She hesitates for a moment.

“Okay. I’m only telling you this because I’ve had too much wine. You can’t tell Si about what I’m about to say.”

“Okay.”

“Promise?”

“Of course yeah, I promise.”

“Okay. Well perhaps I’m imagining it, but I just don’t think Simon loves me anymore.”

“What? Of course he does.”

“No, I mean physically. We haven’t had sex for months. I constantly feel like a housewife, not his lover. It feels like all I do is welcome him home from work, make him dinner and comfort him. Do you see what I mean?”

“Yeah sure I see do. Who doesn’t want to feel intimate with their partner?”

“Exactly. It’s not just the sex though. I want to feel attractive and loved again. I see him every day but we rarely kiss, we may hug or cuddle on the sofa, but it’s just not the same as it used to be.”

“I see where you’re coming from Sandy and you’re right.”

“I am? I’m not being selfish or harsh on Si am I?”

“No you’re not. Sandra you are an attractive woman, you really are and there are many men out there who would kill to have you. I mean look at me, I regret the day I woke up and Tanya was gone. I have nightmares constantly. I always imagine her and when I imagine her, she hates me. Maybe it’s because I didn’t fight to keep them. I didn’t do enough to keep Tanya in my life and that’s why I haven’t seen her or the kids in years. It’s my fault. That’s why Simon needs to make an effort with you because you may meet someone who does love you and who does want to look after you and he may give you everything you’re missing and more.” I’ve never spoken to anyone like this before, it’s most likely the alcohol, mixing whiskey and wine wasn’t the best idea.

“Ryan that is so cute.” Sandra says as she stares at me.

“You deserve better and there are plenty of men out there who would make you happy, I’m sure of it.”

Sandra looks down to her glass and takes another drink.

“Maybe. But I don’t want to hurt Si, we’ve been together so long and Sam would be so upset.”

“You need to think of yourself. Everything will work out if you were to leave him. Have you tried talking to him about this?”

“I have tried but he never likes talking about it, especially about sex.”

“Well if he won’t listen, maybe you need to just leave the house. Don’t tell him where you’re going so he knows what his life would be like without you. If you wanted to, you could live with me for a little while?”

“That could be an idea.” Sandra says as she stares at me. “Ryan, I really like you and you’ve opened my eyes to what I need and want in my life.”

“I’m glad I could help you Sandy, I really like you too.”

“Maybe it’s you I need in my life.”

I pause. Did she really just say that? What does she mean? She wants to be with me?

“What?”

“Ryan I said, I want you in my life.” Her words slur slightly. “I want you.”

I look at her, her eyes staring into mine. She bites her dark red bottom lip seductively.

“Sandy... I don’t know what to say.”

“Do you want to be with me?” She asks.

“I can’t. You’re married and we hardly know each other.”

“I know but as soon as I met you, I was attracted to you. You’re so handsome and I really want you and now we’re alone I just want you even more.”

My stomach turns inside out. I really do like her but I can't do that to Simon and I can't do that to Tanya and the kids.

"Sandy, sorry I just..."

Sandra gets up from her chair and walks over to me and pulls me out of my chair.

We stand face to face, staring into each other's eyes. I need to kiss her. She looks stunning.

"We can't do this. You're with Simon and I'm still looking for Tanya and the kids."

"Ryan, please." She kisses me.

My lips respond, followed by my mind, her soft lips; her soft skin. My hands move to her waist and she comes nearer. Our bodies draw closer. She stares at me.

"We can't. We're both married and we are both drunk, we don't know what we're doing." I say, hoping Sandra would stop... But she doesn't.

I lie in bed with the covers off, next to Sandra. She's asleep with her leg on the duvet whilst hugging it to cover half her naked body.

I stand up from the bed and look back down to where I had lain then I look to Sandra; her eyes open.

"Ryan," she croaks.

"I've got to go, thank you for dinner."

"What about desert?" she says as she sits up.

"It was good." I chuckle.

I stare at her and she stares back. The alcohol however, is taking over. My balance becomes nonexistent. I need to go home.

“Don’t go Ryan, come back to bed and stay the night with me.”

“I can’t, I’ve got to go.” As I turn to leave, I stumble. I stand up straight and try to regain a sense of direction and balance.

I stagger out of the bedroom and down the spiral stairs, down into the open-plan bottom floor of the Cann’s home.

I get to the front door to notice two sets of keys hanging on the wall next to the front door. I take one of the sets of keys and check the cut of the key by inserting it into the door. It works, so I leave, shut the door and lock it behind me.

I put the keys into my pocket and begin to sway home.

My vision blurs as I look up at my house at the top of the slope. Continuing to take steady steps across the road, I follow the path from the pavement up to the house, planning the route that I shall take home.

I look around at the empty cul-de-sac. There are no lights on at any windows on the street. The street lamps are dim, barely shining down onto the pavements.

I look over to the grubby house which has no movement whatsoever. I look back towards my house and step onto the pavement. As I walk up the pavement, I sway more and more. My feet feel as if they’ve evaporated. I collapse face-first onto my lawn. I smell the

grass. My outstretched hands clench into fists, gathering up grass and mud. I try to move but I can't. My entire body is numb. My senses disappear.

Sandra's face enters my mind. I watch her face move and shape into Tanya's. Her eyes look at me. Her face has no emotion, but soon changes to anger. Tanya turns away from me and walks away.

We're in a dark room, I recognise the smell of the muskiness and I recognise the shadows that smother me and Tanya. My throat tightens; my Adam's apple moves and vibrates as I open my mouth. With no words coming out, Tanya appears in front of me.

"Help me Ryan. You really, really need to help me, before it's too late."

She disintegrates and the room crumbles around me. The shadows darken, the walls collapse and each segment of wall becomes part of the shadows.

I don't know what's going on. What is Tanya trying to tell me? I know this is only a dream, but it feels so real.

Recollection

Killing For Your Love Chapter 18

I spend most of my days studying local newspapers, judging the murders, searching for the article describing Lizzie's dead body. I fear for her. I fear the day that I do find her; the day that I can in fact identify the body in the morgue.

I have made sure that nobody can find me. I am being searched for by the police. Whether that's because they are delusional enough to think I'm guilty of killing my family, because I am searching for Lizzie and the kids myself or because they are actually worried that I could be missing or have committed suicide. It's definitely not the latter; they are treating me as a suspect...

Just when I thought I had found Lizzie it wasn't to be. I thought it was her, from behind it looked exactly like her but thankfully it wasn't. She wouldn't go into another man's house; she wouldn't do that to me.

The two people won't go to the police to report me; I hope nobody else saw me.

My eyes open slowly. I lie in bed and look to the ceiling with the warm waking up feeling all over my body.

How did I get home? I remember collapsing outside on the lawn but only vaguely.

The images of the shed enter my mind. Flashbacks of the fox and its insides scattered across the floor.

I need to clean the shed and get rid of the fox.

As I stare at the ceiling planning what to do, my thoughts are interrupted:

BANG BANG at the door.

I sit up. The cold air seeps under the duvet counteracting the temperature of the mattress and swathing my back. The duvet flops off my chest. I look ahead of me, to the usually empty wall and I'm horrified. I stay in my bed, staring at the wall. Who did this?

I stare at the newspaper headline letters that have been cut out and stuck onto the wall to read 'Beneath men sit'. It's not just spelled out once; it's repeated a number of times across my wall.

BANG BANG again. Deep voices drone through my walls from outside.

I stare at the letters. Who did this?

I swing my legs from under the duvet and off the mattress.

Looking down to my leg, I notice flecks of mud up my leg. The bottoms of my feet are covered in mud too. What happened last night?

BANG BANG rings out through the house followed by. "Mr Milligan, please open the door."

I can't stop looking at the wall. I walk up to the lettering and stare at the pile of newspapers on the floor.

BANG BANG.

I knock off the lettering. The letters drift and swirl down onto the floor.

I put some clothes on: jeans, that I never really wear anymore and a brown polo shirt. I leave the room, shutting the door behind me.

I am not halfway down the stairs when I see the front door is open. I step off the last step and look around to the basement door which is also wide open. There is movement down in the basement. I lean in and look down the stairs. No one is in sight. I step down the creaky wooden steps. I see lights shining and moving around the basement. I step down off the bottom step and the lights shine into my eyes.

"Mr Milligan?" a deep voice speaks.

"Who are you? Why are you in my home?" I say angrily.

"We're the police. I'm inspector Hughes and this is Detective Seymour. We need to search your property due to the investigation of a murder that took place last night. We are searching all the properties on Mulberry Lane. Do you have any objection to the search?"

The shed enters my mind; the fox, the blood, the segments of brain spattered across the walls, the guts all over the floor. "Do you have a search warrant? And does it specifically

say you can come into a home uninvited?” I ask, anger making my voice harsh to my ears.

“The basement is clear.” Seymour says.

Hughes nods to his colleague. “I think you’ll find we can do what we like, Mr Milligan, especially if you don’t answer and the front door is open. Let’s go up stairs Mr Milligan.”

They follow me up the basement steps toward the front door. I turn to the two muscular men. Hughes’ crinkled face is leathery with beady eyes, one brown and one green. The deep scar on his neck is jagged and uneven as if someone used a blunt knife to attack him.

What am I going to do about the fox?

“Mr Milligan we have a search warrant to search the properties on Mulberry Lane and the surrounding homes around this area. There was a murder last night; another blonde victim who lived on Mulberry Lane.” Hughes says.

My mind is compacted with fear. The fear of the fox being discovered, how could I explain that it wasn’t me? The fear that murder victim is Sandra Cann. I need to stay calm; I have done nothing wrong at all. Someone is setting me up for some reason.

“What? Who?” I ask.

“We cannot reveal who the murder victim is at this time.”

“Oh please I need to know.”

“And why’s that sir?”

“Because I have friends who live on this road.”

“Lucy Brekken was murdered last night. She was raped then stabbed to death. Her husband, Graham was also murdered we believe. Her body was in the home and we found traces of his blood there but he is missing. We are searching all the properties on Mulberry Lane for any indications of his location.”

I am frozen to the spot. I feel dizzy. They are going to find the fox and they’ll pin this death and the other murders on me.

The two men walk off to search my home. They are going to find the newspapers also which will make them suspicious.

The leading officer comes up to me; his voice is distant, he has to repeat himself.

“Sir?” I hear him say. “Sir can you hear me?”

“Yes, sorry. I’m just hung-over from last night.”

“Do you remember what you did last night, Mr Milligan?”

“Of course I do, I went over the road to Sandra Cann’s house and we had a meal together. Her husband asked me to keep an eye on her because of these recent murders.”

“When did you leave her home?”

“God, well it was very late. I can’t remember a specific time.”

“Right. Did you hear any noises? If you were out late then you could be our only hope in finding the murderer.”

“I’m afraid I didn’t hear anything.”

“Okay Mr Milligan. We don’t need a statement from you at this time, but we will.

We will need both yours and Mrs Cann's statements. We are asking everyone on Mulberry Lane of their whereabouts last night."

"I understand officer. I will answer any questions you have." I say calmly.

"We will search the house now, however."

"Yes that is fine, I'll be outside."

What about the newspaper cut outs? I need to get them to hide them. I begin to speak again, "Actually officer, can I get something from my room?"

"What could you possibly need at this moment in time Mr Milligan?" He asks looking me up and down.

"Well I haven't tidied my room and..."

"It's fine Mr Milligan I expect I've seen a lot worse. I'll see you outside." Hughes says.

I stand in the hallway by the front door and watch the thick set of Hughes make his way up my stairs.

Once he disappears upstairs, I look through the kitchen door and out of the kitchen window to see Seymour searching the garden. He looks around at the fences. He takes long strides toward the gate and looks around the area. I hope he doesn't find the blood trail leading to the shed.

As he looks around, my head feels numb. The numbness drains my body and progresses down me. My hearing disappears as I wait for the shocked expression of Seymour. I continue to stare as Seymour pauses. He looks back to the house then at me but I don't think

he sees me. He walks toward the shed with less of a stride and swagger. Standing in front of the door, he reaches for the handle.

What should I do when he finds it? Should I run? Should I stay here and tell them the truth?

Everything slows down in my mind. His fingertips touch the shed handle. His palm touches the handle and his wrist tightens and turns. I stare at his face, waiting and waiting for the neutral expression to turn into disgust and shock.

“Ryan, are you okay?” Sam Cann says from behind me, breaking my concentration on Seymour.

“I... I’m...” I try to speak as I watch Seymour open the door.

“Ryan?” Sam says as he stands in front of me now. “Are you okay?”

Seymour has the shed door wide open. He takes a step back and looks the shed up and down. He glances towards the house and back to the shed. I hear Sam’s voice echoing in and out.

“Ryan you look awful.” I hear Sam say.

“I’m fine thank you.”

“I’ll get these men out of your house; I doubt you’re the killer around here.” Sam says whilst patting my back, making my shoulder jolt.

“Thank you.”

“Hughes.” Sam shouts. “This house is clear.”

I continue to look outside at Seymour who has disappeared inside the shed. Sam brushes

past me on his way to the bottom of the stairs.

“Come on Hughes.” Sam pulls out the radio and repeats himself. “Come on Hughes.”

“What’s going on? We haven’t finished the search.” I hear a muffled shout from upstairs.

“Yes we have.” Sam shouts.

I look out to see Seymour striding toward the house. His shoulders sloping as he walks. The shed door is shut and Seymour looks unaffected.

What’s going on?

“Ryan we’re going to leave now. Sorry to have disturbed you.” Sam says.

Hughes is downstairs, standing next to Sam. Seymour walks into the hallway and nods to Sam and Hughes.

“I searched the garden and the shed.”

Seymour says, turning his head to stare at me. He turns his head back to Sam and Hughes.

“All clear.”

“Yes well it would be; Ryan isn’t the murderer.” Sam says.

“Oh, okay.” Seymour says.

“Speak soon, Ryan.” Sam says as he heads towards the front door.

“Have a good day Mr Milligan.” Hughes says out loud. “Let’s hope we don’t have to meet again.” He mutters under his breath.

I don’t reply, instead I escort him to the door and watch them leave.

They walk down the gravel path with Sam leading the way across the road where two

police cars are parked alongside Sam's Mercedes.

Sandra is speaking to two police officers. The house next to the Cann's has more police cars parked outside it. That house is taped off with blue and white tape.

The press is gathered outside the Brekken's house taking photos of any movement by the police officers entering and leaving the house.

I never met or even saw the Brekkens but it is getting too close to Sandra now. I need to protect her from the murderer.

I walk back into my room to look at the newspapers. I pick them up and go through them, looking at each page. The stories of the local community are left untouched. The reports of the murders are cut to pieces. The letters of the headlines are cut out to spell 'Beneath men sit' a number of times across my wall. The newspapers are different broadsheets and tabloids reporting on our local murders.

Is it the murderer doing this? Is it a warning to me and Sandra?

I look back to my bed; the duvet is clumped on it. The mattress sheet has smudges of mud on it. It must be from my legs and feet but where did the mud come from?

I look to the end of my bed. Surely not? How did that get here?

Staring at me is the bear from the basement, sitting on the end of my bed. Its ear and dusty fur are the same. The red pins for eyes are

bent to face me, right here in this position. How did someone know I would stand here and see the bear? Someone is trying to fuck with me.

I grab the bear and take it back downstairs. As I turn to the basement door, I take one last look at the bear. It used to have a black beady eye and then it changed to two red pins for eyes. Without hesitation, I throw the bear down into the darkness of the basement and shut the door.

Wait a second.

I go back to the basement door and open it. I look down into the darkness and walk down the steps. As the creaking from the basement steps stops and I stand on concrete, I bend down, feeling around on the floor for the bear. The dusty floor is confusing, why would there be so much dust down here?

I walk back up to the steps and flick the switch for the lights.

As I stand waiting for the lights to stay on, I look at the bear which sits upright against the wall, staring at the basement steps. As I continue to stare at it, the light flickers on and off, on and off, on and then stays off. I'm in darkness. What happened there?

I reach to the switch. My finger hovers over it when all of a sudden the lights flicker on and stay on.

I look back down to the bear but it's gone. What?

Where is it? I step off the steps and look at the rest of the basement. The bear is not

there. The pink table under the steps has also disappeared.

I hear metal on metal knock behind me. I turn quickly. There's no one there. The basement steps creak. I turn around again, facing the steps to see the bear half way up the steps, staring at me. The lights flicker off again, the bear has disappeared. The bear back on the ground, where it should have been.

As I look back to the steps, there is a silhouette of someone under the steps. My heart thumps hard but I have to stand my ground.

"Who are you?" I ask.

The lights flicker. The figure moves closer. They flicker again and the figure moves even closer. The lights go out again. I stay where I am. Waiting for the lights to come on, I stretch my arms out to feel around me. There's no one here, what is going on?

The lights flicker. The figure has disappeared. The lights go out. I hear the basement steps creaking. I hear footsteps, creaking down the steps. Why won't the lights come back on? The silence is eerie and unsettling. I stand still, listening to the creaking steps. The creaks move down the steps and as I hear the last step creak, the silence returns. The light flickers on and Sandra is standing at the bottom of the stairs.

"Ryan? What are you doing?"

I stay still, staring at Sandra. She warily approaches me.

“Ryan, are you okay?” She says as she takes hold of my hand.

I don’t answer, instead I hug her. Fear leaves my body and I feel safe. I have no idea what happened. Was it all tricks of the mind? Did I imagine it? Well I must have, I keep imaging Tanya and the kids but why? It’s driving me insane.

“Ryan, look at me.” Sandra says, clutching my head. “Please look at me.”

I look up into Sandra’s eyes. I study her pale skin; her blonde curls, her thin neck and her tight blouse, then I place my hands on the sides of her face and kiss her. I pull away and continue to stare at her.

We stare for a moment not saying a word to each other. Sandra leans in and kisses me on the lips.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah I’m fine. Sorry to frighten you.”

“Well you didn’t frighten me, I was just worried about you and I’ve been thinking about you all night.”

“Me too.” I smirk. “How did you get in though?” Sandra lifts her arm up and the spare house keys dangle over her palm, held by one finger. “Spare keys. Do you really believe I could break in?”

“I suppose not. Let’s go upstairs.”

“Oh can we?” Sandra presses her body against mine.

“Well I actually meant let’s get out of here, but sure we can.” I say.

It feels morally wrong, but I can't help my feelings and Sandra can't help hers. I feel bad for Simon.

We leave the basement and stand in the hallway. I shut the basement door and pull Sandra towards me.

"We shouldn't do this."

"Why not?" Sandra asks, disappointed.

"Well the police are sniffing around here and there's Simon."

"Ryan, please don't." Sandra says as she kisses me and directs me towards the stairs.

I just can't fight her off, I can't stop it. Then the images of the shed enter my mind, the newspapers in my room. We can't go up there.

"Sandy, why don't we do this later?"

"Oh, what's wrong?" Sandra stutters.

"Nothing, it's just that my room's a mess and I'm still unpacking things in the house. Why don't I come over later?"

"Okay." She drops her hands by her side and looks at me.

I kiss her on the cheek. "I'll see you later."

"Okay." Sandra says with a smile. "Bye." She kisses me and I walk her to the door.

I watch Sandra walk down the path but I can't help staring at the neighbours and police.

I look to see Sam watching Sandra walk towards him. They chat for a while. I look at the Brekken's murder scene. There are fewer photographers and police now. With only two

police cars parked outside the Brekken house and Sam's car in front of the Cann's.

The grubby house on the end is quiet with no sign of the man at all.

The house closest to the grubby house is empty, they must be on holiday as are the ones to my left, which leaves my next door neighbours; the Brookes. Leanne stands on the pavement watching the Brekken household. I look across to see Paul emerge from his house, he looks at me and changes his direction and comes over. He nods to me. "Did you know the Brekkens?" Paul asks.

"No I didn't." I say.

"Ahh well they were nice. Leanne always spoke to them but I didn't really."

"Why was that then?"

"What? Why didn't I talk to them?"

I nod to reply.

"I don't know I just didn't," Paul says then laughs.

"I suppose that's a legitimate excuse."

"Oh yes. So are you worried about these murders at all?"

"Well, not for myself no but for others? Yes."

"Yeah I suppose we're safe." He laughs again. "You're dark and I'm bald." Paul laughs hysterically.

I stare at him in disbelief. Making jokes out of these murders. He's probably trying to hide his fear.

"Shouldn't laugh really," he says.

'No you shouldn't' I felt like saying, but instead I don't bother.

"Let's hope he doesn't fancy going for gingers instead." Paul smirks again.

"So do you know the man who lives in the shed over there?" I ask Paul pointing to the grubby house.

"Err." Paul stands in silence and stares. "No not really, I've heard that he's lost it though, he's a right nut."

"How do you know?"

"That's what I've heard. He's an ex-vet or scientist or both, I dunno, I can't remember. But he's alone and I guess it's driven him mad. Word is that he's linked with these murders or he knows who the murderer is."

"How do you know?"

"People talk, I know some people in the force and they talk too. I wouldn't be surprised if it was 'im. He's a fucking nut."

"Well we don't know, so I wouldn't go shouting it around."

"Naa I won't, because he might go for bald guys instead of the blondes." Paul says without laughing at his own joke.

I've learnt a lot from talking to Paul. I've decided that he's an odd guy and comes across as a bit of an arsehole. He's the type of man who jokes about serious news stories and passes on offensive jokes that aren't funny and he's just plain rude and disrespectful.

"If you say so." I say after a moment's silence.

"Well I'm going. Good to speak to you Paul."

“Yeah good to talk to you, mate.” Paul says, dragging his feet as he returns to Leanne. I look towards the Cann’s and see Sandra and Sam still speaking, so I go back inside.

Inside, I look to the basement door. I walk towards it and open it. I listen. Silence.

I enter the basement and switch the lights on which flicker as usual. I see the bear still in the same position. However one of the red pins is on the floor.

I pick up both the pin and the bear. I look at the eyeless, musky bear and stick the pin back into its head so it has two pinned eyes again. As I do, something falls behind me. I jerk and turn around. One of the pink plastic chairs for the children’s play table has fallen on its back. How though? I stand still, holding the bear.

Keeping my eye on it, I walk over to the table and look around it. There is only dust and mould surrounding the table and chairs.

I look to the pink table closely. It’s old, has been used frequently and the paint is faded. But why would a man who doesn’t have any children have toys in his basement?

I pick the chair up and stand it back onto its four legs. I step back and look at the chairs surrounding the table. Scratch marks on the side of the table catch my attention. I rub my hand over the side of the table and feel the marks. Then I look closer at the scratches. Squinting to see what it says, I read the scratched plastic which sends a shiver through

my body. I only have to read it once then I kick the table under the steps and back away. 'Beaten hints me', 'Beaten hints me', 'Beaten hints me'. The same as what's scratched on my kitchen table.

Who the fuck has done this? The anger overwhelms me; I'm uncomfortable in my own home. In my anger and stress, I pick up the table and throw it against the wall by the metal shelving, shouting and screaming obscenities.

"I'll fucking find you and I'll fucking kill you, you bastard!" I shout out loud, surprising myself because I rarely swear or lose my cool.

I leave the table on the floor and keeping a hold of the bear without realising, I take it upstairs with me.

Leaving the basement, I jerk the door shut behind me and walk outside to my bins. I throw the bear in the bin and slam the lid. I look behind me to see the police still on Mulberry Lane; Sam's car has gone.

I walk back inside and go out to the back garden to look at the fox in the shed. Why didn't Seymour react to it? Could he be the one doing all this?

I go to the shed; I stand outside, breathing heavily, still full of anger. I finally pluck up courage to swing open the shed door.

Looking into the shed but it's empty. With no sign of anything ever being dead in there, I step in and look around inside. I study the corners of the floor boards, the roofing and the windows.

What is going on? Someone is playing a game with me but why?

I leave the shed and shut the door. I pause and open it again. There's nothing there, except floating dust.

"Never seen a shed before?" I hear Paul shout from the other side of his fence.

I decide to ignore his sarcastic remark and stare into the shed.

"Giles?" he speaks again.

"It's Ryan." I reply.

"Oh yeah, sorry mate. So what're you up to?"

"I'm looking in my shed." I reply.

Paul laughs and says: "Have a good day."

I do not reply. I wait for a few seconds and look round to make sure he's left me alone.

I walk toward the gate and look around the grass to find the splatters of blood that led me to the shed. Nothing.

I did not imagine this, someone is trying to fuck me up here, I can tell.

I march back inside and run upstairs to my room.

Looking at the newspapers on the floor I know that this is all linked, the writing on the tables and the wall; the fox in the shed. This is all directed towards me. But what does the writing mean?

I leave my room and walk downstairs to think of what it could mean.

I pull out some A4 paper from my laptop bag and a chewed pen and sit down at the kitchen table. I lean forward and look at the scratch mark on the table. It's written in the same

style and the same size as the one on the pink plastic table in the basement.

I get up from the table and move into the sitting room, taking a wooden chopping board to lean on so I can write.

I sit down in my arm chair and rest the chopping board on my crossed leg. I write the two phrases that I have found on the tables and my wall.

Beaten hints me

Beneath men sit

These phrases make no sense whatsoever. Maybe they've been translated from a different language? That could explain the construction of the phrases. It's definitely not Standard English, that's for sure.

I sit there for a moment and study the two phrases. I have no idea what they could possibly mean! I change around the word order and cross examine them, nothing. This is infuriating. I put the paper and the wooden board on the arm of the chair.

I need a drink. I walk into the kitchen and pour some whiskey into a glass and knock it back.

I take the bottle into the sitting room and look at the phrases I wrote down. Absolutely nothing enters my mind; I have no idea what they could possibly mean. All I can think about is finding out who did this.

Beaten hints me

Beneath men sit

What could they possibly mean?

I have a few more swigs from the bottle and leave the house. I walk down the path and look straight ahead to the Cann's. As I cross the road, I look down Mulberry Lane. The police are still parked outside the Brekken's house and there's no longer anyone else standing around, there are no police officers outside the house.

My attention is distracted by the grubby house as I see the strange man standing outside, staring at me.

I stand in the middle of the road and glare back at him. Fed up of this now. With no hesitation, I shout: "What are you looking at?"

He continues to stare at me and doesn't say a word back.

I walk towards him, he stays still. As I get closer, he lowers his arms and turns away.

"Can I talk to you?" I shout.

He stands still, facing the door as I approach. I get almost to the footpath in front of his house and as I step onto the pavement, he runs inside and shuts his door. I run to his front door.

I'm banging on the door with a clenched fist, bellowing: "Answer the door right now!"

With no answer and no curtain twitching, I take a step back to look up to the second floor, no signs of life there either. I walk around to the side of his house. He has wood and sticks stacked up to the side of his house with bits of rusted metal lying around on the mud and dead grass that passes for a lawn. I look around his back garden, it's overgrown, there's a neglected vegetable patch with bamboo sticks, wilted leaves and vines dangling onto the ground.

I look around and try to find his back door. Looking through the vines and leaves covering the back wall of the house, I identify it. However, the back door is infested with woodlice and covered in vegetation.

There's no way I'm getting to his back door. I look up and down the door and notice something odd. I look down to the bottom of the door and spot a square hatch. I think it's a dog-flap but I can't tell. I don't think he has a dog, but I suppose he could have had one before.

There's the sound of movement to the side of the shack. I turn my head and there is nobody there. I then hear a twig snap on the other side. This time I do not look, I will let them think that I haven't heard them. I pause for a moment, waiting to hear another sound of movement.

What should I do if it's someone trying to attack me? Do I hit them? Do I run? Do I call for help?

I wait. I look back into the garden without looking towards the noise. I take a deep breath. My fists clench and my breathing is slow. I hear another twig crack which makes me look in time to see a fox. I look at the fox and it stares back at me whilst taking small steps towards me. It pauses and then runs into the woodland.

I turn to walk back to the front of the house when I see two men walking towards me. Police, both officers are tall and thick set.

“Can we help you sir?” one of them says.

“No not at all.” I reply.

“We heard you shouting at the resident of this house. What are you doing around here and why were you shouting?” The other one says.

“Well he was staring at me and he’s been staring at me for the last few days so I thought I would confront him, is that against the law?” I reply or should I say the alcohol replies.

“I don’t like your tone Mr...?”

“Milligan, Ryan Milligan. Now if you don’t mind.”

“Just wait one moment sir. What house do you live at?”

“That one.” I say pointing to my house. “The one with the long gravel path up the slope.”

“Mr Myers’ old home. I see.”

The two officers stare at me.

“Can I leave?”

“On the condition that there’s no more trouble, not another word from you sir, we

are investigating a murder and we don't have time for this. I suggest you stay away from this house and the man who lives here, do you understand?"

"Yes I do, officer."

"All of you living on this cul-de-sac are prime suspects to this murder and we are keeping a close eye. We will have to write this down and to be quite frank I didn't like your tone and I don't like your whiskey breath. Good evening Mr Milligan."

I wanted to reply to these arrogant cops but left it and walked through the middle of them after they stood apart to let me through.

I walk along in the middle of the road and I know there are eyes watching me. I look around as I go; the police officers are staring at me. I look to the grubby man's house and see him standing at his window with his arms folded, also staring at me.

I shake it off and continue to walk towards Sandra's. I take one more look. The police officers have disappeared and the grubby man is no longer at his window. I can still feel his gaze. He's standing outside his front door with his arms by his sides, still staring at me. I turn around and face him. He looks unaffected.

With that, I turn around and continue my journey to the Cann's.

I stand outside their house and inspect it up and down, trying to work out which room Sandra's in. I look back to the grubby man who is still staring at me. Suddenly, he hears a

front door shut and his expression changes; he looks petrified. His head turns sharply to the Brekken's and he goes back inside his house.

With no one watching me, I walk up to the Cann's front door. I knock, but no one answers. I can hear music bellowing through the house; Sandra must not have heard me. I go around the back of the house and look in through the windows as I go. I stop as I see her dancing around the lounge in her underwear. All she wears is a purple bra and matching knickers.

I don't know why she isn't wearing any clothes, but she looks great. I'm not complaining. I walk further around the back of the house and kneel by the window. I stay below the windowsill and poke my head up slowly so my eye level is above the windowsill. I look into the house and see her again, this time from behind. Her knickers turn out to be a purple thong.

I duck back down as she turns towards me. I slowly walk back to the front of the house to see Sam's Mercedes pull up. Shit.

Sam opens his door and gets out of the car. His car bleeps as he presses a button on his key, he pulls the door handle to check it's locked. He takes a look inside his car and then walks up the drive of the house. He looks at me and does a double take.

"Ryan, what are you doing around there?!"

“I was looking to see where Sandra was, she didn’t answer. I heard music but I couldn’t see her.”

Sam stares at me for a moment and walks to the front door. He bangs on the door aggressively and shouts: “Mum open up!”

The music is turned off from inside and there is a moment of silence.

The door begins to unlock and it opens slightly and then fully. Sandra stands there in her dressing gown.

“Sorry I was er having a shower.”

“Why is he around the back of your house?”

Sam says angrily.

“I don’t know Sam, maybe because I didn’t answer the door?” Sandra says.

“Why are you here then?” Sam says to me.

“Don’t talk to him like that. I invited him round because Simon wants someone in the house while he’s away. He’s keeping an eye on me.”

“I was talking to him.” Sam says.

“I just told you darling, stop being paranoid. You need to know when to stop working. Ryan is not a murderer, okay?”

“Ryan.” Sam says, staring at me.

“Your mum told you. Your dad asked me to look after her and keep an eye on the house for him while he’s away.”

“Well I can do that, see you later Ryan.” Sam says stubbornly.

“Sam, don’t be so rude. That is not your choice to make, this is my house and I want

him here. He makes me feel much more comfortable and safe.”

“I can look after you better than he can.”

“Oh yeah, well will you be here tonight?”

Sam looks down and pulls out his phone.

“No I won’t be here tonight, but my phone won’t leave my side, so you can call if something’s up.”

“Okay I will, but Ryan will be here for most of the evening, I might even ask him to stay overnight.”

Sam stares at Sandra and shakes his head.

“Fine whatever. Well I’ll be in my office for most of the night, I might drop round in the morning to check on you.”

“You don’t have to do that.” Sandra says as she reaches for Sam’s shoulder.

“Yes I do mum. See you tomorrow.” Sam says as he turns and walks off towards his car.

“Bye darling I love you.” Sandra says to Sam who doesn’t reply.

“Bye Sam.” I say, once again no reply.

“Oh come in Ryan don’t worry about him.”

Sandra walks away from the door and I walk in, shutting the door behind as I enter.

“I saw you dancing.”

“Are you stalking me Mr Milligan?” Sandra says as she saunters towards me with her dressing gown open.

“Well I didn’t get an answer at the door.”

“Oh right yes, sorry. Did you like what you saw?” She says as she puts her chest against mine.

I push the dressing gown off her smooth slender shoulders and say: “I did. I bet I can guess what colour your underwear is.”

Sandra laughs and leads me upstairs.

Shola

Killing For Your Love Chapter 20

I walk into the morgue to see the tall ebony man I found out his name is Don.

Don is helping me out, every time a woman of Lizzie's description comes in here, he tells me and I see if it's her.

I know what Don is doing is wrong, I shouldn't be allowed to look at these bodies, but for the mean time he's letting me. He knows if he stops I'll make the authorities aware of this operation, and the additional felony's he commits outside of work.

Don is a dodgy man; he helps criminals cover up the wrongs they've committed. He's the man to call if a body needs to be hidden, and stay hidden. He can dispose of all the evidence involved in a murder.

I know this because he told me and I saw him do it once. He has saved many people by doing it, preventing them being from being found out...

"So you have someone for me?" I ask Don.

"Yes." Don says looking to my feet.

"What's wrong?" I ask

"We need to stop this. I can't do this anymore, it's too risky."

"Stop? No we aren't stopping." I tell him.

"Let's go."

"I can't do it anymore, sorry." Don says as he turns around to walk away.

"What the fuck are you going on about? We are doing this right here right now, let me see her."

"No." Don says as he walks away.

"Don, I'm warning you. Get back here right now. Show me the body or I'll reveal all your little secrets."

"Do it then." He replies to me.

"Oh I will. I'll kill your wife and seven year old boy whilst I'm at it. Mariah and little Dwayne."

Don paused and turned back to me. He clenches his fists and walks towards me.

"Don't even think about it Don." I tell him.

"Show me the girl."

Don unclenches his fist.

"This way." He says.

I walk through the green double doors and enter a cold-room. The walls are white, as is the ceiling; the floor is a light blue. I see my breath in the cold atmosphere and the heat of Don's head steams up into the freezing air.

I look around me. The layout is similar to a hospital ward with eight beds: four beds against the wall on either side.

They all have green covers over the bed, covering the bodies.

Don walks to the last one against the right wall and looks to the folder attached to the end of the bed.

"Here she is." he whispers.

Don lifts off the cover to reveal a blonde woman. I look to the eyelids of this woman. Her cheek is swollen and purple. Her neck still has finger marks across it. Her breasts and skin on her

chest are nonexistent. It's as if they've been ripped off.

I look further down to see her stomach that has been pierced multiple times.

"This isn't Lizzie." I say.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. That isn't her." I say staring in disbelief at this woman's body.

Don covers her over and walks past me.

"So do you know who's doing this to these women?" I ask.

"It isn't anyone I know, they would have called me if it was. But they must be angry. They obviously want revenge, I reckon they've lost something, someone and don't know how to get it back. Their anger has built up and they are now taking it out on a specific target and type and anyone who stands in their way will be killed. These murders are pure evil."

Don sounds a little too confident about the reasons behind the murders.

"Does it scare you that you don't know who it is?"

"I'm not scared of a lone killer. If I had the chance of facing this person, I would kill him myself to stop the misery. Which makes me ask, this isn't you is it?" Don stares at me and folds his thick arms.

"Me? Why would I want to see these people if I committed the murders?" I say.

"I don't know, you tell me?"

"Let me out Don."

Don grabs me by my jacket and pushes me against the wall.

"If I find out it is you, I will kill you. Do you get me?"

"Get the fuck off me." I say whilst trying to prise his grip off of me.

Don slowly lets go and stays standing in front of me looking down to me. He walks away and walks through the double doors. I follow.

"What the hell was that about?" I ask him.

"It was a warning to you." He says.

"Well it isn't me, I'm just looking for my..."

"Shush!" Don interrupts me.

I look to the front door of the morgue to see flash lights shining onto the door. A figure looks inside shining his torch.

"Hide." Don whispers.

"Where?" I ask.

"Go into the morgue area with the bodies."

"I'm not g..."

"Now!" He whispers.

I walk back through the double doors and kneel down behind a bed.

I listen intently as Don goes to the door and unlocks it.

"Can I help you?" I hear Don ask.

"Yes you can. Whose car is this parked outside?" The voice has an Irish accent.

"Mine. Why?" Don replies.

"We were wondering who was in here and why. What are you doing here?" the same man says.

"This is my job, I work here. I come here occasionally at night when a body is transferred here." Don replies.

"What does your job consist of here?" an American accent replies.

"It's a morgue what do you think we do, host children's parties?"

I hear a moment's silence.

"We examine bodies that come in and hold them until they are identified." Don sighs.

"Right. So why are you here now?"

"I've told you, I come here some nights to do some work and wait for any calls if there are any. I'm busy at the moment so would you mind leaving? Thank you and bye." I hear Don slam the door and walk towards the morgue area I'm in.

"Jesus Christ" I say, "Who was that."

"Police sniffing around. You need to leave but you can't go yet."

"Why not?" I ask.

"Because they'll be watching. You can't take the car, I have to. Trust me." Don says.

Well what else can I do? I have to trust him...

My dreams for once, were good. I dreamt of Sammy and Alex in our old house, our old garden; their old toys. Tanya and I were out in the garden with them. I was cooking up a barbecue whilst Tanya sat by me with a glass of ice cold Pimms in her hand.

Currently in a doze, I continue to remember the old times.

Looking around the garden, the oak tree at the end is full of life, its leaves are bright green and the sun shines through the branches. The hedges and lawn are cut to

exact length, and the smell of freshly cut grass wafts through the air. The pond's clear water boasts two coy carp that swim elegantly around the smooth, charcoal rocks. Their bright scales catch the light from the beaming sun.

As I proudly look at my surroundings, I feel a slight nudge against my knee. I look down to see Sammy and Alex smiling up at me, revealing their little white stubs for teeth.

I look into their eyes and tell them I love them. They giggle and run off.

As they disappear into the house, I turn to Tanya.

"Hello darling." I say.

"Heya." Tanya replies, smiling.

I look at the twin shining planets of her eyes. I look to her smooth fair skin and stroke her cheek with the back of my fingers. As I do, her skin begins to peel away.

"Tan, are you okay?"

She stares back at me. Her eyes darken. Her skin peels to reveal the tender redness of her flesh. She barges past me, knocking me off balance and I fall onto the grass.

The grass has changed from lush green to brown straw with patches of mud. I look around, the oak tree is burnt, the leaves are singed and the top of the tree is on fire.

I look in the pond. The rocks are covered in blood and dead fish float on the surface. The once shining carp are brown and decaying.

I look to the house which isn't my old house anymore, but my new house. The windows

are smashed and there is blood smeared over the bricks and windows.

I run to the house and it explodes in flames, launching me back a few metres. I land on the mud awkwardly and sit up, staring at flaming ruin.

The wind begins to howl around me. Rain hammers down onto the dead grass, splattering me with mud.

The shed door opens and slams shut repeatedly.

I push myself up off the ground and walk over to the shed warily. I reach out to the door; the heat from the house burns the side of my face. The shed door swings open, wafting a stench into my face, forcing me to gag. Sammy lies on the shed floor, her throat has been slit and blood covers her entire body.

A low droning sound rings in my head. I can't block it out. I put my hands over my ears to no effect. Inside the shed, I shout to Sammy. "Darling let's go." She doesn't respond. "Sammy?"

I feel her neck. No pulse.

"Sammy, no!" I shout, my voice is muted.

I pick her up and lay her down on the dead grass. I stand up and look down to her body. Tears flooding down my face, I look to the house to see Alex standing at a window, crying and screaming, although I can't hear him. The fire is uncontrollable as it flares up, the tiles on the roof collapse and fall into the house.

I look back to Sammy whose eyes are now open. I look at her but I back away.
I hear a voice fading in and out of my mind, saying my name repeatedly.
“Ryan, Ryan, Ryan.”

I look back at the house to see Tanya standing behind Alex, screaming.
Someone is behind me, I can't see them but I can feel their hair tickle my face, their chin rests on my shoulder and I hear them whisper: “Ryan.”

I wake up and sit bolt upright. I jump out of bed and go to the window to look at my house over the road. It's fine.

Breathing heavily, I look back to the empty bed. Sandra must be downstairs.

I open the door and walk out to the spiral staircase, to hear where she is. I hear faint music playing from the kitchen.

I walk back into the bedroom and put on my trousers and shirt.

As I walk down the spiral stairs, Sandra appears wearing jeans and a tight fitted t-shirt.

“Morning gorgeous.” I say to her.

“Morning you.” Sandra says as she saunters towards me and kisses me.

“Good sleep?” I ask.

“Oh yeah, you wore me out.” She says as she bites her bottom lip. “You didn't have such a good sleep though, did you?”

I look at her confused, “Y-y-yeah I did.”

“Oh well you were really unsettled throughout the night.”

“Oh sorry, did I keep you awake?”

“No but I woke up a few times and you were talking in your sleep; I came back after going to the loo and you were really hot. It was odd.”

“Yeah, I do keep having nightmares.”

“Oh baby, what about?”

“About my kids and the old house and that, that’s all.”

“Oh right, well if you ever need someone talk to, I’m here for you.” Sandra says as she pulls me in for a hug.

“Thanks.” I say.

As we hug, the front door is knocked on. We both freeze.

“I bet that’s Sam.” Sandra says.

“What should we do?”

“Could you just hide? Sorry baby.”

“Yeah sure, I’ll hide out the back.”

“Thanks.” Sandra leans in and kisses me on the lips.

I go into the kitchen and try the back door, but it’s locked. Shit.

I hear Sandra open the door and greet whoever it is with a kiss. “Hello darling.” It must be Sam.

I look around the kitchen for a back door key, but there isn’t one.

“What are you doing here so early?”

“Mum, I told you I’d be coming round early to check up on you.”

“Of course, sorry sweetheart. Do you want to come in for a quick coffee?”

My heart sinks as I duck behind the sink. I can't hide anywhere else; I can't get out of the house. Hiding has made this look really bad. If he sees me, we're in trouble.

"Errrm. I could stay for a quick one." Sam says.

The answer I didn't want. I stay hiding behind the sink, twiddling my sweaty thumbs. Sandra comes over to the sink and looks down to me. She looks over to Sam and back to me. She mouths out wide mouthed, 'what are you doing?' I look at her and mouth back pointing at the back door, 'locked'.

She stands above me pressing against me, filling the kettle up at the sink.

"Coffee with two sugars?" She asks.

"God no, just one sugar please." Sam replies. His voice is muffled and distant, he must be sitting on the sofa facing away from the kitchen.

Sandra puts the kettle on its stand, opens the drawer and pulls out a key. She looks down to me and rolls her eyes. She walks over to the door, unlocks it and opens it.

"Bloody flies." She says. "All the places to fly and they fly into my bloody house."

"They're annoying aren't they?" Sam half-heartedly replies.

Sandra looks down to me and tilts her head back and forth towards the door. I return the head bang movement and grin. She looks down and keeps a straight face and walks away into the sitting room. I rise and look over the worktop and sink and see Sandra

sitting opposite Sam facing my direction whilst Sam faces away from me. I stand up fully but as I do, Sam stands up.

“What are you doing?” Sandra nervously asks.

“Gonna wash my hands.”

“Do it in the toilet, I have no soap in the kitchen.”

“Oh right, okay,” he says.

I hear him creak up the spiral stairs.

I hear small strides towards me. I stand up and see Sandra.

“Leave now.” Sandra whispers.

“That’s not very nice.” I say, smiling.

I hear the tap upstairs turn on.

“Seriously Ryan, go now,” she says.

“Okay, see you later darling.” I say.

“Bye.”

“Where’s my kiss?” I ask.

The tap upstairs turns off and I hear footsteps.

Sandra leans across the sink and kisses me on the lips.

“Bye, Ryan.” Sandra whispers.

I walk calmly to the back door and around the side of the house.

I hear the back door slam and I watch in through the windows. Sandra goes back to the sitting room and I see Sam coming down the stairs.

I walk up to the front door and knock on the door.

I hear voices and then Sandra opens the door, wide-eyed.

“Oh... Ryan, Hi. Can I help you?” She says, frowning.

“I saw Sam was here so I was wondering if I could ask him about something?”

“Yeah I guess so. Sam?”

“Hi Ryan” I hear Sam shout. “You going to come in?”

“Yeah sure, if that’s okay with you Sandra?”

“Yes you’re more than welcome.”

I walk in and sit on the sofa next to Sam.

“Alright?” Sam says as we shake hands.

“I’m good thank you, yourself?”

“Could be better. Work is shit at the moment. I just wanted to apologise to you for yesterday. Sometimes I just don’t know when to switch off from work, I assume everyone is a lunatic” He laughs. “So yeah, I’m really sorry.”

“Seriously Sam don’t worry about it. I completely understand; I know what it’s like to lose someone you love and let me tell you, it’s the worst pain you can ever go through. Pain to yourself doesn’t compare to losing someone you love. It’s nice that you care so much for your mum, so seriously, don’t worry about it. But just to reiterate, I’m just here to look out for your mum whilst your dad’s away. You’ve got nothing to worry about”

“Thanks Ryan, you’re absolutely right, thank you.”

“No problem.”

I look over to Sandra who smiles at me.

“Would you like a drink?”

“Oh no it’s a bit early for a drink.” I laugh.

“I meant a tea or coffee.”

“No thanks Sandy, I’ve just had one.” I smile at her as she rolls her eyes.

“Sam, can I ask you something?”

“Sure, what’s wrong?” Sam says.

“This may sound odd, but, what do you know about the man who lives in that wreck of a house at the end of the road here?”

“He likes to keep himself to himself, but he’s always friendly towards me.”

“You’ve spoken to him?”

“Yeah. He’s actually a very intelligent man.”

“Wow. Okay. I wasn’t expecting that.”

“He’s experienced a lot throughout his life. Why do you ask?”

“Well, it’s just.” I pause for a moment, wording what I’m about to say in my mind.

“He really creeps me out. I don’t know what his problem is, but it feels like he’s always watching me, keeping an eye on what I’m doing or where I’m going. He never talks to me and he seems scared of me.”

“Have you seen him follow you?”

“I don’t see him but I feel eyes on me constantly. You know that feeling you get when you can sense someone staring at you? I have that all the time and it makes me feel so uncomfortable.”

“Yeah, I know that feeling. The weird thing is he’s actually a very shy guy.”

“What’s his name?” I ask.

“He calls himself Shola.” Sandra says.

“Shola?” I ask.

“Yeah.” Sam says. “Shola McMorran.”

“Is that his real name?” I ask.

“I don’t think so, think he legally changed it. But I don’t know what his birth name is.”

“Right so what’s the deal with him then? Why is he so weird?” I ask.

“Shola doesn’t speak to anyone anymore, especially the police. We’ve pulled him in so many times, suspected him of crimes but he was always innocent. Weird thing is he always knew exactly who had committed them. He’s a busybody, he knows how people act around others, and he can judge people really well. He would love to be a detective but because of his age, he can’t be.”

“So did he help you with investigations?”

“He didn’t just help, we would bring him in and then he would tell us who committed the crime, he was right every time.”

“So what about these recent murders, does he know who it is?”

“He wouldn’t say and we can’t accuse him of it.”

“Why not?” I ask.

“Because the last time we called him in was for paedophilia. He was accused by an unnamed witness. He knew who the witness was, he told us; it was his ex-wife. She moved back into this area and saw his house. She decided to falsely report him, saying he was at the park and he touched a child.”

“Jesus.” I say in disbelief.

“Yeah, she wasn’t ‘all there’. But ever since, he decided not to speak to the police, he doesn’t want to be questioned about anything

else. So we can't ask him. Shola however, is a clever man who had intelligent parents supposedly. A shocking story I heard, is that during World War 2, Shola and his family moved here and camped out in the only empty building in the area, the water closet. The houses that are here now were about two or three homes per house on this road. There were people sleeping out on the ground and dying out in the cold overnight. Conditions were poor, people were starving and homeless. It was Shola's family's only way to stay alive. He's lived there ever since he was a little boy. Anyway, Shola went on to become a scientist. I'm not sure what field he specialised in, but I know that he's a very well educated man. Once he did that for a while, he became a specialised vet. He had all sorts of careers. He remarried and started a mini family with his lovely wife. She had a child but she didn't know who the father was, so paternity tests were done. Turned out Shola was the father. I've never seen him that happy before, he became so friendly, he'd say hello to neighbours, walk around the area and everything. She even moved into the shack with him, he was granted permission from the council to extend it."

"So what happened to his wife?" I ask.

"She was murdered." Sandra said.

"Yeah she was killed. That was the one time that Shola didn't know who did it. We asked him and he didn't know. This of course raised suspicion but we all knew it wasn't him. That

is what fucked him up. His wife and her child were killed in his home right under his nose. He was in the garden at the time, supposedly.”

“How long ago was this?”

“Well must be a good five to six years ago. It was tragic. I’ve never seen a man go from feeling like the luckiest man alive to being so depressed.”

“I had no idea.” I say.

“No one ever does. He is constantly watching on Mulberry Lane. Why? I don’t know, maybe he wants to stop violence, maybe he wants to find the man who killed his wife and child. But that day will never come.”

All three of us sit in silence, we must surely all be feeling sorry for Shola, I had no idea. I can really sympathise with him.

“So he probably isn’t following me then? He’s probably just looking out because he’s paranoid.”

Sam drinks coffee and nods. He eventually says: “Exactly, don’t take it personally.”

Sam’s phone rings.

“Work?” Sandra asks.

“Well who else would it be Mum?” Sam asks.

He pauses as he looks at his phone.

“I’ve got to go.”

“What’s up?” Sandra asks.

“I’ve been called to the office to do some work; some of the officers have got suspects and witnesses for the recent murders. I’ll see you soon Mum.” Sam says as he gives her a

quick hug. "See you soon, Ryan." Sam then looks to me and nods.

I return the nod. "See you soon mate."

Sam walks out and slams the door behind him.

Sandra looks at me and sighs.

"That was a close one," she says.

"Was a bit wasn't it?" I laugh and go over to her.

"Ryan, I need to ask you a favour."

"Okay, what's wrong?"

"All this talk about death...a couple of my friends were killed in their home a while ago. I haven't had time to go over to the house and properly say my goodbyes." Sandra wells up.

"It was their wedding anniversary; someone broke in through the back door and they were murdered. I just want to go and see the house. I need to sit outside and say goodbye to two of my dearest friends. Would you please come with me?"

"Of course I will darling." I reply.

"We can walk there; well obviously we have to because Simon has the car."

"Sure, we'll go there now."

Sandra smiles and gives me a kiss on the cheek.

"Thank you," she whispers then she goes to gather her things together.

Friends' Death

We leave Mulberry Lane and turn right at the end of the road.

We walk for about fifteen minutes and turn down a dark alleyway.

“You wouldn’t believe this would be here in the country would you?” I say.

“No you wouldn’t, but every village has it’s dark, ‘rapey’ areas.” Sandra laughs.

“Luckily you’re with me then if this is a ‘rapey’ area.”

“Yes I feel safe with you.” she says as she strengthens her grip on my arm.

The alley way leads to a road which is lined with big, American style houses. I spot a large white one in the distance.

The houses on this road are huge and expensive, they really look as if they’re in the wrong part of the world, which I then say to Sandra, my statement makes her laugh.

“I used to think that; every time I used to come here and see Ella.” Sandra says as she looks at the beautiful house in front of us.

“Is this where Ella used to live?”

Sandra paused and stayed silent.

We stand outside a large, white house. It has a footpath leading up to steps that lead onto a porch, which covers the entire width of the front of the house.

“Is this the house where Ella lived?” I ask Sandra again.

“Yes.” She says quietly as she begins to sob slightly.

“I’m so sorry Sandra.” I say as I pull her into my chest.

“You would have liked Ella and Nick, they were so lovely, such a nice couple. They were together for fifteen years before they decided to get married. They married and were married for only a year when some... Bastard came along and killed them whilst they celebrated their 1st wedding anniversary.”

What do I say to that?

“I know, this world is just unfair to a lot of people. There are people out there who take life for granted and for some reason, believe they have the right to decide people’s fate.”

“You’re right.” Sandra says with a tight throat.

She pulls her head from my chest and looks towards the house.

“I wonder who lives there now?” Sandra asks.

“I don’t know, hopefully someone happy to take away the negativity surrounding the history of the house.”

“I hope so.” Sandra says solemnly.

We stare at the house whilst hugging.

Sandra stares at the house continuing to sob.

“Can we go now?” Sandra asks.

“Yes of course we can.” I say.

We turn around and walk back home.

Depression

We arrive back in Mulberry Lane. With our arms unlinked.

“Thank you for doing that Ryan it means a lot to me.”

“You’re welcome. I’m here for you Sandy, don’t forget that.”

“I won’t darling.” She whispers as she leans in and kisses me on the cheek.

“So what are your plans for the rest of today?”

“Well actually I’m going out tonight. Going to the pub with some friends; I would invite you but it’s girls only.”

“Well I could always dress up and get some melons from the supermarket?”

Sandra laughs and shakes her head, “You do those embarrassing dad jokes Ryan. You’re a talented author, come up with some more creative jokes darling.”

“Just because you don’t find them funny doesn’t make them dad jokes. Some dad jokes are the best jokes I know.”

“Never mind, don’t worry Si does...” Sandra stops herself from speaking.

“Si what?” I ask.

“Oh nothing, you don’t want to hear about Si.”

“He’s my friend and your husband; he’s bound to come up in conversation.” I say. I don’t want him to come up in conversation,

don't really want him returning and ruining what Sandra and I have, to be honest.

"Yes great friend you are, shagging his wife and what a great wife I am, shagging his friend." Sandra whispers aggressively.

"Well now you put it like that," I say.

"We should probably stop this, don't you think?"

"What? No we shouldn't."

"We should, we'll get caught, especially when Si gets back, he'll find out. Don't get me wrong it's been fun but we can't risk it anymore."

"What? Wait a second, you're dumping me?"

"We weren't ever together really Ryan, were we?"

"Well what would you call us fucking then?"

Sandra looks at me. Her eyes begin to water. Her tears dribble down her cheeks.

"We weren't anything. We had some fun."

"Sandra that wasn't just for fun. You have feelings for me and I have feelings for you."

"Yes but it can never happen. It won't ever happen. We have different lives; I have commitments to Simon and Sam."

"Well good for you Sandra. I have nothing in my life. My wife could be dead for all I know, along with my kids; how do you think that makes me feel?" I begin to raise my voice at her.

"Keep your voice down." Sandra whispers.

"Why? Are you embarrassed? Well guess what, don't come running to me when you

have someone in your home trying to murder you.”

Sandra slaps me in the face.

“Fuck you Ryan.”

“Go and get on with your commitments

Sandra Cann. Have a good life.” I say as I turn away and walk towards my house.

I can't believe she ended it just like that. It was from nothing. There were no signs; I thought she would leave Simon for me. But that is not to be.

“Ryan I'm sorry.” I hear Sandra shout.

I do not look back.

I walk into my kitchen and pull out the whiskey from the cupboard and open the bottle. I pour out a shot and down it. It burns down my throat and into my gut. I pour another shot and gulp it down. I slam the shot glass down on the table and begin to swig from the bottle.

I walk into the sitting room and look around at the old-styled furniture. I leave the sitting room and pull out my keys and look to go into the garage for the first time.

I walk over to the garage door. I test the keys in the door and eventually I unlock the door and open it.

The garage is completely empty. There is nothing in here whatsoever except dust, spiders and spider webs.

I sit down on the ground, continuing to drink from the whiskey bottle.

I wake up from a nap. I feel awful, my head spins and my senses have vanished. I smell a strong stench of whiskey.

“What a waste.” I say out loud to myself. There’s a wet patch where the bottle has tipped over.

I attempt to stand but cannot. I try again and fall back onto the ground.

“Fuck.” I shout. “Fuck.” I shout again.

I push myself up with my legs, my back against the wall. Although now standing upright and on my own two feet; the wall is supporting me.

I stumble out of the garage and into the hallway, shutting the door behind me.

I open the front door to get some fresh air. To my surprise it is dark. I look to the neighbours. The Cann’s place is dark, Sandra is definitely out. The Brekken’s home is also lightless with blue and white police ribbon still surrounding the house. There’s a car sitting outside, surely an undercover cop car.

I look to Shola’s house, nothing. I look next door, nothing. My other next door neighbours, nothing also. Mulberry Lane is lifeless day and night, I’m bored.

I’m going to the pub.

I walk to the town closest to Mulberry Lane.

Up the old cobbled street, small shops on either side of the road. All their lights are switched off; all their doors have ‘CLOSED’ signs facing out into the dark of the cobbled street.

I stumble up the uneven surface and look to an alleyway. Wonder what's down there?

I walk down the alleyway; it smells of urine and beer. I get half way through and I hear a bottle chink against the cobbles behind me, the light sound of glass moving on uneven stones. I pause for a moment and look behind me. My vision doubled and distorted, I see nothing.

Continuing to walk, I hear feet dragging along the ground behind me. I take bigger strides towards the opening. The sounds quicken and become louder and closer. I look behind whilst walking but there's nothing there. I look ahead and a figure stands in my way.

A man wearing an army trench jacket stands in front of me. His face is in darkness because of the hood over his head. I look down to the knife in his hand.

"What you got?" This figure mumbles wearily.

"Nothing for you." I say full of confidence. "Move."

The figure's stance changes; his pumped chest deflates, his shoulders slope and his height shrinks.

"Move." I say again. I would never be like this sober.

The figure steps aside and I walk past him.

As I look around at the street I've discovered, the figure hits me on the back of the head with something hard, knocking me onto the ground.

I clutch the back of my head; all I can see are the cobbles. The realisation that someone has attacked me sinks in, so I stand up and turn around to him.

The orange street lamps reveal the face of the attacker. He's an old man with a long grey beard, hay-like grey hair and beady brown eyes. The stench of urine and sweat fizzles into the night air and into my nostrils.

I use my fingers to feel the back of my head, touching my head gently; I look at my fingers to see no blood.

"Hit me. I dare you." I say to the tramp.

"Give me money," he says.

"If you hit me again, I will." I say aggressively.

The tramp pauses, his beady brown eyes look me up and down. His grip on the wood he holds tightens. He lifts the wood up to rest it on his shoulder. He hesitates, his beady eyes still judging me. His arms tighten and he swings the wood at my face. I lift both my hands up and catch the wood. His swing was weak.

His beady eyes widen as he releases the piece of wood. I toss the wood over him and back into the alleyway which echoes with the hollow sound of it landing.

"Bad luck." I say walking towards him.

The tramp takes steps backwards and trips on rubbish bags that are scattered across the ground. He scrambles back up and continues to retreat.

I look into his eyes. He's scared. Usually I would have walked away now but I want to make a point to this tramp.

I clench my fist and swing it onto the side of the tramp's face. My punch forces him to one knee, and then he collapses into rubble and rubbish.

He stays down, squirming onto his back.

"Don't try and mug people if you can't even fight."

I walk out of the alleyway and look along the street. There's a building that looks as if it used to be a cottage.

I walk towards the white building; it has wooden benches outside. There's a wooden sign hanging above the door "The Mill".
Bingo, a pub.

I walk in through the black double doors to stand in the doorway staring at the almost empty bar.

I stagger to the bar. After tripping over my own feet and nearly falling, I make it to the bar to lean on it.

The young female bartender looks up and I give her a wink. She stares at me and rolls her eyes, chewing her gum.

"Can I have a pint of Lager please?"

"Yeah sure. What would you like?" She replies instantly. Her voice doesn't match her look.

"The cheapest please." I reply.

She sounds very well-spoken and high pitched. She's wearing a scruffy red top and

black trousers. She has greased-back brown hair in a ponytail and wears gold wrist chains. She pours out my pint and places it in front of me.

I stare into the pint, watching the bubbles rise to the thin white cloud-like froth.

“That will be three pound...”

She speaks but I cannot hear the price so I hand over a five pound note.

“Thanks.” She says.

She walks to the till and brings me back my change.

“Here you are.” She says as she reaches across the bar handing me my change.

“Thanks.”

I look down to the change and try to work out how much the drink was. My sight is double-vision still so I just slip the change into my wallet.

I look up to stare at the bartender but she’s disappeared.

I look around in the pub and there is nobody at all. How odd.

I pull out my wallet again and open it to look at the photo of Tanya and the kids. I place the wallet next to my pint so that I can stare at the photo as I drink.

After a few minutes, I hear someone walking towards me from behind the bar.

“Who’s that then?” I hear the young bartender ask me in her quiet, posh accent.

“Oh that’s my wife and children; Sammy and Alex.”

“That’s so cute,” she replies.

“Only problem is, I haven’t seen them for four years.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” she sounds sincere.

“It’s fine. I don’t know why she left or how - or if someone is responsible.”

“What about the police? Did you contact them?”

“Yeah but they stopped searching after a year or so.”

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry to hear that.”

“Yeah; I don’t ever give up hope.” I pause to hear silence. “I see them in my sleep at least.”

“Just think of the good times.” The girl tells me. “I did that when my Mum died a few years ago.”

“Oh I’m sorry to hear that.” I say.

“You just have to move on don’t you?” she says, shrugging her shoulders. “Enjoy your drink.”

I watch her walk away and pick up my glass, which is empty. I sigh.

I think about getting another pint but I would much rather go home and drink whiskey by myself.

I leave the pub and walk back home to Mulberry Lane.

I turn onto Mulberry Lane and down the cul-de-sac. All the homes match the light out in the night skies, excluding the stars of course. I walk along the pavement and turn to crunch my way up the gravel path.

I get to my front door and search my pockets for my keys. Where are they?

I check my left trouser pocket, then my right. I tap my chest to see if it is in my shirt pocket. With no more places to check, I must have lost them on the way home or on the way to the pub. Shit.

Drearily, I remember my back pockets. I tap my right buttock to feel a piece of metal in my back trouser pocket. I dig into my pocket and pull out my front door key.

I really need to get a key ring for this bastard key.

I open the front door and walk in to the cold. I look to the open garage door. I swear I shut that? The basement door is also open fully, revealing the dark inside.

I walk into the kitchen and pick out another bottle of whiskey. I decide I'll not use the glass after a few shots so why bother?

I undo the bottle and throw the cap on the kitchen floor.

I walk into my sitting room and slop into the arm chair. I pull out my wallet and open it up, staring at Tanya and the kids again. I swig from the bottle as my eyes begin to grow heavy; they release my tears. The tears stream down my face and gather on my eye lashes, making it difficult to see the picture in detail. I can only see the blurred outline of Tanya and the kids through all my tears.

How did it all go wrong? Did Tanya leave me? Was she taken from me? These questions run around in my mind at least once a day. If there was a way to bring them back to me, I would do it. Absolutely anything.

After around twenty minutes of drinking and crying, I begin to feel nauseous and heavy. My body feels numb; my mind is blank with the only thought being Tanya and the kids. I drop the half empty bottle of whiskey on the floor. I've wasted more whiskey.

My eyes force themselves closed and before I know it, I'm asleep.

Survival

Killing For Your Love Chapter 25

I'm running into darkness, unaware of any direction.

I have been accused of murder. I have been implicated in the disappearance of Lizzie and the kids, not by the Police but by a gang who are hunting me down. They are a gang sent by Don I believe. Since that night with Don accusing me or 'warning' me as he called it, there have been people watching me without a care for me seeing them. The time has come though to run...

Chapter 24

"Get out my house!" I shout at the bald-headed man standing in front of me in my own house.

He does not speak and instead smashes my glass table and my TV with his metal bat.

He corners me, smashing my living room to pieces with his bat.

"Stop!" I bellow again, but he ignores me.

As he turns away from me, I run towards him and dive onto his back which pushes him onto the ground. He keeps hold of his bat and tries to stand up with me hanging onto his back.

Shrugging me off, he gets to his feet and hits me on the back with the bat.

I try to shrug off the pain and stand up but he swings the bat at me again, hitting my arm and forcing it into my ribs. I manage to stay

standing even though my arm is lifeless. I wait for him to swing again. And he does, smashing the bat into my rib cage, knocking me onto the sofa.

I struggle to catch my breath as he hits me again, this time on the shoulder. Wincing with the pain I shut my eyes and feel a sharp pain on the arms cocooning my head.

I look at the man who stands above me as he hits me with his bat. He grabs me by my jacket and throws me onto the ground and he kicks me. I spit blood and try to stand.

The bald man throws his bat aside and punches me in the face and stomach repeatedly and then he tosses me into the smashed television.

There's an ornament on the floor next to my feet, I grab it in desperation. The bald man charges at me to hit me again. This time I dodge the punch by pushing off the television and its stand to get behind the man. It works better than I expected, he punches the wall and I hit him on the back of the head with the bulky ornament.

The man grunts and falls into the wall, allowing me to hit him on the back of the head, again and again until he flops onto the ground with a thud.

I stand over the man as he turns onto his back to look up to the ceiling. I pick up his metal bat and walk back over to him.

I stand over him, staring. His eyelids flicker as he looks up at me.

"Who sent you?" I ask.

The man shakes his head.

"I said who sent you?"

The man shakes his head again, forcing me to smash his head with the metal bat. Unaware of

my strength, I hear a crack. I look down to his face, his eyes are open but he has blood oozing out from the back of his head...

Chapter 25

I hide in the dark woodlands and anticipate an attack. I don't know how many men are after me and chasing me at this moment but I will fight for my life. These men could be responsible for Lizzie and the kids. I know Don thinks I killed them.

I hear leaves rustling and branches snapping in the distance. I look into the woodland but I cannot see anyone.

After a few moments of hiding, I hear a branch snap directly behind me but I cannot turn around to see, I can't risk being heard or giving away my position.

I concentrate on trying to slow my breathing down.

I look ahead and see three men standing in a line. They're all wearing black trousers and hoodies, each of them clutching a crowbar.

"How did we lose him?" I see one man's breath in the cold air as he speaks.

"Let's leave him out here. We can wait at the tree line and get him when he comes out."

"No, this is just a warning." I hear the third man say. The voice is one I recognise. Don is here with them.

I knew he'd be involved in this.

The three men turn and walk in a line away from my position.

They disappear into the darkness. I continue to wait, just in case...

Eventually, I walk towards the woods exit. I am still on edge, holding a thick branch as a weapon. There are car lights ahead of me, facing away. There are four men this time.

I approach them with stealth. I walk up a gentle slope which appears to be someone's garden and crouch behind a bush to try and hear their conversation.

"He got away, but we can get him if he leaves the woods," Don says.

"No it's fine, as you said, he needed a warning. I've been gathering evidence on him and I have evidence that he's been up to no good," says the only man not wearing a hoody.

"Right, so are we leaving now?"

"Yes." The man says, he's obviously the leader, but who is he?

"Okay Mr S." Don says to the leader as he takes the hood off his head.

"Thank you for tonight boys. I will be in touch." Mr S says.

All four men get into the car. Don and Mr S sit in the back whilst the other two hooded men get into the front and after a few seconds, the car drives away. Without the car's lights, the area is in darkness. Now I'm alone.

What is Don doing? And who is Mr S?

I look at Tanya as we lie in bed together. I stare into her eyes and she stares into mine.

I say: "I love you." But she doesn't respond. She doesn't even acknowledge it.

"I love you." I say again. And again, she doesn't respond.

I shout: "I love you!" She again ignores me, continuing to stare at me. Her pupils dilate. Her eyes begin to redden. Her chest pulsates quickly, in, out, in, out.

I sit up and look at her. She continues to stare at where I was lying.

"Tanya?" I ask her. I sit up and feel her skin. Her skin is burning hot.

"Oh my god, Tanya you're boiling."

She doesn't respond.

I try to move her onto her back but she won't move.

"Tanya we need to get you to hospital." She ignores me again. "Tan!" I shout. This time, my voice is heard. She slowly turns her head towards me. My voice echoes in the room.

The room itself becomes smoky. Tanya begins to cough when all of a sudden, she bursts into flames.

"Tanya!" I shout again.

I take a deep breath, inhaling the smoke from her body which sends me into a coughing fit which I can't control.

Her skin turns to ash and continues to burn until she disappears.

All of a sudden I wake up on my bedroom floor, choking. The realisation kicks in: It was another nightmare about Tanya.

However, I have moved, I fell asleep on the chair downstairs and I must have sleep-walked upstairs.

I sit up and look to the door where smoke slithers into the room through the gaps in the door frame. The smoke enters the room and crawls along the floor towards me to then circulate and rise up into the atmosphere.

Fuck! The house is on fire.

I run to the door, as I grip the door handle it burns my hand. My natural reaction is to let go of the handle.

Shit it's hot.

I grab my duvet and use it to grip the handle and open the door. A mass of smoke blows into my face, taking my breath away. I fall onto the ground, choking, just as I did in my dream.

I try to stand but I'm weak and still drunk. I get back to my feet, ducking down. I leave my room and see light coming from downstairs.

I run to the stairs whilst ducking down and covering my mouth and nose with my hands, which has no real affect.

I get to the top of the stairs and stare down to the flames in the hallway. The heat burns my face. The heat forces me to shut my eyes. I'm stuck up here, what am I going to do? I stand up and overbalance. I trip over something at the top of the stairs and I fall, hitting my head, back and shoulders on each step. I land on the bottom step into the wrath of the heat.

Flames surround me. I open my eyes and look through the thick flames block the front door. The hallway is consumed by flames and smoke. The ceiling is already blackened with streaks smudged across it. The wallpaper has crinkled and peeled off leaving it hanging off the walls.

I look to the top of the stairs to see the brown bear from the basement at the top of the stairs, that was what tripped me up, how did it get there?

Feeling woozy, my vision closes in on itself. I force my eyes to focus and push myself up off the bottom step. In the sitting room, something odd catches my attention. On the wooden flooring here in the hallway and the carpet in the sitting room, I notice red footprints leading from the sitting room into the kitchen. It looks like blood, and that thought sends shivers down my spine, making the hairs on my arms stand.

I leap from the bottom step into the flames. My shirt catches alight as I run towards the sitting room. Screaming in pain, I run straight into the wall and fall to the floor. I pat my shirt down and crawl into the sitting room.

The chair where I fell asleep and the footprints appear from nowhere. They begin in front of the chair where I slept, around behind the chair. The prints lead out into the hallway and into the kitchen. I duck down and follow the prints into the kitchen. I look to the sitting room door which has flicks of flames blowing into the room.

My sight blurs and my legs are numb, I fall onto the soft carpet. I rest my head back and look up to the sitting room ceiling where the smoke gathers and the flames appear, carving away at the ceiling's paint. The crackling of the flames strengthens. My eyes begin to grow heavy; my muscles are limp and relaxed.

I need to get up I say in my mind. Get up!

I take a deep breath and sit up.

The door frame has snapped, causing part of the wall to collapse. I look down to the footprints and crawl along, following the prints.

I drag myself into the kitchen. The air is barraged by smoke, making it difficult to keep my eyes open.

The footprints lead to the kitchen table and then to the back door.

The prints are much clearer in here; they are thick and messy, with rivulets leading away from the prints. This is blood!

I stand up with my knees slightly bent and look onto the table. To my horror, there is a piece of wood with two nails sticking out through the top of it. It must be the wood I saw Shola holding before; the piece that he threw into the road when I first moved here.

All the suspicious things going on here must be him. The fox in the shed makes perfect sense to be him, scientist and vet being able to lure a fox to him? He has a fox running in his house as if it's his pet. Why didn't I think of this before?

I stare at the wood. The nails sticking through have blood on them. The blood has dripped on the table to create a pool.

I need to confront Shola, why has he done this? He must have set the house alight.

I turn to the front door but the flames still block it. I turn around and look at the back door and to my horror; blood is smothered all over the wall and door.

The blood reads 'sin beaten them' across the wall and on the back door multiple times.

What does that mean?

With not much time to think, all I need to worry about is getting out of here alive to stop Shola. He must be the man committing these murders, he's the one who's been watching me; maybe he fears I'm on to him.

The back door is locked. I turn to look at the front door but the kitchen has now caught alight. The worktops have flames burning on the top of them. The cupboard door hinges have snapped and the doors have fallen onto the floor. One door lands on the worktop and one falls onto the floor. I position myself to run through the flames and to the front door. It is the easiest way to escape.

As I take a deep breath, I am blown off my feet. In mid air, my natural reaction is to cover my face with my arms. My back smashes into the back door. The windows smash throughout the house. The kitchen door's window smashes and the glass lands on me. The table flies across the room along with the piece of wood.

All my whiskey must have caused that explosion, along with some electrical works through the house. I crawl away and as I do, the kitchen ceiling caves in. Debris lands on me, pinning me to the ground. There's another explosion in the house somewhere and I watch part of the hallway ceiling collapse.

I try to crawl, the weight on my back unbearable. I use all the strength in my arms to try and pull myself out of the rubble but I can't move. The flames begin to burn all around me in the kitchen.

"Help!" I shout as loud as I can. My voice is muted by the flames and the smoke.

"Help! Help me!" I shout again and again but no one can hear.

I try turning onto my back to see if that makes a difference - it doesn't.

I squirm on the floor. Staring at the front door, hoping, wishing, praying that someone has heard me.

I look out of the window next to the front door, there are people out there, blue and green lights circulating, flashing through into the window. I can only hear the sirens if I listen really carefully. I seem to be losing my senses. I think death is upon me...

As I feel myself beginning to drift off into a sleep, I hear a BANG from the hallway. Someone is choking and coughing. Their feet drag along the floor. Pieces of rubble slide past me. The weight on my body reduces by the second. This person stands in front of me

and pulls me up off the floor. I don't get to look at them, my sight is blurred, and my hearing is like there is water in my ears. The voice of this person is deep, it must be a man. He says: "Ryan get out, run as fast as you can to the front door." Whoever it is, they could be about to save my life. "Go now!" The man shouts.

I run, my body weight is uneven; I swerve to the left and right. Nothing will stand in my way to reach the front door. I run through the flames, putting my hands over my face. As I reach the hallway, I arch my back, put my shoulder out in front of me, partially turning my upper body so that I'm looking towards the basement door, and launch myself through the front door.

Outside, my vision is blurred. The big fire engines, the police cars and the ambulance are all unrecognisable shapes.

I run onto the grass, the temperature outside is a complete contrast, it caresses my entire body. I take my first clean breath of air for a few minutes. The change affects my body making me feel faint again. I fall onto the grass and roll down the slope. I can see that I am rolling but I cannot feel it. I stop part way down the slope and stretch out my arms in front of me, resting my cheek on the grass.

My eyes feel heavy once again, until three people come running over to me. I hear screams and jumbled voices. There's someone with green latex gloves on. I look up to see a man and woman dressed in green, they must

be paramedics. I see a man wearing a thick black and yellow protection suit with a yellow helmet on.

“He has severe burns we need to get him out of here now!” I hear the female paramedic shout.

The male paramedic places a plastic nozzle over my nose and mouth. I toss my head trying to get away from it.

“Take it easy Mr Milligan, breathe normally you’re safe,” the male paramedic says.

There’s another man collapsed near to me. His bald head shines from the lights of the vehicles. He looks up to me to confirm that Paul Brooke saved my life.

“Thank you.” I whisper through the plastic nozzle, reaching out to him.

“That’s okay mate,” he says between choking. A paramedic kneels next to him. “I’m fine don’t worry about me love, look after my friend,” he says to another female paramedic and he nods towards me.

He stands up and walks over to Leanne as she embraces him.

I look up at the crowd; no one is here for me now that Tanya and the kids are gone.

My eyes begin to well up with tears, I’m completely alone.

“Can you stand up Mr Milligan?” the female paramedic asks.

I nod to her and struggle to my feet.

I look down to my shirt which once was white but now is grey and black and partially burnt revealing part of my chest. My trousers

have holes revealing my left shin and right knee.

“That’s great, we need to take you to hospital; you’re in a bad condition. You must have inhaled a massive amount of smoke.”

“I tried staying low.” I say, wheezing.

“We can tell; you could be dead now if you hadn’t.” The male paramedic says.

“Come on, let’s walk to the ambulance.” The female paramedic says.

As they walk either side of me to the ambulance, Sandra and Sam are standing outside the Cann’s house. She looks at me with relief. Her make-up is smeared around her eyes. Her nostrils are red and her lipstick is ruined. Sam looks at me and smiles.

“Thank God.” Sam shouts.

Sandra stares at me and smiles. As the paramedics open the back doors to the ambulance, Sandra runs over to me.

“Can I hug you?” Sandra asks me.

“I’m in pain,” I bluntly reply.

“I wouldn’t recommend it. He has burns all over his body. He’ll be in hospital the next few days.” The female paramedic tells Sandra.

“Okay. I will come and see you,” she says to me, smiling whilst trying to stop her lip quivering.

I nod to her and step up into the ambulance. They put me onto the bed inside.

“Take it easy now Ryan, you’re in safe hands,” the female paramedic says as she stands over me, placing the plastic nozzle over my mouth and nose again.

I look out through the doors as the male paramedic shuts the back door of the ambulance; I look out through the other, open side.

Tanya stands there, staring at me.

Is that really you?

I stare at her.

“Tanya.” I say.

“What’s that sir?” the female paramedic asks.

I do not reply. I wait to see if it really is her.

The male paramedic shuts the other door.

I look through the window of the door.

Tanya stands there still; all I can see now is the outline of a female’s body. She stares. The ambulance pulls away from her and the figure remains, watching the ambulance drive away.

As the figure shrinks into the distance, my head falls onto the pillow on the bed. My eyes gain the weight again and I drift away...

Recovery

Killing For Your Love Chapter 26

So who is this Mr S? I have no idea whatsoever but whoever he is, I need to find out and I need to finish him.

This is all becoming very risky, I'm being hunted for the wrong reasons. I would never harm my family, no sane man would.

I sit in darkness planning my next moves, nobody knows I'm here, the man who used to live here no longer does; he's not even alive anymore. I made sure of that.

It's funny that this house has no name and not even a number.

Chapter 27

I'm out in the night once again. I trek up to the morgue where Don works. No one is around but the lights are on inside.

I walk right up to the door and open it slowly. I walk into the morgue entrance and look around me, with no one in sight down the hallways; I go out the back to find Don.

I take stealthy steps through the corridor. There's water running through the pipes that run along the ceiling and top of the walls. The wind outside is vicious as it pushes against the building making the windows and the frames creak.

I reach the area where Don has taken me many times to see the bodies; right out into the morgue area. When people are here I have to go into the white room and look through a window but when no one is around, I'm allowed to come out the back.

I look through one of the double doors' windows. There are beds and lumpy objects under each sheet, but no Don.

I push the door open with my finger tips and creep into the back area.

There's a strong smell of bleach out here. The temperature is freezing.

Ahead of me is a door, I think that it's the security office but with no one here there won't be anyone in there.

I continue to look around; on a bed on the right lays a blonde woman under the blue sheet. I don't know her.

Lifting the cover up on another bed, I look at a man. I believe it is the man who was in my house. His head is covered in dried blood; it doesn't sit normally as his neck is bent back at an awkward angle.

I must have caused a lot of damage with that bat.

"What are you doing here?" Don's deep voice bellows from behind me.

"I've come here to see you." I reply.

"Why would you want to see me?"

"Because I have some questions to ask you." I say as I turn to face him.

"Go on." Don replies carelessly.

"Don, enlighten me, who's Mr S?" I ask.

"I... I can't... I can't tell you, I'll be killed."

Don stutters.

"Oh Don. I'll kill your wife and your kid, I've already warned you. Tell me what I want to know."

"I don't know who Mr S is. I really don't, that's all he is to me, Mr S."

"Why is he after me? What does he want from me?"

"Mr S is a bad man Daniel. I would stop investigating these murders if I were you. I would stop trying to find out who Mr S is and I would stop coming here."

"I can't leave Lizzie and the kids."

"You have to."

"Why does he not want me sniffing around?"

"Daniel, do you really not know?"

"No, I don't."

"Mr S has contacts, many contacts. He knows the police, he knows detectives. They are all after you, they believe you killed all these blonde women, they believe you killed Lizzie and the kids, if you come here again," Don pauses and stares at me. "I will kill you."

"I didn't kill Lizzie or the kids. I will do anything to find them so if you, Mr S and the other two get in my way, don't be surprised if I kill you."

"I doubt that very much, Daniel."

I turn around and leave the morgue.

More enemies. That is not what I need to find Lizzie and the kids.

Someone is setting me up.

I open my eyes. I'm blinded by bright lights which cause my vision to blur. I hear mumbling and a high pitched beep sound every couple of seconds. I look straight up and see a figure standing over me. Their head blocks the light and it shines around their head.

I hear mumbling and the beeping. Each time I hear the beep, I get flashbacks of the flames in the house crawling into each room, catching the house alight.

My senses return to me slowly, my sight regains some normality. There's a nurse standing above me as she checks my machine. Of course, I'm in hospital.

"Mr Milligan how are you feeling?" the nurse asks.

"Rough," I reply.

"That's no surprise. You will begin to feel a lot better now though. You've been unconscious the whole night, we've kept you in just to keep an eye on you; you must have inhaled a lot of smoke. Could you sit up for me?"

I use my stomach muscles to sit up; my chest feels as if it's been stamped on. I sit upright and begin to cough. The nurse holds a cardboard tub up to my mouth.

"I won't throw up." I say.

"Okay Mr Milligan. How do you feel now you're sitting up?"

"Not too bad actually."

"Okay that's good, we should be able to discharge you in a couple of hours so take the

time to recover and get yourself together. You are free to walk around but if anything doesn't feel right or you feel faint, just stop and I can help you."

"Okay, thank you very much."

"That's okay." The nurse replies, smiling.

She leaves, leaving me to myself. I fall back down onto my back.

I try to remember exactly what happened last night, I remember falling asleep in the sitting room on the chair. I held a photo of Tanya and the kids. That's probably just ashes now, like the rest of the house.

I woke up on the bedroom floor; there was a lot of smoke in the room. I went to the stairs and tripped on the brown bear from the basement which will now be destroyed, thank God.

I saw bloody footprints in the house, they led to the chair I was in and then into the kitchen and out the back door. The piece of wood which Shola had was on the table though, with bloody screws through the wood.

He must have done that! Shola, why would he have left that wood there though? It wasn't my blood and I doubt it was his. Sam may think he's clever but that was plain stupid.

I need to get out of here, I need to find him. I hope he thinks he killed me.

I get up from my bed and warily stand up. My balance is okay. I need clothes though. I look into the cupboard by my bed; it has some clothes in it. There are brown leather

shoes, a pair of blue denim jeans and a green polo shirt with a note on top of it.

‘Ryan,

I know you don’t wear anything but shirts and black trousers but this is all I could find of Simon’s clothes.

Come and see me when you’re out of here.

Sandy xxx’

So Sandra had come in to see me? She must at least care about me then.

I need to be careful who I speak to now though, there are many suspects and at least one that wants me dead. The person who did this is most likely the person targeting blonde women in Surrey.

I mean Shola is involved but is someone helping him?

I pull off my hospital gown and put on the clothes Sandra gave me.

I walk out of the hospital towards the main road. To my delight, I spot a taxi. I put my arm up and the taxi man acknowledges me by nodding his head. He looks down to his lap and then fiddles around for a minute as I walk over to him.

“Can you take me to Mulberry Lane?”

“Yeah sure hop in son.”

Liam Graynnil

The Taxi pulls into Mulberry Lane. I look at my house. The door is no longer there, the rectangular hole is covered with a wooden board; as are the windows on the bottom floor.

The window frames have black smears surrounding them from the heat. It looks as if charcoal has been smudged around them.

The taxi pulls up in front at the bottom of the path. The taxi driver turns to me.

“We’ll call it eight quid.”

I look in my wallet and pull out a five pound note and three pound coins.

“Cheers; have a good day.” He says as I get out.

I stand on the gravel path and look up to the house.

At least it’s all in one piece.

The grass closest to the house is flattened with black ash clogged in the blades of grass along with glistening slivers of glass from the shattered windows. The top of the path is also smothered in ash and glass.

I feel a hand rest on my shoulder. The hand tightens slightly.

“Hello Ryan.” Simon says behind me.

His voice changes my mood. My stomach tightens; the hairs on my neck stand up, the feel of guilt.

“Oh hello mate. How was your trip?” I say as I turn to face him.

“It was okay, a little boring out on the job but there you go, was pretty good to get away from here.”

“How come?”

“Oh you know it’s good to experience some change, a break from Sandy as well, no nagging whatsoever.” Simon says.

“Sandy doesn’t nag does she?” I ask.

“Naa course not. Mate I’m sorry about the house I really am. You can stay at ours whilst it’s being repaired. You’re more than welcome Ryan.”

“I’m not sure.”

“I’m telling you Ryan, you have nowhere else to go so come round to ours.”

“Okay thanks Simon that’s really kind. I’ll come over later then.”

“Yeah sure, see you later mate.” Simon says as he pats my back and walks towards his house.

As I stare at my boarded up house, I hear Simon’s feet drag as he changes direction.

“Oh Ryan by the way I read your book whilst I was away.”

“Oh nice, so what did you think?”

“I did like it. I could tell that you based it on your past, you know with your wife and children. I’m guessing that Daniel is you and Lizzie is Tanya, am I correct?”

“Yeah sure.”

“Yeah. I thought it was interesting to see how you felt about her and all that you’ve done to get her back and to find her. I’m guessing that

a lot of it wasn't real though and was dramatised right?"

"Yes of course." I reply, not really knowing which parts of the book he meant.

"Yes exactly. You also used the current stories of around here locally as well which I think is very risky to link the recent murders to blondes as a reason to why Lizzie was taken."

"Excuse me?" I reply. I did not use the current blonde murders in my book, not at all.

"You know; the attacks around here recently. You used that to make people believe that's how Lizzie was taken, but of course it isn't, is it?"

I stare at Simon, not having a clue what he is talking about. It's as if he's talking about a different book. I wrote *Killing for Your Love* ages before the recent blonde murders.

"Errm Si are you sure you mean my book?"

"Yes of course I do. Daniel on the hunt for Lizzie and the kids. He searches for bodies of blonde women; he comes across difficult situations as he comes across dead bodies in the morgue but also discovers some bodies in homes and things. A gang is after him because they believe that Daniel is the killer of his own wife and kids but also responsible for the other murders."

That's not my book, yes Daniel is the main characters as well as Lizzie and the kids but none of the rest of that happens.

"Yes that's right." I say. "Can I have the book back please?" I ask.

“Yeah sure.” Simon puts his arm behind his back and pulls out my manuscript that I gave to him.

“Thanks” I say and snatch the papers from him.

“That’s fine. It was an interesting read mate and I like the pen name. See you around.”

“What? You like R. Milligan as my pen name?”

“No.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Oh come on Ryan, don’t worry, your secret’s safe with me, I won’t let anyone know it’s you.”

What is he going on about? The book is by me, R. Milligan like on all my books.

“Simon, please elaborate I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“How can you not know? Jeeze Ryan, surely you remember naming yourself as Liam Graynnil?”

Liam Graynnil? Who’s that?

“Oh right yes.” I look at the title and author name on my manuscript.

Killing For Your Love

By

Liam Graynnil

I did not write this. This is not my writing. It’s my title and some of the characters are mine, but the story simply is not me. I did not write this.

“Thanks Simon. Well I’ll see you later then.”

“Yeah great, we’ll have some drinks tonight and try to forget all this shit.” Simon says as he looks up to my house.

“Yeah sure, thanks. See you later,” and I turn back to my house.

“Bye Ryan.” Simon says as he jogs back.

Who the fuck is Liam Graynnil? It isn’t a name I have heard of, it’s no one I know or even know of. I wrote on this paper, I wrote the title page but on that page I put R. Milligan. I did not do this, someone else did this. But who?

I stare at the burnt house and I hear a front door shut. I look around. Mulberry Lane is empty; Simon is in his house.

I run up my path and try to move the boarded up door but it won’t budge, I can’t break in here; it will be too obvious.

Wow breaking into my own home, what a disaster.

I fold up *Killing for Your Love* and put it in the leg pocket of Simon’s jeans and move around to the back of the house.

Down to the side gate of the house, I enter the back garden. All of the back looks completely normal except the house. The back window is boarded up as is the doorway. Again, the bricks are coated with soot from the fire.

I kick the board across the back door repeatedly until it collapses, revealing my burnt kitchen.

“What the bloody hell are ya doin’?” I hear Paul’s voice ask from over the fence.

“Sorry Paul, trying to get into my house to get some stuff but I know I wouldn’t be allowed to.”

“That’s alright mate I’d do the same.”

“Paul, thank you so much for saving me. I don’t know how to repay you.”

“Don’t worry about it, the useless twats out the front were moaning and running around but not doing enough so I just jumped over and pulled you out, it’s no biggy.”

“Thanks Paul. Well if I ever need to, I’ll return the favour.”

“Cheers mate that’s good to know.” Paul says and he laughs. “Well I’ll leave you to it mate, have fun breaking in.” Paul says as he jumps behind the shed, still laughing.

Inside the kitchen, it smells of smoke. I remember the smell, I remember the heat. My skin heats up and beads of sweat form on my forehead and neck. I breathe slowly, to compose myself.

Past the kitchen to the hallway; the decor is completely gone and nonexistent. If somebody came here not knowing how it was before, they would not have an inkling of an idea what it used to be like. The old fashioned feel of the house has burned away.

I look up the stairs; the carpet on the stairs has also completely melted revealing the wooden steps leading up the stairs.

I poke my head into the sitting room which is completely obliterated by the flames.

I look over to the partially burnt drawers and furniture and spot the locked box.

“I completely forgot about you.” I say out loud.

The black paint has peeled off revealing silver metal with bronze patterns. The bronze areas curl along the silver patterns. One corner of the box has melted from the heat, it is no longer rigid; instead it’s lumpy and bubbly and the pattern has melted.

I try to open the lid but it does not open, shame the lock didn’t melt.

I really need to find the keys to this.

I pick up the box and lift it above my head. I launch it onto the floor in front of me, to no affect.

“Bloody thing.”

The arm chair is ruined.

“I can’t even bloody sit down.”

I leave the sitting room and look at the garage door which is still standing. I push it open and I’m surprised to see the garage is untouched.

I look at the basement door which is also still standing. I open that door and go down the creaking steps. I switch on the light and everything is normal down here too.

I walk back up into the hallway up the stairs. I look up to the ceiling; it has black patterns across it. The patterns curl and twist on the grubby white.

I look in each room on the upper floor, they’re all completely untouched.

So really, I am lucky that I woke up just before the fire spread up here. If I hadn't, I'd be dead now. What a lovely thought.

I sit on my bed and pull out *Killing for Your Love* from my pocket.

I look at the name again.

Liam Graynnil.

Who is this Liam Graynnil? I've never heard of the surname. I look around for my laptop. God I hope it wasn't downstairs in the fire.

I get up from the bed, drop to my knees and look under the bed. Here it is, thank God.

I pull the laptop bag out, place it on my bed and unzip it revealing the laptop.

I open it up and wait for the thing to load. The fan turns, it makes a high pitched droning noise, the intensity and loudness quietens and I can eventually load the internet.

I open up Google and type in 'Liam Graynnil'.

'No results for Liam Graynnil

Showing results for Liam Gray Nail.'

Damn.

I then type 'Liam Graynnil Author' which concludes in the same result.

I then type 'Graynnil' - same outcome.

The name is not recognisable, not even on the internet. Someone is messing with me

with all the writing on the tables and walls,
with the fox in the shed, the person following
me and watching me and now the fire. It must
all be linked and it must be Shola, I mean
there isn't anyone else it can be.

I close the laptop and toss it to the end of the
bed. I pick up 'Killing for Your Love' and I
read the beginning of the book.

Killing For Your Love Chapter 1

*I look at her undulating blonde hair blow as we
walk against the breeze.
"You look beautiful tonight Lizzie." I say to her.
"Oh thanks Daniel." Comes her timid reply.*

I wrote that, that's for sure.

I turn a couple more pages, this is all my
writing. I get to chapter 5 and that is when it
all changes. From chapter 5 onwards, that is
not my work. Someone has tampered with my
writing, but who?

The writing itself is very similar to mine it
could easily be my work but I do not
remember writing it; the aggression from the
main character, the negativity toward the
police and investigation to find Lizzie and the
kids.

I read on, I reach chapter 6, which sends a
shiver down my spine.

Killing For Your Love

Chapter 6

... I stand in the room of a dead woman. Her body is sprawled out on the bed. She's been beaten to death and most likely raped.

I look at her rope-burnt wrists and ankles, her scratched thighs and arms and her swollen face. Her lips have split; the skin from her lips has lodged onto her bloody teeth that are attached to her bloody gums.

I put on my leather gloves to move her red stained hair to reveal all of her lumpy face.

The thought of me not writing this is odd. Why would someone tamper with my work and make it dark and spooky? This does not make sense.

Simon said that he liked the way I used the local deaths in my book, I would never use real life incidents like this; it shows a lack of respect on my part to the local society.

I flick through the pages, searching for anything to do with the local blonde murders.

The negativity, death, blood, gore none of this is me, it scares me, and someone must have come into this house. If they've done this what else could they do?

I go back onto the computer and type in 'Surrey News: Blonde murders in Surrey.' Many results come up with many names and deaths around this area. I click one that I recognise from seeing in the paper before.

I remember the article about Riley Clark, one of the many victims. She was killed in her own home after being ‘brutally raped and strangled to death.’ The online report also claims that she was supposedly tied to her own bed, arms and legs tied whilst she was raped and then strangled.

I look down to my manuscript and read.

Killing for your Love Chapter 12

I stand in the room of a dead woman. Her body is sprawled out on the bed. She’s been beaten to death and most likely raped.

I look at her rope-burnt wrists and ankles, her scratched thighs and arms and her swollen face. Her lips have split; the skin from her lips has lodged onto her bloody teeth that are attached to her bloody gums.

It could be coincidence but this could easily be my character Daniel in the same room as Riley Clark’s body.

I close the article and look at another story. All these murders are similar. The victims are raped and then murdered. But a couple of headlines and newspaper reports stand out to me that also seem to feature in *Killing for Your Love* by Liam Graynnil.

Amanda Holmes’ death is one that really stands out. She was found dead in her home after ‘suspicious smells’ and ‘a large mass of flies at her window.’ She was found in her

living room where she was 'cut to death'. I continue to read the report: 'Her stomach was cut open and her veins were removed from her hands up to her elbows.'

I look down and read a scene from the book.

Chapter 14

The smell is unbearable in the woman's sitting room. She's been here for some time. If this body was a fruit, she had gone past her sale date a couple of weeks ago.

The insects madly fly at the windows, stuck between the curtain and the glass. From the outside it looks like black beads throbbing, but from the inside it looks like flies trying to escape the stench left by the corpse.

The mass of blood and skin was once a human body. The blood looks like an infectious disease, spreading to all the furniture around it. Blood is spattered up the walls; it's on the rug, the coffee table, the sofa, the arm chair, the cabinets and the body itself.

I kneel down next to the organs and stare at the arms and legs of this body. I see a jagged line all the way up the arm. I turn the hand over to see the lines also on her hands. Her veins have been cut from her hands up to her elbows. I turn the body over to reveal a gaping hole for her stomach.

In the fly infested window sill, there are 'congratulations' cards. I think nothing of it and walk upstairs to see if anybody else is in the house and could identify me at the scene of the crime. I leave the stench of the sitting room.

Shutting the sitting room door, the house looks completely normal. I look at photo frames of this woman and her boyfriend or husband. He's punching above his weight.

Upstairs, there are only a few doors but they are all shut. I go to the far end of the landing, to the far side of the doors.

The revolting smell of the sitting room leaves my nose and is moved by the new paint smell for this room. As I walk in, I see things hanging from the ceiling, half the room is painted pink and half blue with a white cot in the middle...

I finish reading chapter 14 and as I do, I get a lump in my throat. It is simply disturbing; there is nothing else to it, whoever wrote this must have been speaking about Amanda Holmes.

To make sure, I read on in the article. 'Amanda's stomach was cut open, which also killed her unborn child.' The lump in my throat expands, as if it has outgrown my neck. My eyes well-up, my hands sweat as I clench my fists.

I close the Amanda Holmes article and move onto Mary Cole.

She was found in the streets, tied to a lamp post. She was beaten to death and raped.

Chapter 15

Her bruised wrists are bound behind her around the lamppost. This is not Lizzie. Lizzie would not do this to me. I look at this woman's right hand

and see the glistening ring on her finger. I kneel down to her ear and whisper.

"You're a married woman, correct?"

"Yes." The slut whimpers.

"And you have children, correct?"

"Yes." She whines.

"And you decided to intrude on my evening trying to seduce me. You're obviously unhappy in your marriage. I suppose the children keep you and your husband together so you come out at night dressed like a slut to get other men. But tonight, you found the wrong man."

The blonde-haired middle-aged woman begins to howl. She shouts: "Help!"

"No one will help you. Let me tell you something. My wife left me, she ran away with my children. I will find her, don't worry about that, but people like you remind me of her. She angers me; I want her to pay for making me feel like this."

The woman begins squeal.

"Shut up." I shout as I swing my fist onto her nose the crack as it breaks is audible...

I stop reading. Whoever wrote this could be the person responsible for all the blonde killings.

I flick back through a few pages to see how this began but another chapter stands out to me.

Chapter 13

This is a big house on a quiet road. The all-white painted house has an outline of bushes growing instead of a fence, surrounding the front garden, separating it from the pavement and the drive of the house...

I look at the enormous white American style house from my car. I see her; I think it's her, it's Lizzie. She walks up to a house, but whose, I don't know.

She wears a long black coat and heels with her hair straightened.

She saunters up to the door, I see her hand move against the door and then hear the one second delayed knock.

I feel as if I remember this, I feel as if I have been to the house before. As I think of the house, I remember when and why I went there and with whom.

I went with Sandra for the anniversary of her friend's death. We stood across the street to the house, I swear this is the same house and is most likely how the two people Sandra knew were killed. I read on.

I walk up to the dark house, looking around to see if there is anybody around, there isn't.

I walk right up to the door and try the handle. The door is locked; I'll go around the back...

I walk around the big white house, staring in through the windows. Lizzie is upstairs, why would she go up there with another man?

I walk into the back garden on the muddy grass and up the damp wooden steps to the back door. I hold the handle and turn it slowly. It's unlocked.

I walk into the dark house, I don't have time to look around; I'm going straight upstairs.

I go up the stairs. As I reach the top, I hear grunting and heavy breathing coming from the half-open door. The only light on in the house shines from that room. I look in to see Lizzie's bare back as she sits on top of the man.

I push the door open slowly and step into the room. They grunt and breathe heavily, they don't see me. When I get to the edge of the bed, I push Lizzie off of the man; his eyes open wide.

My knife is already in my hand and I stab it into his neck in a swift and vicious movement. He reaches for me and grabs hold of my jacket. I grab his arm and pull him out of his bed, tossing him onto the floor.

Lizzie is screaming. I look over to her and to my relief and disappointment, it isn't her.

"Lizzie?"

The woman continues to scream but she runs over to the man on the floor. "Nick!"

I look down at my knife. I killed the man for no reason.

"Nick!" She screams. Her voice pierces the silence, her shouts echo throughout the house. It is resilient; her voice gets louder with each shout.

I've had enough; I walk up to the blonde woman, grab her by her soft hair and cut across her voice box...

Sandra said Ella and Nick. Whoever the author is, they are responsible for this, all of this.

I flick through more page and read about a morgue.

Chapter 20

I walk into the morgue to see the tall ebony man. I found out his name is Don.

Don is helping me out, every time a woman of Lizzie's description comes in to his morgue, he tells me and I come along to see the whether it is Lizzie or not.

What Don is doing is wrong, I shouldn't be allowed to look at these bodies but he lets me and if he doesn't then I will let the authorities know what he has been up to and by that I don't just mean him letting me see the bodies in the morgue, I mean his activities out of work.

Don is a dodgy man, he helps gangsters cover up the wrongs they commit. He's the man to call if a body needs to be hidden, never to be found. He disposes of all evidence involved in a murder.

I know this because he told me. I know this because I watched him do it once. He has saved many people by doing it, preventing them being from being found out...

A morgue and someone called Don. I have no knowledge of either the man or the morgue.

I open up my tossed-aside laptop and go onto the internet. I type in 'Morgue Surrey' and a

number of results come up. I go to 'Google Maps' and set a route starting from '2 Mulberry Lane' to 'Morgue'.

A few results come up on the map local to me. Only one stands out. It is located in woodland and fields up the road from here. I choose that destination and it is only a quick walk.

I must go here, get some answers from this Don.

I grab my jacket from the wardrobe. It's one that I rarely wear; a heavy khaki jacket. It's the type of jacket thugs wear. The type of people I could be dealing with would most likely wear this style of jacket.

I pull it over my shoulders and pull the zip up. I need to be careful now; I cannot trust anyone at all. I'm in danger and this will most certainly get nasty now.

The Morgue

I go out the back door and around the side of the house onto the front by the porch. At the bottom of the path, Sandra is staring up at me.

As I walk down the slope, Sandra crosses the road towards me and waits on the pavement. I reach her and look into her eyes. The patterns surrounding her pupil look like sand with pools of water.

“Ryan we need to talk,” she says.

“We do but I’m busy right now it will have to wait.”

“No Ryan we need to talk, right now.”

I ignore her and walk away. She follows me.

“Ryan, please,” she says as she grabs my arm.

I pull away and it throws her off balance.

“I told you I don’t have time for this.” I am so angry.

Sandra’s eyes widen and she stares at me, taking a step back.

“What is there to talk about? How you used me to for sex because your husband wouldn’t give it to you? Just leave me alone.” I shock myself with how nasty I am to Sandra but it does the job, she turns around and walks back to her house without a word.

I leave Mulberry Lane and walk towards the woodlands where the local morgue is.

I enter the woodland which reminds me of the woodland where Liam Graynnil wrote about Daniel being chased by the gang and Mr S.

I walk through the dim woodland. The sky has become darker as evening approaches. The clouds thicken in the sky, obscuring the sun and any light still generated is blocked by the trees and dying leaves. I walk through the squelching mud and the weakened branches. Bushes claw at my jacket; the holly bushes scratch the rough, heavy fabric. I dodge the overhanging vines and drooping branches that block my path, until I reach the dirt road which leads up to the morgue.

I stand in the middle of the road and look all around me. The trees on either side curve over the top of the road acting as a shelter made from bark and leaves.

I look down to the tyre tracks left by many different vehicles with different sized tyres. The vehicles have created craters and fallow water stands in them.

I look up the road and stare into the darkness. On Google it said that the morgue was up the road so I may as well just follow it.

I take long strides over the uneven tracks, stepping over the waterlogged craters. The road has been neglected for a long time. Normal cars certainly do not use this road, vans and trucks must be the only vehicles to drive up it, in the mud.

Walking along, I can feel eyes watching my every move. I hear branches and twigs snapping within the woodland. The wind blows from behind me, pressing my jacket into my back. I look around, the gold beads

that are eyes glitter past the tree trunks and leaves as the animals hide from me.

I decide to jog, the eyes continue to stare at me; the gold beads continue to glow in the dimness. I look ahead and see a small building with lights on. It must be the morgue, although it looks more like an abandoned building rather than a frequently used one.

I jog up to it and stand outside a door which must surely be the entrance. The lights are on but there is no one inside in the shadowy foyer.

I take a step back and look at the surroundings of the morgue. The plastering has cracks across it in random patterns, revealing darkness underneath the white plaster. The cracks interlink and stretch across the face of the building reminding me of veins. Any surviving plaster is the colour of rain clouds. The windows are smudged with yellow muck.

I return to the door. Slowly, I reach forward and push it open trying to stop it creaking. I take a step onto the uneven plastic flooring. As I go further into the building, I feel colder than I did outside. I look around a waiting area. A desk and chair sit through a hole in the wall, there are seven chairs arranged across the partially torn plastic flooring. There's a door to my right and it leads to a corridor.

I take stealthy steps through the corridor, careful that my footsteps don't echo. There's water running through the pipes that run

along the ceiling and top of the walls. The wind outside is vicious as it pushes against the building making the windows and the frames creak and whistle. I stare straight down the corridor, the bleakness and the fading lights complement each other eerily.

I walk until I see blue double doors with thin rectangular windows looking into a dim area. I push one door open and step into the room.

The room has lots of doors; some look like massive freezer doors. I go over to a sliding door and open it. I look in to see bodies. I step back and close the door. I feel bile coming up my throat but I am able to swallow it back down.

Something drops in another room and a deep voice calls out: "Hello?"

I do not reply. I look around to see where I can hide. There isn't anywhere except behind a bed covered by a white cloth. There's a body under the cloth but I have to hide.

I run towards the bed and duck down behind it with my feet behind the wheels of the bed.

I crane my neck to try to see what's happening. Another set of double doors opens and out steps a thick-set chap.

His skin is black with darker freckles on his cheek bones. He wears a dark long sleeved t-shirt, and white latex gloves.

"Hello? Is anyone there?" He grumbles.

He walks back into the double doors and disappears.

I stay in my position for a moment and stare at the doors. I look to the window and see the

silhouette of his head behind the door with his breath misting up the glass.

He steps away from the door and I stand up from behind the bed. I go to the door and peek through the door.

As I attempt to look through the window, I see the reflection of my own face which makes me jump. I slowly push the right flap open. I let the flap go which slaps with the other side of the door. I walk slowly as I enter a completely white room with three inbuilt metal beds in the middle of the floor. The bed in the centre has a body lying on it. There's a short rectangular trolley like a set of drawers containing equipment such as knives, blades and spatulas. As I approach the body, I'm astonished to see a blonde woman whose chest has been cut open; starting from the bottom of her neck down to the bottom of her nonexistent breasts.

Her skin colour nearly matches the wall colour, her blonde hair looks recently straightened and her red insides have specks of black.

"Humans should be respected." The deep voice sounds from behind me. "Even when they are dead, their bodies should be respected. Whoever forced them here should be the one here on this bed; it would make my job much better. I would like to deal with criminals and make them pay."

I turn around warily and look up to the black man's face. His expression changes as I speak.

“Hi I’m Ryan Milligan and I could really do with some help...”

“I know who you are, get away from me!” he shouts.

“I’m sorry?” I ask confused.

“Get out of here now, you have no business here.”

“Are you Don?”

“I think you know who I am, you bastard.”

“I don’t know what...”

“Get out!” Don shouts as he clenches his fist.

“Don? You need to calm down...”

“Don’t tell me to calm down you fucker!”

Don bellows as he charges towards me with his fists raised.

I stand up straight and await the impact that I am about to receive. Don reaches for me and as he does, I grab his shirt, trying to throw him aside. He grabs my arms tightly. I lose grip on his top and he throws me into the trolley which topples over, scattering equipment across the floor.

As I attempt to stand, Don grips me by my jacket and pulls me up off the ground and punches me in the stomach. It knocks the breath from me and I collapse but he holds me up and punches me again. The punch makes me feel as if something is lodged in my throat and stomach. I try to catch my breath but I can’t. Don holds me up, continuing to punch me in the stomach, head, face and nose. He then knees me in the chest and pushes me away. I fall to the floor. I cover my head as he stamps on me. He stamps on my

arms protecting my head; he kicks me repeatedly in the chest and stomach and then kicks me in the privates. I let out a cry and curl up on my side; he turns me from my side to my back and kneels over me. Then he places his huge hands to my neck and begins to squeeze.

I panic, my breathing rapidly speeds up; my throat feels numb. As I look into his eyes, he has no remorse, he is prepared to kill me and dispose of my body.

I look around me and spot a sharp object which looks like a knife. I look back to his face and he still waits above me. I reach for the blade, but it is too far away from me. As my sight begins to darken, I lift my knee up and smash him in the back. His grip around my neck loosens and I push him over, overbalancing him. He sprawls away from me and I kick him in the face. I feel his nose click under the sole of my shoe and I see speckles of blood on the floor.

Letting my leg drop, his nose is pouring with blood. I reach for the blade, grip it in my hand and turn to Don. I point the knife at Don and stand up.

“I’m looking for someone called Liam Graynnil or someone called Mr S, can you help me?”

Don stares at me with no expression on his face.

“Tell me or I’ll kill you.”

“I bet you would.” Don replies.

“Who is Liam Graynnil and Mr S?” I ask again.

“Are you seriously asking me that question?”

“Yes I am and I want an answer right now.”

Don smiles at me. He looks to the floor and pauses. His shoulders begin to shake. He looks back up to me and laughs hysterically, revealing his blood-smearred, yellow teeth.

“Nice try, Mr Graynnil.”

I look behind me but nobody is there.

“Who’s Liam Graynnil?”

Don pauses and begins to stand up.

“You,” he whispers.

I look at him, he’s serious. He looks at me with a blank expression and then swings for me with his huge fist; I dodge him and run at him. As I push his chest, he stumbles backwards and I slice his throat with the blade. Blood spurts from his neck, it pumps onto his green t-shirt. Don stumbles and leans on the bed holding the woman. As he leans on it, I walk up to him. Don turns around and pushes himself off the bed, I stab him multiple times in the stomach and in the chest until he falls onto the ground and is no longer breathing.

I stare at Don’s body for a moment, still holding the knife. The blunt handle digs into my skin as I squeeze. Realisation kicks in. Guilt fills my mind. My grip on the knife strengthens by the second until I let it drop onto the floor. The noise is minute. The room falls silent.

I walk over to Don's body keeping the churning vomit down, and sit him upright. I place my arms under his and try and get him up onto his feet.

I cannot lift him. He's a lot bigger than me and it is impossible to pick him up. I drop him back onto the floor and pick up the knife and put it in my jacket pocket.

What can I do with his body? I can't move him. I could probably barely drag him along the floor.

I need to leave, I need to get out of here and find Shola and end this once and for all.

I walk away back through the corridor, out of the entrance and outside.

As I stand outside and look into the sky; the clouds have increased. The greyness has darkened to night. Down the road, lights are approaching.

Shit, what should I do?

I look around me. Mulberry Lane is that way somewhere, so I run toward the woodland and barge my way past the branches and through the woodland.

The ground is uneven making it difficult to run. I hear tip-tap sounds surrounding me. The sounds begin to come more rapid until I can feel it; it's raining, really chucking down now. The leaves stop the rain for a moment but the sound of the first few drops merge into the sound of the deluge soaking the leaves and trees. Running ahead of me are rivers of water dropping down onto the

already damp mud making it difficult to keep my footing.

I run, ignoring the rain until I hear thunder roar in the skies above me. The roar ripples across the sky, vibrates the ground and my ear drums. As the thunder fades away, the only sound I hear are my feet in the mud and leaves until another roar ripples across the skies above me.

I reach the end of the woodland and not far from Mulberry Lane. As I look at the roads, there are no cars, there are no pedestrians. There is nobody outside.

I need to be wary, now is a chance for Shola to try and kill me.

I run along the pavement, stamping through the rivers forming on the road and pavement. Finally I see it, the road sign for Mulberry Lane. I turn left and run to my path. I run up it, the usual crunching sound disappears and is now a solid squelch at each step I take.

I run around the back and go inside. I keep my shoes and jacket on even though both are covered in blood. I walk in through the destroyed bottom floor and run up stairs.

I get into my room, pull out my whiskey bottle and swig from the bottle. Don is in my mind. His black pupils and black irises; his black skin smothered in blood and his slit open neck. It makes me feel sick but I swig from the bottle.

What did he mean by I'm Liam Graynnil? I know that I am not Liam Graynnil, I've never

heard of him I've never seen a book by him so whoever he is, is a mystery. But for Don to say I am him is really odd, it makes no sense at all.

I swig more from the whiskey bottle, trying to block out my recurring image of Don's body. I feel light-headed, I haven't had much, but then again I haven't eaten very well recently. I twist the lid back onto the whiskey bottle and leave it on the side of my bed. I unzip my jacket and kick off my shoes...

Confrontation

I open my eyes, sit up fast and take a deep breath. I had a nightmare but I have no recollection of it. I expect it was about Tanya and the kids if I did have one.

As I stare into space trying to remember my dream, I see my laptop open on a word document; the document is my version of *Killing for Your Love*.

The word document has been scrolled to the end of the file. I read the page it has been left on...

The End

Continued:

The park here will be a death scene within a few hours. The storm has erupted, the rain pours down ferociously. The thunder and lightning complement each other's strength and power, and the swing chains around the beautiful woman's neck hang her up like a jacket on a hook. Her bare feet hang loosely as do her hands and fingertips.

The rain lands on her burgundy hair and slides down her smooth skin; down her soft neck to her shoulders or straight down her chest to her legs to drip onto the ground from her fingertips or toenails.

I look at her lifeless body hanging here in the chains on this red metal frame, in the public for everyone to see when they wake up in the morning.

The chains are embedded in her neck. Blood escaped her throat and dribbled down to her chest. Deep purple with flecks of blackness envelops her neck; decorating patterns around the tight chains.

Why? Because I can.

It's a sacrifice, women are cruel and bitter. There was a time that men were dominant and the women acknowledged that but now they want 'equality'. They want to be equal but they never will be because men are superior. This is an act of strength and domination to men and a warning to all women, especially Lizzie who left me and took my kids, she will pay and the killings will continue for as long as I am alive and for as long as women try to become equal to men.

I stare at my laptop, when was this written? I have not looked at this file for a while but even so, someone has come upstairs, turned it on, gone onto the *Killing for Your Love* Word document and left it on the last page for me to read. Why didn't they just kill me? It must be Shola. It is someone living on Mulberry Lane it must be someone who has easy access... My mind expands, my thought changes, maybe it isn't Shola. Maybe it is one of the Cann's, they have a key, they have easy access and they have all this time. Surely not

though, surely Simon wouldn't do this and Sandra most certainly wouldn't. Surely?

I don't know who I can trust; the answer is nobody, not one person.

I walk downstairs and hear the rain outside. I think for a moment, rain, thunder and lightning, the park. Is that last part set at the park around the corner from here?

I look outside and see flashing blue lights in the distance through the tree line that covers the park.

"No way." I say out loud

I go and put my jacket and shoes on and run outside.

The blue lights aren't too far in the distance which must mean one thing. What I read must have been written in pretty much real time.

I go to the end of Mulberry Lane and look ahead to see police cars and ambulances surrounding the park.

I walk over to the park and see the crowds surrounding the blue police lines around the park. The rain continues to pour down, the photographers' cameras flash in sync with the lightning. I look to the swings which are covered by a white tent. Sam is there. He's wearing a long grey jacket and he's speaking to a group of people. I see him and push through the crowds of observers and photographers.

“Sam!” I shout but the thunder mutes me.
“Sam!” I shout again making him turn around towards me.

“Ryan.” He says as he turns to his group to finish speaking. Then he strides over to me.

“What’s happened here?” I ask him.

“Someone has been hung by the swing chains, another victim but the weird thing is; she’s got brown hair.”

“Oh right.” This must be the same murder like written after the end of my book.

“Yeah she’s been hung, but we don’t know why.”

I stare at Sam, feeling sick.

“Ryan?” I hear Sam ask me, his voice echoing inside my mind. “Ryan?” He says again.

I look up to the field by the trees and see someone staring at the park from the trees.

“Sam I have to go.”

“Are you okay Ryan? You do know you don’t need to worry about Sandra, Dad and I are here to protect her now, thank you so much for...” I interrupt him; he has nothing to be thankful to me for, just as I have nothing to be thankful to Sandra for.

“That’s fine Sam don’t worry, I’ve got to go, good luck with the case.”

“Are you sure you’re okay Ryan?”

“Yeah I’m fine but I think I may know who is doing this.”

“You do?” Sam stares at me. I nod my head but don’t reply. “Who?” he asks.

“I’m not quite sure to be honest. I need to do something to check.”

“Ryan I can help you.”

“I don’t know if it is this person and if the police started sniffing around then we may not find them out, I’ll try and find out, just don’t watch me or tell anyone that I may know.”

“Right. Well I’ll make out that we’ve not spoken about this then, have a good night Ryan.” We shake hands and I look to the trees again but the figure has disappeared.

I run around to Mulberry Lane and stare down the road. Nobody is in sight; once again the road is as silent as a cemetery.

I walk slowly towards my house watching Shola’s house and the Cann’s. It must be one of those two.

As I stare at Shola’s I see movement within the house, the curtain twitches. I pause for a moment and walk past my house and continue to walk towards Shola’s.

“Ryan!” Simon shouts from his house.

The rain slaps the concrete, muffling his shouts and cries.

“Ryan!” Simon shouts again.

I stop walking and turn to him slowly and walk over to him.

“What are you doing?” Simon asks.

“Just walking.”

“Well you shouldn’t be walking around alone; anyone could be out here, especially the murderer.” Simon says in a monotone.

“You’re right. Simon I need to talk to you about something, it’s really important.” I say.

“Right, go ahead.”

“As odd as this may sound, I think I know who is committing these murders. I think it is someone who lives on this road.”

“How can you possibly know that?”

“It’s Shola.”

“Shola? The man in that shed of a house there.” Simon says staring at the house.

“Yes. Things have been happening to me, he’s been following me and coming into my house and...”

“He comes into your house?”

“Yes he does, he comes in all the time. He’s done sick things. He’s written odd things on my walls, he’s put dead foxes in my garden, he set my house alight, he...”

“How can you possibly know this Ryan? Did you see him?”

“No I didn’t.”

“Well then it could be anyone, it could even be me, I have a key to your house. Just come inside.”

“Well is it?”

“Is it what? Me?” Simon asks.

“Yeah. Is it you then?”

Simon pauses and stares at me, he reaches my arm and holds it tightly. “Ryan I’m your friend and I work, I don’t have time to do such things to you or anyone.”

“So it isn’t you then?”

“I can’t tell if you’re being serious here Ryan. These accusations, if heard by anyone else, could be misleading and could result in bad things happening to me or you or both of us.” He looks up and down the road, behind him

at the front door and back at me. “No... It is not me.”

I look into his eyes, his expression isn't completely normal; he has a mixture of fear and anger towards my accusation.

“Okay then, sorry Simon.”

He nods at me and I pull off a fake smile.

“Don't worry about it Ryan, come inside.”

As we walk inside, I look behind me to see Shola standing outside his house with his arms folded, staring at me. I turn around and ignore him.

Simon and I walk into his house, I take off my jacket and hang it up on the hanger and kick my shoes off.

I turn around to see Sandra sitting on the sofa typing on her laptop.

“Hello darling.” Simon says as he walks into the kitchen, grabbing her shoulder as he walks past the sofa.

“What are you doing out there Ryan? It's a bit late and the weather is awful.”

“I was just looking around.”

“You haven't been here much since coming out of hospital though, where've you been?” Sandra asks.

“Leave him alone Sandy, he's an adult.”

Simon says laughing.

“Well no Simon. He's just come out of hospital he nearly died. You can't just come out of hospital and stand in the rain all day and most of the night.”

“It’s fine don’t worry about me.” I say to her, meaning in more ways than one.

“Well I do worry.”

“Then don’t.” I reply.

Sandra shakes her head and looks back to the laptop.

“What’s the time darling?” Simon asks.

“Oh it’s...” Sandra looks around at her laptop screen. “Nearly twelve o’clock.”

“Oh God really, I’ll go to bed soon then.”

Simon says.

“I’ll join you.” Sandra says giving me a seductive stare from the corner of her eyes.

“We’ve got a spare room upstairs for you Ryan or the couch; it’s entirely up to you.”

“I’ll sleep down here actually, don’t worry about me. I’ve got whiskey to help me sleep too.”

“Good idea mate.” Simon says.

“Here’s the duvet and pillows for you Ryan, have a good sleep.” Sandra says as she walks up the spiral stairs.

“Goodnight mate.” Simon says, following her.

“Night.” I say as they disappear.

I sit down on the sofa and think for a moment. My muscles begin to relax as I sit back with my head resting back on the sofa. I feel absolutely knackered and before I know it, I nod off to sleep.

My vision blurs as I stand in the middle of the road on Mulberry Lane, staring at a dark

outline of someone with a long green coat and clumpy brown boots.

I try to shout, but my cries are mute. The figure turns, the hood on their jacket is up, covering their head. Inside the hood the face is nonexistent. "Beneath men sit." I hear a voice whisper in my ear. "Sin beaten them." The voice whispers again.

"Who's there?" I ask the figure in front of me.

"Beaten hints me." They whisper again and a hand grabs my shoulder.

"I'm Liam Graynnil." The voice whispers again.

I turn around to see Tanya kneeling; she's holding Sammy and Alex in her arms. They're on either side of her, completely pale with dark bags under their eyes. Tanya looks up to me and screams. Tears pour down her face, her screams ripple through Mulberry Lane. I look around; Simon and Sandra stand in front of their house, Paul Brooke and his wife stand outside their home and Don stands by the tree line blocking the park. I turn around to Shola's house but he is not to be seen. I turn around to look at Tanya on the ground, as I kneel down to her; she changes into the green hooded figure, squealing in a high pitched noise which disorientates me. I become dizzy, everyone blurs, as does the road itself. I look to the figure; it stands up, throwing Sammy and Alex aside. I fall backwards landing on my back, I crack my head and I am unable to move. The figure stands over me; the hood

looks down at me with no face. It kneels closer to me until it's just millimetres away from my face. I feel their lukewarm breath on my face, I see yellow teeth appear inside the hood, then a face but it's a face I cannot identify.

"I am Mr S." The figure says and he stands up.

He stands in silence, looking down on me until he suddenly shrieks and bawls, forcing me to wake up on the Cann's sofa.

I sit up and look around me, breathing heavily.

What was that about?

I listen carefully and look at the clock in the kitchen. It's four in the morning. Now is the time to look for answers, Shola is never going to answer me if I knock on the door and he will never talk to me. I need answers now.

I go into the kitchen. I pull out the drawers, searching for anything to take with me to Shola's house.

I open a drawer which contains knives and cutlery. I pick up one of the sharp kitchen knives and then slowly push the drawer back in.

I open the cupboards which contain boxes of cereal, baking goods and biscuits. I open another drawer which has more cutlery: bottle openers, cooking equipment and a torch. 'I'll need that' I think to myself as I pick up the torch and then creep to the front door. As I

reach the door, I slip my shoes on and put my jacket on.

Gripping the door handle, I pull it down, the locks clack and clunk, the plastic sticks to the door frame and freezing cold floods into the house. As I take a step forward, I hear the bed creak upstairs. I hear mumbling and then the floor creaks across the sitting room ceiling. I follow the path of whoever is up by the sounds through the floor. I wait for a moment longer and hear the sounds approach the spiral stairs. I stay still. Waiting for the floor boards to creak in the toilet. There's a shadow through the hole of the stairs. Please don't come down here, not now. I see the shadow through the stairs, it brushes into the kitchen and it goes past the stairs and into the toilet.

I step outside and pull the front door handle up slowly so that it doesn't shut and lock me out.

I walk across Simon's lawn and look to Shola's house which seems completely normal but still creepy.

The weather has quietened down, the rain is lighter; the droplets much smaller than before, the roar of the thunder is quieter.

The street lamp outside my house is flickering; as is the one closest to Shola and the Brekken's. I walk over to Shola's with the wind blowing against me, rustling through the trees, and blowing litter along the road.

I stand outside of Shola's house clutching the kitchen knife in my hand. Once again, this is

going to get nasty, most likely a similar conclusion to the morgue and Don.

As I stand in front of his door I notice that his door is open slightly.

I look over my shoulders to see the shadowy cul-de-sac. It's completely silent now that the rain has stopped and there is no one out this early in the morning.

I push the screeching door open, it thumps against the inside wall.

I step in on the carpet which has no bounce to it like a normal carpet. It feels crushed and worn. As I take gradual steps into the house, I hold onto the damp wall.

I pull out the torch and shine it ahead of me. I shine the light up onto the black mouldering ceiling; droplets fall down onto the flat, musky carpet. I shine my torch onto the wall to see specks of black and white fluffy mould on the tacky wallpaper.

I walk past a door to my right and keep walking towards the back garden. I shine my light into what is supposed to be another room. There's a small wooden table and a sink, with mucky plates and chipped mugs next to it.

I go back towards the front door and push the door I previously passed. It's closed, so I pull the handle down and push the door open slowly. Continuing to push the door open, I look back at the front door, which is gaping. I look back into the room that I am about to walk into and I see paper, books, and furniture all overturned.

What a slob.

The door doesn't open fully. I go into the room and look behind the door to see a dead fox acting as a door stop. I look into the centre of the room and stare at an overturned table. Its legs stick up into the air with a body lying across it on its back. I recognise the long green jacket and clumpy boots; it's Shola.

"Shola?" I whisper.

With no reply, I walk over to his body and kick his hand and repeat myself: "Shola?"

Still no reply; his body doesn't flinch, his chest is not moving and he has blood all over him from head to toe but I notice something odd, he holds a small black book in his hand.

I step back from the body and look around the room. Creepily, I see photos of myself stuck on the wall, black and white photos of me. There are many, there are photos of me outside my house, of me in the kitchen. The photographer must have been in my garden. There are photos of me speaking to Sandra, Simon, Sam and Paul. There are even photos of me at the pub and at the supermarket.

I look back to the body and kneel down. I try not to touch Shola at all. I reach for his bloody black book. As I pull it away, Shola's body goes rigid and straightens, he turns to me and grabs my shoulder. I drop my torch and the black book on the ground. I grab his arms and throw him, rolling him on the floor. As he rolls onto his front, Shola tries to stand and as he does, he looks over to me with panic in his eyes.

“Help me,” he says.

This is the first time I have seen and heard him.

We stare at each other for a moment, he looks weak and vulnerable.

“What happened here?” I ask him.

He does not answer; he stares at me with his teary eyes. He breathes deeply then all of a sudden he charges at me, his fists clenched. He swings his fists at me. I duck out of the way, crawl on my knees and frantically push loose paper and books out of my way to search for a weapon. Shola’s boots head towards me from behind, I see an iron bar on the floor, it’s curved at one end. I grab it and turn onto my back. Shola stands above me, I hook his feet with the bar and pull. He yelps in pain as he collapses onto the floor. I use the bar to stand myself up.

I walk over to Shola who’s squirming on the floor holding his ankle. I stand above him and swing the bar across the back of his head. His face smashes onto the floor and I hear him groan.

“Why are you doing this to me?” I ask him.

Shola doesn’t respond; he just stays on the ground.

I lift the bar above my head and push it down into his thigh. It pierces clean through his thigh; he screams and makes me feel nauseous.

“Shut up!” I shout, trying to act strong. I swing the bar and hit Shola on the top of his head.

Shola goes limp.

“Tell me what’s going on, why did you put that fox in my shed? How did you come into my house and write all those messages? Why did you try and kill me?”

He doesn’t answer. I throw the bar aside and kick him. He doesn’t react; I pull him off of his front and push him onto his back.

He’s dead.

I look around the room, I look at the photos of me and spot a CD rack. I look through the three CD cases, as I open one; I read the title as “FOX CAM 1 Ryan Milligan.” Followed by FOX CAM 2 and 3.

I look around the room for a TV but there isn’t one. I slip the three CDs and their cases into my jacket pocket and continue to look.

I pick up the black book from the floor and open it. I read what he has written and it seems like an activity log of my every move. This confirms that Shola has been watching me. What also confirms it are the black binoculars sitting by the window facing all the way down Mulberry Lane.

“Ryan Milligan leaves No. 2 Mulberry Lane at 23:40.

He returns at 2:48, limping slightly and his white shirt covered in blood.”

I flick through the pages, reading the time lapses and all my activities.

“Ryan leaves No. 5 staggering, presumably after a night with Simon and Sandra Cann. He stumbles up to his pathway and collapses for 2 minutes. He then rises up off the ground and walks away from his house.

He returns at 4:00, going straight into his house.”

That makes me think back to that time. When I left the Cann’s, I did stumble home and I did collapse. I remember that, but I do not remember coming back round after collapsing. Shola has written that I got up and went back out but I do not remember this at all.

I continue to read...

“I follow Ryan to a street around the corner from Mulberry Lane. He has stolen a Vauxhall Astra, 06 plate. He stole it from one of his blonde victims who I do not know the identity of.

He sits in the car and stares at the house of the married couple Nick and Ella Browne.

As he watches Ella walk up to the house, he leans forward in his car. Nick answers the door and Ella walks inside.

After a moment, Ryan follows them; he goes up to the front door. He pauses as he tries to walk in through the front. He runs down the

porch steps and around the back of the house. Momentarily I lose him but as I wait, I hear screams from inside the house and I call the police.”

I read this entry more than once and this is definitely the house that Sandra and I went to. Shola watched me kill Ella and Nick? I did not do this; I do not remember doing this at all, why would Shola make all of this up? I flick through more pages and come to the most up to date page, dated today...

“Ryan,

I know what is going to happen. You think that I am evil when I'm not. I have been watching you for a long time, even before you moved here.

There are things you need to know and you need to discover them for yourself.

You may kill me but I have people who are aware of you, they will track you down and kill you for me.

You are a murderer. You are the murderer who killed all those blonde women and anyone else who got in your way.

You will want answers about Liam Graynnil and whatever else you know but let me tell you something, you may have killed Don and you may have killed me but there are still people out there who want your head. You better watch your back Ryan or should I call

you Liam – Yes that’s right, you’re Liam Graynnil.

See you in hell,

Shola”

I stare at the last message from Shola and wonder what the fuck is going on. I’m Liam? Don implied that also, there is no way I am this Liam Graynnil, they must be lying, they must be setting me up for some reason but at least I know that Liam Graynnil is the murderer and he is out there with the other people who Shola and Don were working with.

I’m still confused... why they have targeted me?

I’m just a normal guy who’s been searching for his wife and kids for four years, it doesn’t make sense.

I look out the front to see two figures looking in through the window into Shola’s house. I take a glance at everything to see if there is anything else, I don’t think there is, well I hope not.

I run out to the back and barge the back door open.

I run out into the garden and into the woodland behind Shola’s house. I pause, hiding within the trees and the shadows staring at Shola’s house.

A figure walks around the side of Shola's house and into his back garden. The figure holds a torch and what looks to be a gun.

Another figure comes out from inside Shola's out of the back door. He looks to the other.

As the figures stare at each other, one of them runs back down the side of the house and the other walks back inside. I pause for a moment and come out from the trees. As I stand on the open grass, the figure runs out from inside the house and runs down the side of the house and down the road.

I take steps towards Shola's house. I reach the fence surrounding his back garden, as I look into his house, the house suddenly explodes.

The heat is scorching even from this distance. The roof lifts off the house and clatters back down onto it knocking the walls down and completely destroying everything inside it. I land awkwardly on my shoulder with my legs akimbo. The wet grass soaks my back instantly through my jacket.

I push myself up off the ground and run. I've got to get out of here, that explosion would have woken everyone up not just on Mulberry Lane but the surrounding area.

I run down the side of the blistering flames as they flicker into the night sky. I reach the road and sprint.

I cannot be seen, if I am, I will be the main suspect. With the blue lights still circulating at the park and through the tree line, they would have most certainly heard the explosion and

they probably saw it. I must have only seconds until they come around the corner.

I'm able to reach the Cann's and run inside. I shut the door, without slamming it. I listen to see if they did hear it and they sure did. I hear mumbling and movement upstairs.

I pull my jacket off and hang it up and then slip my boots off and jump into the couch. I shut my eyes and hear the stomps of bare feet walking around upstairs. I hear the movement towards their bedroom window and then both of them running across the landing and down the stairs.

"Shola's house is on fire." Simon says.

They both run past me and go outside.

"I hope he's okay." Sandra says.

I stand up and step out onto the drive to watch the policemen running down the street towards Shola's.

I look over to Paul's house, Paul, his wife and two kids are all staring at Shola's house.

A police car speeds across to the house.

Sam's Mercedes arrives moments later. I hear men shouting: "Get back, stay back."

I see Sam stand in Shola's front garden looking hopelessly at it. I walk up to Sandra and Simon.

"Jesus! I wonder what happened there?" I say.

"I don't know but there's no way he's alive." Simon says.

"Oh God poor man, maybe it's to do with the blonde murders?" Sandra wonders.

“No course not darling. It’s more likely a gas leak and explosion: don’t worry about it. We should probably go back inside though, I don’t expect Sam would want us poking our noses into it,” Simon says as he puts his arm around Sandra. “Come on.”

They both walk back into the house and I follow them.

We stand in the sitting room in silence.

“Tea or coffee?” I say out loud.

“Nothing for me I’m going back to bed.”

Simon says.

“And so am I.” Sandra says, staring at the ground.

“Okay, well night then.”

Sandra doesn’t say a word, she walks back upstairs and Simon strolls to the stairs. He puts one foot on the first step and looks back at me.

“Bit odd, all this is going on, in Surrey especially. But even more importantly on Mulberry Lane. It’s like a soap.” Simon says, shaking his head. “Anyway see you in the morning mate.”

“Yeah see you tomorrow.” I say.

He disappears up the stairs and I sit down on the sofa, confused as to what is going on. Maybe I need to read this book by Liam Graynnil to understand more what is happening and what has happened.

I pull out the book and begin to skim read. I read the first few chapters again when Lizzie and the kids disappear. I re-read the first few

deaths, a nervous quiver pulses through my body. They're saying I committed these murders and did all of this. Daniel is being hunted in the book by this group because they believe he harmed Lizzie and the kids? Is Daniel me or Liam Graynnil or both? I begin to read the book, imagining myself. Daniel is me.

Killing For Your Love Chapter 8

I stand in a house where I believe Lizzie has been coming to before she disappeared.

The house is located on a cul-de-sac with no owner currently living here. He's been missing for some time now, just as long as Lizzie has been gone for.

It's located on a slope with a gravel path leading up towards the front porch. I stand in the open hallway and smell the muskiness marking the abandonment. Where did this man go? I know who he is; I have come across him before in his line of work. Andrew Myers.

He knows me very well and my family, Lizzie and he have a bond, a very strong bond. Sometimes, I would watch Lizzie walk in here and I would look through the windows to see what they're doing. But I could never see them; they were always too busy upstairs.

I pause and stare at the description of Lizzie and Andrew Myers. This piece is about my house, the house that I bought.

It's peculiar that I or Graynnil have used real names for real people. Don and Andrew Myers have been used without a pseudonym whereas I'm 'Daniel', Tanya must be 'Lizzie' but why?

I *have* been in the house before, I knew Andrew Myers, I do not remember any of this whatsoever.

It makes sense for me to have been in my house before; I had a link with it, that's why it all seemed so familiar. When I walk down into the basement it seems like I have been doing it for a lifetime.

But this could be the reason that Tanya left me, was it for another man? The thought sickens me, I begin to retch. How could she? I continue to read.

I walk down into the basement and switch on the light. It has been ripped apart down here; the wall across from the stairs has been knocked down but is covered with a fake wall.

I pick up the black metal box on the basement table and walk back upstairs into the living room. I place the box in there and walk back out into the hallway. I shut the door and go towards the front door until I hear the crunching of the path.

I look out the side window next to the door to see a middle-aged man walking up to the front door holding a set of house keys.

I sprint to the basement door and shut myself in. I stand behind the door and listen. The latch of the door clunks and I feel the breeze from outside squeeze in under the basement door and onto my ankles. I hear the door slam and footsteps.

He walks past me towards the garage and then back, his shadow makes the basement darker. The light evaporates from the crack under the door. I think he's about to enter.

He grabs the handle but so do I. I use my strength to counter his. He pulls on the handle, grunting and moaning.

"Fucking thing." He says.

I keep a hold of the handle with both hands, pulling the handle up.

Eventually he gives up and walks away.

I open the basement door, slowly. I poke my head out of the door and look into the sitting room, but he's not there, he must be in the kitchen.

As I look out, I hear footsteps upstairs: even better.

I step out and shut the door without any sound. I go to the front door and open it slowly, luckily I escape without being seen.

The man going into the house must be Simon; it couldn't be anyone else except Mike the estate agent.

I remember Simon telling me that the basement door locks on its own, there was me thinking the house was haunted.

I stare at the book and throw it aside. I have so much to search for now. The black metal box, that's the one that is locked, I need to get into that. The knocked down wall in the basement, what is that about?

I walk over to my jacket pockets and pull out the FOX CAM videos. I need to see these, they'll confirm everything.

I go to the Cann's TV and kneel down to their DVD player. I press the eject button and out slides the CD tray. I place CD FOX CAM 1 into the player. The Player drones and the fans within the player blow out warm air.

The TV flickers and on comes poor-quality camera footage in the dark in some woodland. The footage is of trees and hanging vines. The camera is moving and appears to be strapped to the fox's neck. I can't believe that Shola actually used foxes to film me. He must have trained them like you would a dog with persistent treats and my scent to follow me I suppose.

I watch what the fox sees as it's trotting through the woodland and then there's a figure amongst the trees. There's an outline of somebody wearing a jacket, looking through the woodlands, high-kneed strutting around the woods, stepping over fallen branches and tree trunks. The image becomes clearer as the fox follows the figure through the shadows.

I fast forward the CD until I get to a part with light to see if the figure is me. As the footage moves out of the woodland and out

into a road, I press play and continue to watch the footage.

The figure looks like me. He's wearing my green jacket, black trousers and boots and even driving around in a Vauxhall.

I press pause, it must be me, same physicality and same clothing. The image is grainy and unclear but I can tell that it is me.

I pause and stare at the screen in disbelief. I can't believe it.

I fast forward more and I recognise the street, it's the big white American-style house, where Sandra's friends Ella and Nick lived.

The stolen Vauxhall is parked on the road in front of the house next to the footpath. The footage shows me getting into the car to presumably watch the house. The camera shows Ella walking along the pavement. She walks up to the door. Her blonde hair bounces with each step she takes. She wears a tight fitted black dress which is cut halfway up her thigh. She steps under the porch and knocks on the door. Her hand knocks against the door with the sound delayed.

Nick answers and Ella enters. I continue to watch, all the lights switch off in the house and the upstairs ones switch on.

At that point, I get out of the car and stare at the house as I march up to it. The fox moves from behind a car along to another car along the street. On the footage, I turn to a staggering old man. I pause and then walk up to the porch and try the door. I then go

around the back of the house and at that point there is silence along the street.

The camera then shows the staggering old man do a double-take at the fox. He approaches the fox, lurching from side to side and eventually falling over in the middle of the road. He stays on the ground and goes to sleep.

Screams come from the house and disrupt the neighbourhood. The fox camera shows lights turning on in other houses. The screaming continues and at that point, I stop the CD.

I lean down to the player, eject the disk and pull out the CD and snap it in half, along with the other disks and I bury them into the Cann's kitchen bin.

I go back to the sofa and sit down to think.

I killed these people, it was me. All these people are after the killer with no idea of who it is and all this time I have been wondering who it is and trying to defend Sandra from the murderer and all along I was the danger to her.

I stand up from the sofa and get myself ready to go back to my house.

I leave the Cann's stealthily and step out into the early morning cold. Shola's house is still alight, the flames are burning strongly. The panicking observers block my view of the wreckage, police and fire brigade surrounding the house.

I walk up the path, around to the back and inside the house through the scorched kitchen. I step in and put the boarding of the door back up over the gaping hole in the wall. I go into the hallway and up the stairs to my room. I get into my bed and lie down, thinking everything over. I am in trouble, what am I going to do? If I own up, I will be going to prison for the rest of my life for a crime I do not remember committing.

I lean over to the chest of drawers by my bed and swig the whiskey from the bottle. My eye lids grow heavy, my senses disperse and I pass out.

Missing

Tanya arises in front of me as if she was formed from the darkness surrounding her. Smiling, she reaches her hand out towards me and says: “Hi Darling.”

“Oh Tan, is it really you?”

“Yes it’s me, I’m safe.”

“Where are the kids?”

“They’re downstairs darling.”

“Where are we though?”

“We’re home Ryan, you don’t need to worry anymore, we’ve been with you the whole time.”

“Home? Being my new home?”

“Yeah, Mulberry Lane where else would we be? We’ve been here the whole time.”

“I don’t understand; you haven’t been here the whole time at all.”

“We have.” Her face changes, her pupils grow large and her irises darken.

“Are you aware of everything that’s happened?”

“Everything,” she whispers.

“Liam Graynnil being me and me supposedly committing all these murders?”

“I know everything and I understand, darling.”

“Okay well you tell me what’s going on.”

Tanya pauses and stares at me.

“What do you want to know?”

“Well everything, I want to know what the fuck is going on. In *Killing for Your Love* by Liam Graynnil...”

“You.” Tanya interrupts.

“In Liam Graynnil’s version, Daniel is me and you’re Lizzie, correct?” Tanya nods. “So I killed all these people and I am being hunted down by a group of people who say I killed you, is that correct?”

“Well yes, haven’t you read the book?” Tanya mutters.

“I have read most of it Tan, but it doesn’t make sense, I don’t remember the deaths, I do not remember going out into the woods during the night. I remember absolutely nothing of any of that. What I really want to know is: what is Andrew Myers to you?” Tanya stays still. Her breathing stops and she stares at me as if in a trance.

“So come on then, what about you and Andrew? Have a good fuck together? Good affair right? And then you left me and went to live with him is that right?”

“I love you Ryan and the kids do too, please don’t do this.”

“Answer me.”

“You won’t understand.”

“Understand why you left me for another man? No I don’t, please explain it to me.”

“I can’t.” Tanya screams.

“Tell me now!” I shout back.

My yell blows her hair back, her expression changes once again, her skin begins to fade away into the darkness surrounding us.

“Did I kill Andrew Myers? Is that why he disappeared?” I ask her calmly.

“Yes.”

“And did I...” I try to ask a difficult question which I fear the answer to. The answer is going to be difficult to deal with whatever it is. A lump forms in my throat, making it difficult to ask in my normal voice and tears flood down my face. I feel nauseous as I set myself up to ask the question: “... Did I kill you and the kids?”

Tanya pauses. She fades more. I reach out to her and ask again.

“Did I kill you and the kids?” I shout, repeatedly.

Tanya disappears into the darkness leaving me alone. The room lightens up to reveal my bedroom.

I look down to my bed to see a body under the duvet. I look around the room; blood is smeared across the floor. There are bloody handprints on the door and walls. I take steps towards the bed and grab a hold of the duvet. I lift it to see blood on the pillow and long strands of blonde hair. I pull the duvet off to reveal a man soaked in blood wearing a black suit and white shirt. The shirt is stained a light red. On the suit, there is a name badge. I lean across the body and read the name. My sight not completely clear, I stare at the badge and try to focus. I eventually manage to read it. It says: ‘Dr Andrew Myers’. I pull away from the body and try to focus on the face but I cannot, for some reason my sight will not look at significant details. I could see Tanya’s face clearly but not Andrew’s.

I stare at him, his face is blurred. I continue to stare until I see his head turn slowly on the pillow. His neck makes a cracking sound, his blurred face is staring at mine but I cannot see his. I try to focus, it's still completely blurred. Then Andrew sits up in the bed, keeping his face toward me. My eyes focus on his closed eyes which suddenly open to reveal his bloodshot eyes.

We stare at each other; his eyes are frightening, I can't look much longer and as I turn away to leave, he stands in front of me, blocking the doorway. He doesn't say a word, he continues to stare at me, mouth slack as if his jaw has been broken or his teeth have all been ripped out.

I take a step back. He walks towards me, taking a deep breath; he's holding a knife. I take steps back until I fall over the bed. He stands above me and takes another deep breath. He lifts the knife above his head and he opens his mouth to speak...

I awaken with no feeling. I open my eyes and stare at the light skies above me. The white fluffy clouds and light blue sky above me.

Where am I?

I sit up and realise I'm in a woodland clearing. Why am I here?

My feelings return to me, I feel my back which is completely soaked and freezing cold. I look down to my body to see that I am wearing nothing at all, not even underwear. I shyly look around me and see my trousers hanging on a branch with my boxer shorts on

the ground underneath them. I push myself up off the ground and charge to my trousers. I put my boxer shorts on and then pull my trousers off the branch to see a piece of paper on the wet leaves on the ground. I look down to the note which reads 'we know what you did.'

I look at the note and put it into my pocket. I turn around to see the naked body of a blonde woman.

Next to her is my white shirt, dragging my feet, I walk over to my shirt, pick it up off the ground and take a few steps back away from the body. I just can't look at her. I don't want to see the face of this woman. I don't remember any of this at all. I don't know what happened here although I can probably guess.

I button up my shirt and look around the woodland. Where can I go? I have no recollection and I have no idea where I am.

I turn around and something stands out to me. As I watch the trees sway from side to side, I see the roof of a house; hopefully I am not too far from Mulberry Lane. I walk towards it and suddenly I recognise where I am. I've never really paid much attention to this part of the woodland but I look up and see the fence around my garden and house. The woodland is the one right behind my house. I run up to the back gate, open it and go into the house through the back door.

I walk into the burnt-out kitchen and through to the hallway and up the stairs. As I walk along the landing, I look out of each of the

three windows at the front of my house. There are police cars on Mulberry Lane. From the middle window the Cann's house has three police cars there and Simon and Sam are standing outside. Simon looks stressed, like he's just woken up. His hair is untidy; a messy quiff and flattened on one side but normal on the other.

I then move along to the last window and look at where Shola's house once was. It now looks like a tip site. The police have blocked it off with the blue and white police line around the area of rubble.

I look back to the Cann's and Sam is hugging Simon. What is going on with the Cann's?

I go out into the back garden and I hear feet on the other side of Paul Brooke's fence. I look over to his fence. Through the gaps in the fence, I see a figure pacing around the garden and eventually I see Paul's bald head poke up.

"Hello mate." Paul says.

"Hello." I reply.

"God you look rough pal, late night?"

"No not really."

"God I did, bloody awful night, got no sleep at all because of all this going on. I have to admit to you mate, I am scared for my family. I hope no one tries to harm them, you know with the Brekken's, your house catching fire, the shitty house on the end and now all this shit with the Cann's..."

"What's wrong with the Cann's?" I interrupt Paul, cutting his sentence off short.

“Haven’t you heard? Bloody hell mate you’re the one living there at the moment, Sandra has gone missing, last night with all this stuff with the dirty man on the end.”

The hairs on my neck stand on end, my brain feels as if it is pumping real fast, is the woman down in the woods Sandra?

“I didn’t know that.” I try to say normally.

“Can’t believe all this is going on around here, there has never been trouble like this before, it’s ever since you’ve moved here.”

Paul says, laughing nervously.

I don’t laugh at all or even smile, more than anything, I’m terrified. I know that all this is meant to be but it really isn’t, I’m not capable of doing this to innocent people.

“Well mate have a good day.” Paul says as he steps down from behind the fence.

I run back into the house, I need to know what is going on, this house has been the home of Liam Graynnil so there must be some hard evidence to see if it jogs my memory at all.

I run up to my room and pick up the metal box that has been here since I moved in. I look on my bed and see my green jacket. I pat my palm onto the pockets and I feel the knife in the pocket. I pull it out and go back over to the box. As I stick the knife into the gap between the box and lid, I hear knocking downstairs.

I walk out of my room and stand at the top of my stairs to hear voices mumbling outside. I listen to the voices.

“There shouldn’t be anyone in here but I hear something from the house.” A voice says.

“Right, I’ll go around the back and see if anyone can get in and if anyone is inside, wait here.” The second voice says.

And with that, I run out into the kitchen and out the back door and I jump over the gate and run into the woods. As I run, I look for the blonde woman’s body, but I cannot find it. I can’t see if it is Sandra. I go from my house through the trees and over hanging vines because it leads to the main road.

I reach the main road and watch the cars whistling past, blowing a breeze into me. I look at mothers with their push chairs and holding their toddlers’ hands as they bounce along the footpath.

I stop and think for a moment. Not only the police, but Simon will find it suspicious and wonder why I am not at his house and where I have been. I don’t have much time to think and it is time for me to go to the Cann’s and get this interrogation out of the way.

I get up to the Cann’s drive before I am stopped by Seymour and Hughes.

“Mr Milligan would you mind coming into the house with us? We need to question you.” Seymour says.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

“Just come inside and we’ll explain everything.” Hughes says.

As we enter, I see Simon and Sam sitting on the sofa, Sam looks at me and shakes his head. Simon stands up.

“Where the fuck have you been?” He says.

“I’ve been out all morning, I couldn’t go back to sleep so I went out.” I reply.

“Where have you been? Did you take Sandra?” Simon grunts.

“We’ll do the questioning here Mr Cann, please take a seat.” Hughes says.

Simon sighs and looks to Sam, but Sam stays seated. Simon then looks at me and slumps onto the sofa.

“Could the both of you come with me so Hughes and Mr Milligan can speak for a moment? Thank you.” Seymour says and leads the way out into the back garden.

Sam stands up from the sofa and pats Simon on the shoulder.

“Come on dad.”

Simon stands and follows Sam out into the garden.

Hughes sits down on the sofa where Simon and Sam sat and I sit opposite him on an armchair.

“Mr Milligan, Sandra Cann has gone missing and no one knows where she is. No one has seen her. Her phone was left here and there is no way of contacting her. Mr Cann told us that she wouldn’t leave home because she is scared, so she wouldn’t go without a phone to contact anybody. Now it doesn’t look good that she had disappeared and so had you. So where were you?”

“I just went out for a walk; I do it all the time when I’m stressed.”

“Why are you stressed?”

“Because I have a lot on my mind.”

“Like what?”

“Like my house being set alight for a start, not seeing my wife and kids for four years; I think that’s pretty stressful not knowing if they’re even alive.”

“No offence Mr Milligan but that has nothing to do with this case.”

“You asked me the fucking question of why I would be stressed.” I bellow at him and rise from my seat. As I stand, I stop myself from losing my temper any more.

“Sit down.” Hughes says.

I sit down, resting my elbows on my knees and clasping my hands together.

“So Mr Milligan, what did you mean when you told Detective Cann that you may know who did all of these murders?”

“I just assumed I knew who it was.”

“He said that he made out you didn’t say it but then shortly after, Shola’s house went up in flames so was that anything to do with you?”

“I thought this was about Sandra?”

“It is.” Hughes stares at me awaiting my answer.

“His house going up in flames was nothing to do with me. Simon and Sandra woke up and came down stairs and all three of us looked out the window so even they can vouch for me being here.”

“What was your relationship with Sandra Cann?”

“I feel as if this is an interrogation rather than some questions about my whereabouts, I feel like I’m a suspect.”

“Everyone is a suspect Mr Milligan.”

“Well I’m not, because it wasn’t me.” I say as I stand up. “If that’s all, then I’ll be on my way.”

“Please sit down Mr Milligan I have not finished.”

I stare at Hughes as he stays seated, forcing me to sit.

“The less you rebel against my questions, the quicker we can get on with our day Mr Milligan. Right where was I...” Hughes stares down at his notepad and looks back up to me and continues to speak. “So what is your relationship with Sandra Cann?”

“Well she’s my friend of course. I stayed here a couple of times when Simon was away.”

“Did you like her more than a friend? Were you physically attracted to her?”

“Of course not.”

“Do you like blondes?”

“My wife is blonde so I guess so.”

“So where did you go last night for your walk?”

“I went to the town and had a look around.”

“So if we look on CCTV then we’ll see you there?”

“Of course.” I say confidently but inside I fear the fact they won’t.

“Okay Mr Milligan. We’ll be in touch.”

We both rise and I leave the house without seeing Simon or Sam or even shaking Hughes' hand.

I step outside and look over to Shola's house which only has one police car in front of it now.

I sprint over to my house and into the garden. I need to get into that metal box.

As I slowly walk down the side path, I press my back against the wall and shuffle to the edge of the house and poke my head into the garden. It's clear; those police sniffing around earlier have gone.

I walk in through the back and go straight upstairs to the metal box.

There it is; the battered, peeling, burned and dented metal box.

I go over to it and stick the knife into the box and wiggle it around next to the lock, just hoping for the catch to spring itself. I twist my wrist and press the knife against the lock with all my strength, but nothing happens.

I pull the knife out and poke it back in. I pull the handle down as much as I can, the lid lifts and bends forwards and comes out of line.

The hinges on the back bend also. As I pull the knife down to move the lid, it finally moves and the lid adjusts from its natural, tight fitting position and creates a gap to slip my fingers in. As I use my hands, my knife bends, slips out and drops onto the floor. I pull the lid using my hands. The hinges bend and the lid pulls away from the main box. As I

continue to pull at the lid, the hinges eventually snap. The lid adjusts and I prise it open. The lid is still attached by the padlock. I push the back of the lid toward the padlock to reveal the inside of the box.

I pull out paperwork and some lined paper which has hand written notes on it. There is also another piece of paper which has printed writing and diagrams across it. It's titled 'Architectural and planning sketch of basement extension.'

I look at the sketching and measurements. The layout that I know is on this page but on this page it is a much bigger basement than what it actually is down there. As I study the sketches, I notice that a dotted line is drawn along the page where the wall is in the basement.

There is nothing behind that wall, there is no extension at all behind that wall, it's just a wall, I thought. Well there is only one way to find out.

I go down to the basement door; the door's creaking is louder than before. I switch on the light and stare at the wall.

I place the metal box on the table with the two pieces of paper alongside it. I look at the extension drawings again, then at the four main walls of the basement, I compare the sketch of the basement to the actual basement. I look at the stairs behind me. I knock on the concrete slab walls - they are rock solid. I move along to the sides of the walls. Once again they are firm and make no

sound when I knock against them. I move onto the back wall where the metal frame is, I knock on the wall and I hear a hollow echo behind the wall.

That wall is not made of concrete or brick that's for sure, more like hardboard or MDF.

How am I supposed to get behind the frame? It's going to be heavy, especially with all the equipment on it.

Back over at the papers, I look at the notes. I don't know who has written them or what they're about. So I quickly skim read the squiggly and scruffy handwriting.

'Sitting intensely and twiddling his thumbs, my patient faces me and lets his head hang loosely with his eyeballs rolled up into his eye lids. I ask him questions about his actions but there is no response. I ask my patient why he rapes and beats his wife Tanya Milligan most nights. He shrugs his shoulders and says "because I feel like doing it". I ask if he feels capable of killing an animal, he shrugs his shoulders. I ask if he is capable of killing a human being. He stares at me and smirks.

I then ask if he is capable of killing his own children. He begins to shout; he stands up and tosses the table towards me. I summon help and security comes in, it takes three men to lock my patient down onto the table and sedate him to calm him down...

Taking a short break, I continue to question my patient. I ask him about his wife and

children. My patient's mood changes, the mood is odd to describe, he speaks about times which I think are his dreams rather than reality, they lacked details, locations, timings etc. He speaks about his wife and says that he would never harm her. I ask if he knows who Ryan Milligan is; he does not respond and instead ignores my question. I ask him again and he shakes his head.

To conclude, I believe that my patient has a sane mind when his personality doesn't split, but when it does, he changes into a different mindset; he changes all beliefs, opinions and even language. He changes into a complete different person who is interested in mind games and puzzles. The only aspect that stays the same is his profession of being a talented and creative writer.

The question of the reasoning of the name change is still unknown. When I ask him about his name he seems unaware of it and does not answer.

I will continue to monitor the situation of Ryan Milligan and Liam Graynnil but I can come to the conclusion and diagnose Mr Milligan of having a severe case of Dissociative Identity Disorder. Much care will need to be taken. I believe with the right support, that Mr Milligan can return to normal life and deal with all life expectancy and everyday life after care here in the institution.

Signed: Andrew A. Myers

Date: 28.09.09

Patient Number: 129113005

Patient Name: Ryan Milligan

I stare at the patient's name. It's me but I have never been to an institution or been interviewed like that by Andrew Myers. I have never even met him.

I think about the past, I think about that day Tanya and the kids disappeared, that day where I felt hopeless, that atrocious day. I think of how I dealt with it, by sitting in my house and wallowing in self pity and waiting for a phone call to give me any hope of finding Tanya and the kids, but that call never came.

I look at the notes, an institution? I never went to one, I've never been to one let alone been kept in one and it is pretty much impossible that I could forget such an event. I'm interested as to why Andrew Myers has popped up again in all of this. First in *Killing for Your Love*, then being friendly with Tanya and now he was my psychiatrist? I feel as if something is going on, it's as if I'm being set up and I've been dragged into some business to do with Andrew Myers. Something isn't right about all of this, he's been so heavily involved in my life but I cannot remember ever meeting him at all. I don't even know what he looks like and I don't know his mannerisms or the sound of his voice.

I look back to the wall, I go to the metal stand and I pull at it. Surely there must be some way to get into the basement extension, with no other opening through the wall, it could be behind here. As I continue to pull the metal stand, the screeching of the metal on the concrete floor sets my teeth on edge. I pause; take a deep breath and pull again, creating the shrill noise of metal against the concrete again, sounding like fingernails dragging down a blackboard.

The stand is at an angle from the wall and towards the stairs. I examine the gap. I fit my body in behind the frame and side step with my back against the wall.

Leaning on the wall, I push my back onto it but it's completely rigid.

I knock on the wall in different positions to hear the hollow sound. I look at the wall and see a rectangular black line. I stand in front of it and study it. I knock on the hollow walls and then the door which sounds firm. I move my hand down the door and feel a hole that reaches mid way through the thickness of the door. I feel around in the hole with my finger tips. Inside is a cold metal circle. I clutch the circle and twist it and the door opens ajar. As soon as the door opens, a stench seeps through the opening and straight into my nostrils making me retch and choke. Lifting my arm up to block my mouth and nose with my sleeve, I push the door wide open and call out "Hello?"

I hear a muffled sound and movement.
“Hello, is someone there?” I call out again.
Feeling around the walls, there is a circular light switch so I click it on, the light flickers a number of times, revealing a huge concrete room.

In the centre of the room is a pink children’s toy table with the brown, red pinned eyes sitting in the centre of the table facing towards me.

I look at the four pink chairs around the table. There is a wooden puppet on one seat; its strings gathered on the floor on either side of the chair. Two other chairs are occupied by big dolls that look like children; their clothes are stained and streaked with brown. One is wearing a white dress and the other is wearing a white shirt with black trousers, neither with shoes to cover their auburn feet and black nails.

I look to my left, against the wall and there is a hunched-up blonde woman, leaning forward on a chair with her hair hanging down over her face.

I make sure the door can’t slam behind me and step further into the room. I walk over to the pink table, staring at the woman on the chair. Each step I take, I fear that she will wake, but she doesn’t.

I reach the table and kneel down behind the puppet. I look at the two children that sit to my left and right. I realise that the smell is coming from what I thought to be dolls. They are in actual fact, two dead children. I stumble

back and shuffle away from the table. The stench makes my stomach churn. I begin to retch, my stomach clenches to pump up vomit. I eventually throw up. It splatters across the floor and makes my mouth taste sour and acidic.

I hear a muffled hum from behind me. I turn back around. In the chair, Tanya sits staring at me.

“Tanya?” I shout in disbelief.

She mumbles something from under a gag. She shuffles on the chair and I see her arms are tied up behind her.

If that’s Tanya in the chair, then the two children must be...

I put the two together, the two children are mine. They’re Sammy and Alex.

I stare at the bodies which are barely.

“No!” I shout. “No, no, no.” My voice breaks.

I stare at them but I cannot go near them, they’re my babies and they’re dead.

Tanya shuffles in the chair, her face reddens and the veins on her forehead stand out.

I go over to Tanya. My face is soaked as sweat and tears drip into my mouth, making me taste the saltiness.

I untie Tanya’s mouth and then move the chair away from the wall. We do not say a word to each other whilst I loosen her hands, instead she bursts into tears.

I undo the ragged cloth that tied her hands together and she falls off the chair and lies on

the floor. I kneel down to her and turn her over onto her back.

“Tan, are you okay?” I ask.

“Ryan, oh Ryan is it you?”

“Yes it’s me.”

“Oh God, oh God, thank you, get me out.”

“Who did this Tan? Who did this to you?”

“Ryan just get me out.”

“Who did this Tan? How long have you been down here?”

“Ryan please just get me out.”

“What happened to the kids Tan? Is that the kids?”

“Yes it’s the fucking kids and you killed them!” Tanya spits in my face.

She pushes me out of the way and wearily stands up. “This is all you Ryan, you did this.”

“I, I did...”

“Yes you did, you locked me down here, you locked the kids down here and you killed them.”

I look at Tanya’s filth smothered face and the streaks of eye-liner on her cheeks and then back to the kids. She continues to speak but my hearing disappears, I cannot hear anything. All I can think of are the kids. I walk back up to them; I pick Sammy up off the chair and then Alex. As I walk towards the door, I collapse onto the ground with them either side of me. Unable to hear my screams, I clutch my arms together and pull their heads into my chest and put my head between theirs. Tanya’s hand rests on my shoulder for a moment until she prises Alex away from me.

I look up at her, her face bright red and soaked with tears, covered with dust.

“This is all your fault.” Tanya says to me as she snatches Sammy away from me. “They’re dead and it’s your fault.”

“It wasn’t me.” I say to her as she shakes her head. “It wasn’t.”

“It was, Ryan. It doesn’t matter if your mind-frame is Ryan Milligan or Liam Graynnil, you still did this.”

I look up at her, she called me Liam Graynnil.

“Tan, is this Liam Graynnil split personality thing real?”

Tanya sighs as she kneels down next to me.

“Yes Ryan, it is. You’re not well Ryan, you’re really, really ill and you have been ever since I left you. This is exactly why I tried to leave you, because I knew you would harm me and the children. I wanted to prevent that but you came and found us with Andrew.”

“What happened?” I ask.

“Ryan, you killed Andrew and then locked us down here in his basement extension. You killed him, tossed his body in here with us and left us down here.”

I listen to her and I do not remember a single thing about any of what she is telling me.

“But I don’t remember any of this Tan, none of it at all.”

“You never do. You have a split personality disorder, when you pass out or sleep, you usually change to Liam Graynnil, that’s what you call yourself anyway. You completely

change Ryan, you're violent and frightening. I remember you used to wake up during the night and you would force me to have sex with you, I wouldn't have a choice."

"What? I raped you? Why haven't you said anything before?"

"I was advised not to speak to you about it as Ryan Milligan. I got in touch with Andrew Myers who was a psychiatrist, he suggested we treated you without knowing because then we would not risk losing the Ryan Milligan in you and so we prevented you turning into Liam permanently. He used to come round in the night and inject you to keep you asleep to prevent you turning during the night."

"You make me sound like some kind of monster."

"You are a monster Ryan. You're horrible when you change."

"I can't help that though Tan, I don't even remember changing mentally or doing any of those things to you or the kids."

"There isn't any excuse Ryan, what you've done is unforgiveable."

"I know, but I need to understand what's going on, I don't understand any of this, why am I called Liam Graynnil?"

"You called yourself that when you were admitted."

"What? So Andrew was my psychiatrist?"

"Yes, he couldn't put you in care because there wasn't anything wrong with you as Ryan but he had to prevent Liam coming out of

you. He did a number of tests and seemed to cure you. You didn't change for a year."

"So what changed?"

"Ryan this will hurt you, but Andrew and I began to see each other behind your back. We became close and we loved each other."

"So you abandoned me?"

"I didn't abandon you, I stuck by you even when you beat and raped me, I wanted to help you, I really did, for the kids' sake."

"For the kids? What about us?"

"I stopped loving you a long time ago. I needed to move on and it wasn't long before Andrew's treatment began to stop working. You kept changing again and so I thought I'd run away, so I went to Andrew during the night."

"You left me?"

"Yes, I had to, I was scared. There wasn't really a cure for you, we tried so much and so hard to help you. We even let you change and then took you down to an interview room at Andrew's institution to question you as Liam Graynnil. Andrew recorded and wrote down the entire questioning, the written version is in the black filing box in the sitting room."

"Yes I've seen it." I reply.

"The name Liam Graynnil was crafted by your split side. Do you have any idea how you made that name up?"

"No."

"Well, you were given a case number when you were interviewed by Andrew which was 129113005. If you look at the first few digits

and go through the alphabet using the numbers, it spells out your first name. Twelve numbers into the alphabet is L, nine letters in is I, one letter in is A and thirteen letters in is M. If you get all the letters from the name Liam Graynnil, you can actually spell out your real name Ryan Milligan. Do you now see? Do you see why Andrew said that you keep the creative mind even when you change? You like to play mind games and you like to jumble up letters to make something else.”

I just stare at Tanya, I do not know what to say, she wouldn't lie to me and if I was to ask anyone about this then it would be Tan. She's my wife and although I put her through all of this, she would know the most about it. The puzzle and mind games from my split personality goes with the writing on my wall. Did I write all those things on my wall to mean something else? I must have; but what does it mean?

“There was writing around the house upstairs. Something was scratched into my kitchen table, there were newspaper headline fonts stuck on my bedroom wall, spelling out something. Was that my split personality do you think?”

“Yes of course it was; it wouldn't be anyone else.”

“But I found something when the house was on fire; I found something that proved it was someone else. A plank of wood which I saw a neighbour Shola holding once. I thought it was him.”

“Ryan it wouldn’t have been anyone else. No one else would think like that, it sounds exactly like you would work as Liam.”

I stare at Tanya and sigh.

“I’m so sorry.” I say to her. I feel ridiculous apologising, an apology will not make her forgive me and there is nothing more I can do.

But why was that plank of wood with the nails through it on my kitchen table? How did that get there? I guess I will never know the answer to that but I killed Shola and judging from what Tanya has said and what is written in the book, I am the murderer of all those blonde victims.

I stare at the two dead bodies on the floor in front of me, my sight blurred from the tears that fill my eyes. I look back to Tanya who is standing now.

“Come on.” She says to me, pulling at my arm.

“Where are we going?”

“Up there, come on.”

“What are we going to do now though Tan?”

“We’re going to go up there and we’re going to get you help Ryan, that’s what you need, help.”

“We can’t go up there.” I say.

“What? Why?”

“Because we can’t.” I groan. “There’s police up there, I’ll be thrown in prison, and surely we don’t want that do we?”

Tanya stares at me and shuffles towards the door and runs into the other half of the basement.

“Tan!” I shout as I chase after her.

She runs into the basement and charges up the creaking wooden steps. “Tan!” I bellow again.

She reaches the burnt out hallway, as she runs to the boarded front door, she smashes into it with no affect. I run up to her and grab her.

“Why are you doing this? Let’s work together on this, we’ll get another psychiatrist, we’ll move away and he can help me and we can live happily together.”

“You killed our children Ryan. You’re a murderer, you raped me and beat me and I don’t want to risk that again.”

I pull her away from the boarded door and throw her onto the floor.

I can’t let her do this; she should want to help me! I cannot go to prison; I would be completely abused or worse, killed.

“Tan please don’t do this. I don’t want to hurt you and I won’t hurt you but please don’t do this, I love you Tan, I really really...”

“I don’t care Ryan, I hate you, I’m scared of you and I don’t care what happens to you in prison.” Tanya screams at me as she gets onto her feet.

Tanya runs at me and attacks me. Her finger nails scratch my face, her bare feet kick my legs and groin. I collapse onto the ground in pain and she continues to kick and slap me until I am able to grab her arm. I push her

into the wall face first and hold her against it. As I do, I hear footsteps on the gravel outside, coming towards the house. I put my arm across Tanya's chest and then put my hand over her mouth.

"Shut up." I whisper in her ear.

She weakly elbows my stomach. I hold her tighter as I hear the chattering of gravel coming closer until it stops. I hear a footstep onto the wooden porch. I hold Tanya tighter. The footsteps sound across the porch and up to the boarded up window. Tanya's muted screams come from behind my hand and seem loud. I listen and wait for the footsteps to step off the porch and back onto the gravel. I hear the crunching move away from the house but then silence. I wait. I hold Tanya's mouth. She bites my fingers but I do not scream, I lose my temper, grab the back of her head and smash her face against the wall. She keeps biting me; so I smack her head on to the wall again and throw her onto the ground. She's dazed and I feel horrible doing this to her. I have missed her so much but now she is an enemy to me. I will not go to prison.

I walk over to her and pull her up off the ground.

"Don't do this Tanya, please."

She does not respond. Her eyes close as she loses consciousness.

I pick her up and hear the gravel path again and then a voice: "Hi you lads, come over

here, I think there's someone in here." I hear Simon shout across Mulberry Lane.

My throat tightens and the hairs on my neck stand. What am I supposed to do now? I look at the scorched basement door; I have nowhere else to go. I run down into the basement, holding Tanya in my arms. I put Tanya onto the basement table. I run back up the steps and shut the basement door.

By the time I get back down, Tanya has disappeared from the table.

"Tanya?" I whisper loudly.

As I look behind, I see Tanya making a run for the stairs. She must have ducked under the stairs to sneak past me.

"Tanya no!"

I hear her push the basement door open and I hear her footsteps above run towards the boarded up door and I hear her shout for help.

I sigh, I give in. What can I do now?

I walk into the basement extension and look around it. I see something in the shadows that I did not see before. I walk over to it in the shadows. It is a square box of some sort. I grab the handles and pull the lid open. It swings across and lights switch on from inside. Inside the freezer lies a severely beaten man who has been preserved. The whites of his eyes are stark against the black and purple skin, his face is mostly dominated by his beard and overgrown hair. His mouth is open, revealing a toothless black hole and he is

naked. His beaten body and cut up skin has
'In the basement' scored across his stomach.

This must be Andrew Myers.

I slam the lid shut and run up to the children.
I pick Sammy and Alex up and I walk up out
of the basement. I get into the scorched
hallway, step onto the collapsed front door
boarding and then walk out onto the front
porch.

The police surround the house; the special
armed forces are here too. Tanya lies on the
pavement with Simon and Sandra looking
after her. I'm shocked to see Sandra; they
must have found her in the woods unless that
wasn't Sandra.

Tanya screams as she sees me, Simon and
Sandra look up. Sandra turns away and vomits
onto the road. Sam, Seymour and Hughes
look up to me in a panic. The police officer
outside Shola's house runs over. The armed
police hands simultaneously move above their
gun holsters.

I lay Sammy and Alex on their backs and
place their hands on their chests. I look out to
the road and Sam says: "Ryan, do you have a
weapon?"

I do not answer and instead stare at Simon
and Sandra.

"I didn't do any of this. This wasn't me." I
say as I go to nervously place my hands into
my trouser pockets.

“Keep your hands where I can see them
Ryan.”

I place my hands into my pockets.

“Ryan Milligan, show me your hands, slowly,
and then get onto the ground.”

I stare down at them and take my hands out
of my trouser pockets.

“That’s it, nice and slowly.”

I stand there with my hands by my sides.

“Right, now get onto the ground.” Sam says.

I do not kneel, I do not move. Instead I stare
at Tanya.

“I’m sorry Tan.” I say as I begin to cry.

My throat tightens. “I’m sorry Sandra.” I say
and my voice sounds strained. I look over to
my left and see Paul standing at his front
door. I look back to them and say out loud to
them all: “I’m sorry.”

I cannot go to prison; I will not go to prison.
I personally did not commit this crime, it
wasn’t me; it was my split personality. I will
do anything I can not to go to prison.

So instead I stare at them all at the bottom of
my path. I quickly place my hands behind my
back. I hear a loud bang echo through
Mulberry Lane followed by screams and then
a sharp pain in my shoulder and then another
piercing pain in my same shoulder. I fall
backwards onto the ground and stare up into
the dark clouded skies. I feel a water droplet
splash onto my face; I feel the vibrations on
the grass and hear the soft stomping of
footsteps running up the grassy slope. Sam
stands above me and looks down to me

holding his gun. Hughes stands at his side and looks down.

Sam turns away and walks into the house whilst Hughes cuffs my hands together in front of me.

I feel myself drifting, I feel dizzy and nauseous when all of a sudden my eyes close and I see blackness.

Admitted

Sitting in an open psychiatric centre, I stare at the television screen and listen to the muffled TV, ignoring the rowdy nutters surrounding me.

”It is a year ago today that Surrey witnessed a big ordeal. It was frightening to the local population as there was a murderer targeting blonde women.” The reporter said.

“But, it is two years ago today that well-established author, Ryan Milligan was arrested for the secret imprisonment of his ex-wife Tanya Milligan. She was kept locked in the basement below his house on Mulberry Lane in Surrey.” The reporter is catching my attention and I listen closer to the television.

“Ryan Milligan was captured and shot in his arrest. But today we have found out some big news about this story. Here today is Detective Sam Cann, the main investigator on this case. Welcome Sam.”

The camera flicks to Sam and back to the reporter.

“Today you and your team have been able to identify the bodies of the victims in the basement with Tanya Milligan is this correct?”

“Yes it is.”

“Right, so there are media reports suggesting that the two children weren’t actually Ryan and Tanya Milligan’s children.”

I sprint over to the television. Did they just say the two dead children were not mine?

The camera goes onto Sam’s face.

”We did not feel it was right for anyone to publicly release this information, but yes, we did tests on the three bodies in the basement and the two children were not Sammy and Alex Milligan. They were two other children who have been missing for a while and their parents have been informed. The other male body cannot be identified at the moment. We were unable to get any dental records because the body had no teeth.”

I stare at the television screen in disbelief. Tanya lied to me, she said I killed Sammy and Alex but I didn’t. They must be still alive.

I walk across the room and knock on the window to get a nurse in here.

“Oi Oi help.” I shout.

“Sit down Mr Milligan.” I hear a female voice say from behind the window.

“No please, I need to talk to someone. I’m innocent.” I say but there is no response. I pick up a chair and smash it against the glass. The double-chinned and beady eyed woman turns to me, astonished. Her chin wobbles as she’s eating.

“I’m innocent, I didn’t kill anybody; I’m being set up!” I yell.

The door to my left slams open and two bald, stocky men in white robes come in.

“I’ve been set up. I’ve been set up, help me.” I say as the two men grab me and force me up to the wall.

They then pull me out of the room and march me through the corridors.

“I’m fucking innocent, I didn’t kill my kids. I didn’t do it! They’re alive.” I shout.

They launch me into my room, I slide to the floor and I get straight back up. As I run towards them, one of the men punches me in the stomach, knocking me to the floor.

I move myself onto my back and look up at the man who punched me. He kneels down next to me and whispers: “You may not have killed your own kids but you killed someone else’s you sick fuck.”

He slaps me across my face and leaves me alone in the room.

I stand up and go over to my bed. I think back to two years ago when all the suspicious goings on happened on Mulberry Lane and what was written in the book by Liam Graynnil.

There was the writing around the house. I go over to my desk to get my pencil. I go back to my wall and write down all that was spelled out.

I write: ‘Beneath men sit’. I then write below it: ‘Beaten hints me’ and then I write: ‘Sin beaten them’. I write the sentences below each other like a shopping list.

If Liam Graynnil likes puzzles and mind games and the letters from his name makes up my name, then surely these random sentences must make up a word, they must mean something. I write down the letters used in each phrase, across my wall. That achieves nothing, I cannot see what it spells out, it could spell out anything, and even if I did

spell it out, it could just be another word to mean something else for me to work out, so I move on.

I think about the foxes I kept seeing around, following me. The dead one in the shed, the one going into Shola's house and then the one I found dead in his home. They don't really have anything to do with it but Shola was the main man in this and he was killed. I don't believe it was me, but then again it could have been Graynnil.

Killing for Your Love, the book itself, everything in there seemed real with Don and the morgue, with the murders, but the group with Mr S, who is Mr S?

I know that the group must be real, they came to Shola's and burnt it down but who are they?

I go back to finding the documentation of Liam Graynnil and the extension plans. How did nobody know about the extension? Why didn't Andrew Myers tell anybody? And if his body was in the freezer, then yes they have no dental records because he had no teeth but he didn't decompose as much as the children so how could they not identify the body?

It hits me. Something is going on, something has happened with some people and they've set me up, maybe I'm not mad at all, what if I'm not?

I think of the body in the freezer, the overgrown beard and hair, the severely beaten face and body and then the writing of 'In the

basement.' My mind stops circulating. My thoughts pause.

"In the basement!" I shout out loud. "In the fucking basement!" I shout again. I look over to the sentences I wrote down and the letters next to them. I begin to write on the wall.

I write I and cross out the I on the letters I wrote, I then write N and cross out the N on the letters, I spell out 'In the basement' and when it's spelled out I have no letters left, they are all crossed out.

"So that's what those sentences meant."

I stand back from the wall and stare at it.

There is no way I'll ever to be able to prove that I am innocent, there's footage from the fox cams of me in the woods and of me killing people. They got that evidence from Sandra's bin. But in that footage, I did not once see my face, my lawyer pointed that out he said it was my clothing but I am never positively identified in the footage. Maybe I have been set up by the group that is after me, but who are they? And how am I going to prove this?

I lie down in my bed and close my eyes. The same as per usual, every time I close my eyes, Tanya and the kids come into view. It's like a picture of the three of them that I am staring at.

I could never harm them.

Visitor

The clunking of the locks turning brings me out of a deep sleep. I sit up fast and look to the open door.

“You’ve got a visitor.” The orderly mumbles. I stand up off the bed and I walk out of the room down the corridor. As I am walking, I hear the stomps of the man behind me following me. I stop.

“I’ve never had a visitor before, where do I go?”

The orderly laughs and says: “Just keep walking down here and they will be the lunch hall on the left. You’ll see your visitor through the window before you go in.”

I carry on past the resting area where we like to go just to watch TV. Then I see it, I look into the room through the window and see a blonde woman sitting in the room. She wears a purple coat and black blouse. Her blonde locks dangle down onto her shoulders. Her make-up is immaculate. I recognise her eyes first, surrounded by her black eye lashes.

As I make eye contact with Sandra, I walk into the room and sit down opposite her.

“Ryan, you look so good, have you been working out in here?” Sandra says to me, smiling.

“What are you doing here Sandra?” I ask.

Sandra sighs. “I needed to speak to you. It’s really important and I should have spoken to you before you were admitted.”

“What have you got to say? Hopefully a ‘sorry’ for using me.”

“Ryan please just listen, this is so important, more important than our past.”

“Okay well what is it then?”

“Ryan, listen carefully, do not interrupt me and please believe me.”

I nod and Sandra then leans in closer to my face.

“I think that you have been used.”

“I’ve been used?” I respond, confused.

“Let me speak.” Sandra says and I nod again.

“I think that you have been a victim in all of this. In some way you have been set up by a number of people. This Liam Graynnil and your split personality are completely made up.”

“What?” I shout.

The orderly says: “Are you two okay?”

“Yes we’re fine.” Sandra snaps at him.

“It might be time to end it.” He says.

“No we’ve just sat down. Actually, can you stand outside the door please, what I’m about to tell him is really personal and difficult.”

The orderly stays in position; his massive bulk blocks the doorway.

“Please.” Sandra says, fluttering her eyelashes.

“Yes okay. Just scream if he tries anything.”

“Yes of course, thank you.” Sandra says.

She watches him leave then continues to speak. “Ryan I don’t have time for this, I don’t have time for questions. You need to listen; this is hard for me and really puts me in

a difficult position. You need to listen to me and believe me okay?"

"Yeah... okay." I say and put my hands together.

"Good. Ryan I know that you have been set up. You have been told to believe that you have a split personality disorder and believe that you are both Ryan Milligan and Liam Graynnil. I know who the person responsible is but they don't know I know. They are in a group with a few other people who were in on setting you up. I don't know names but I know one of the main men involved is Si." Sandra pauses and takes a deep breath, staring at me, waiting for my reaction. "Simon is one of the people in on it Ryan, he's part of this group and he's one of the senior members and they call him Mr S I think."

"How did you find this out?" I whisper.

"It was on Simon's computer, there was an email to him from Andrew Myers calling Simon Mr S. I didn't think anything of it, I thought it was an old email but then I looked at the date and it was only a few weeks after you were shot. There were so many emails between the two of them and another person, Don I think, but I can't be sure."

"I was aware of the group Sandra but I thought they were hunting me down to kill me because they thought I killed Tanya and the kids."

"That's what they wanted you to think, they're the people setting you up for all of this don't you understand? I haven't asked Simon,

I looked through his texts and I followed him around instead. I should have told you, but I didn't know what he was up to. I followed him early one morning; he got up earlier than he usually does for work. I watched him and he went over to Shola's. He went around the back of the house a couple of mornings. I don't really know why but I knew something wasn't right."

"Why didn't you ask him?"

"I was scared Ryan, Simon has a hell of a temper on him which I've seen a lot of times. Of course Shola is dead but I'm sure the house explosion was something to do with Simon. I remember him getting up during the night. I thought he went to the toilet. I dozed off and next minute I heard an explosion but when I woke up, Simon was taking off his trousers and a jacket. I didn't question him but I should have. But even more importantly Ryan, Andrew Myers is alive, he's living on Mulberry Lane with Tanya and Sammy and Alex."

"He's alive and living in my house?"

"It's not your house anymore Ryan, it was given to Tanya because she was your wife at the time. But now you're divorced, she's engaged to Andrew Myers and they own the house. That makes me think that Tanya was also in on all of this."

"I don't think Tanya would do that to me, she wouldn't put our kids through that."

"Ryan! She is not innocent in all of this, what did she tell you in the basement? Did she tell

you that you change in the night and when you do change, you're horrible to her?"

I do not reply and instead look down to the table.

"I know she's in on it Ryan. I found out that on Andrew Myers' Will, she was the person who was left the house, she sold up and that's when you bought it. And anyway she seemed too calm in court and she seemed happy you were sent down and admitted here. She just cut you out of her life and took away any chance you had to see your kids again."

I look at Sandra's eyes, although she wears heavy makeup, the bags under her eyes show through. She looks as if she is stressed-out about this. She must have really thought about all of this to be able to piece it all together.

"I think you may be right Sandy." I sigh.

"Thank you Ryan." Sandra says, sounding relieved. "We need to prove this; you can't stay in here any longer. You're innocent."

"I might not be completely innocent Sandy, we don't know if I don't have a problem."

"You know when I went missing, what happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"What happened, how did you find out I was missing and where were you?"

I look at Sandra and she stares at me, awaiting the answer.

"Well I woke up next to you completely naked in the woods."

"Did you see it was me?"

"I didn't look at your face, I just couldn't."

“That’s fine. I remember waking up in the woods completely naked also but the last thing I did remember was going out to the bins and as I turned, a man grabbed me and put a cloth over my face. I began to pass out and I saw Simon poking his head around the corner. Again, I didn’t tell him, but I made out I didn’t see him and I didn’t tell the police. But Ryan, if you can get out or talk to the police somehow, then I will help you. I will help you prove you’re innocent because I know you are. I don’t know why they did this to you but I know you’re the victim here.”

“Thank you Sandy. It means a lot to me.” I say as my throat tightens and tears form.

“You don’t need to thank me; we’ll get you out somehow.”

“What if I escape?” I whisper to her.

“Escape? How are you going to get out of here?”

“Me and a couple of us in here want to get out, I hear them talking all the time about doing it, maybe we could try, you could help?”

“I can’t help you get out, what good would I be?”

“I wouldn’t make you do anything major, I would just ask you to leave a car outside for me.”

“You’ve got to get out of here first.”

“We’ve spoken about it before Sandy, I will get out. Can I have a phone number to call you on?”

Sandra stares at me, sighs and shakes her head. “I do have a new mobile you can call

me on. Don't pass it on to anybody at all. I've left Simon and I don't want him to find me."

"You've left him?"

"Do you really think I can stay with somebody like that?" She says as she writes her number on a piece of paper. "Here you go, but I can't guarantee that I'll help you darling. Good luck though."

"No Sandra please, please help me. Promise you'll do this for me when I get out. I'll call and tell you the time and day to leave the car out there."

"I need to go. You can call me on the number I gave you. I'm sorry for everything and I hope Simon, Tanya and Andrew all pay for what they've done to you."

"Thanks Sandy." I say as I stand up.

Sandy reaches for my hand and stands up with me.

"Take care Ryan, don't get into trouble; keep your head down."

"Thanks for speaking to me Sandy, you've helped so much. For your information, I've been working out in here, there's nothing else to do."

Sandra laughs, kisses me on my cheek and squeezes my hand. She eventually lets go and walks towards the door. She opens the door and the orderly lets her walk away. I watch her through the window and as I do, she looks back at me and smiles until the windows end and she's gone.

The orderly comes up to me and says:

"You're free to go back to your room now."

He walks out of the room and stands in front
of the corridor where Sandra left.

So I go back to my room.

Break Out

The building's bell rings out at 8a.m for our morning medication but I am already awake.

I wait for the hatch in the door to open and for my medicine to come through for me to swallow like I do every day; but today I'm not going to. The hatch opens; the small paper cup placed on a tray is pushed into my room with some water. The hatch will then slam shut.

I go over to the tray. Using my fingers as chop sticks, I pluck the tablet out of its paper container and down the water. Leaving the empty paper cup on the tray, I also put the plastic cup back onto the tray and I go back to my bed and close my eyes for a few more hours.

After what feels like only a few minutes later, I get up off the bed and go out of my open door to walk down the corridor and into the lounge area where many men sit around reading newspapers, watching television and drinking tea or coffee.

Some are on their own in wheelchairs and others sit huddled together, their seats arranged in a circle.

I go to a group who includes people that I generally speak to; most of them have been talking about escaping for the two years I have been here.

"Frank, Burny, Giles." I say as I nod to each of the three middle-aged men.

“Ryan.” Frank says.

Burny and Giles also turn around and mumble my name.

I lean over and pull a chair over into the group.

“How are you lot doing?” I ask them. Burny and Giles stare at me with their mouths gaping, Frank replies,

“We’re good. What ya wanting?” He says, folding his arms.

I sit down; place my elbows on my knees and lean in to study their weathered faces.

Frank’s head is freshly shaved and his clean-shaven face highlights his deeply sunken scars.

I then look at Burny; he’s slumped in his chair, his neck shrivelled behind his chin with age-spots on his face and bald head.

Finally I look to Giles who is similar to Burny, but not as fat.

I then turn back to Frank and whisper: “Frank how many times have we spoken about getting out of here?”

“Loads of times, but it ain’t gonna happen, there’s too much security in this place.”

“We’ve had many plans, you’ve got contacts on the outside and in here, I have a contact that could help and there are people in here who would help us get out of here.”

“We can’t do it.” Giles interrupts me.

“We ain’t gonna do it Milligan, we can’t do it.” Frank says abruptly.

“We can. Listen you guys, we spoke about an escape before. Have you heard the

weather warnings? It's started snowing out there. There's a heavy storm brewing; we can do it then. We can break out and get away in the snow storm. There will be a lack of communication and no phone signal for them to call for backup and we can get away in the storm and all go our separate ways."

Giles and Burny laugh out loud but Frank glares at me.

"How the fuck would we get out?" Frank snarls.

"We'd have to look at our options." I say.

"So you've come here to say we'll escape but you have no plan?"

"I do have plans; I've developed one from our last plans."

"What plans?"

"We spoke about escaping from the yard in the storage building."

"Going through the shitter ain't gonna work."

"We don't have to go through the sewers, we just need a building where we can go through a fire escape or cut through a wall."

Frank shakes his head. "Cut through a wall? Fuck me mate; what drugs are you on?"

"If we get one of the gardening team, they will have equipment we can use. One of the cleaners will find us a room where we can work to get out. We need to ask around, we can get out, I know it."

"I'll make a call today for help on the outside. Ain't promisin' anythin' but I'll see what can be done."

“Okay good. What do you want me to do?”

“Just meet me here tomorrow. I’m gonna talk to someone to see who can help out. We’re gonna get out.”

“When?” I ask.

“Dunno.” Frank says as he gets up and walks away. “See ya tomorra,” he says.

I stand up to go and make a call to Sandra.

I go into an open area along the corridor which has five phones attached to the wall. There’s a guard standing alongside the phones and all the phones are occupied.

“All right Milligan?”

“Hello Dave, can I make a call?”

“You’ve never made a call in here before Milli but sure you can.”

“Thanks.” I say and Dave steps aside to let me past. I have to wait a few minutes before one of the phones becomes available.

I pull out the note Sandra gave to me. I look to my right and see Frank speaking on the phone, staring at me.

I poke Sandra’s mobile number into the phone and listen to the buzzing of the ringtone. After five rings, I hear a soft voice on the phone: “Hello.”

My eyes water and my throat gets tight, making it difficult to speak. I’ve not made a call or heard a soft voice on the phone for years now.

“Is that you Ryan?” She whispers into my ear.

“Yes.” I snivel.

“Hello darling.” She says.

“Sandy I’ve got news for you; it’s going to happen real soon, in the next few days hopefully.” I whisper to her, turning my back to Frank.

Frank slams his phone down and leaves the room.

“Oh right okay. Are you sure about this?” Sandra says.

“Yeah, I need to do it, don’t I? I shouldn’t be here.”

“No you shouldn’t, but this could be the wrong way to go about it Ryan, I just don’t want you getting caught and be punished even more.”

“I’ve got to do this Sandy; I’ve got to get out.”

“Do you need my help?”

“I have an idea but it would mean potentially pissing off the other blokes.”

“What is it?”

“I was wondering if you could leave me a car outside the institution, there’s a dirt road that runs down the side of where it will happen, if you leave the car parked out by the big cleaners and storage room on the east side, I can escape and drive away.”

“I’m not sure if you know this but there is a heavy snow storm coming in soon so driving would be pretty hard.”

“Can you do that for me?”

“I just don’t...”

“Please Sandy?” I ask but the phone stays silent. “Sandy please.”

“I’ll try and get a hold of Simon’s car. Use his car and then you can use his sat nav to get back to Mulberry Lane.”

“That would be perfect Sandy, thank you.”

“That’s okay. Be careful who you piss off though.”

“I will. I’ve got to go. I’ll call you tomorrow when I know more.”

“Please be careful Ryan.”

“I will, thank you speak soon.”

“Bye, see you soon.” Sandy says as I pull the phone away from my ear.

I walk out of the corridor back to my room. I have nothing else to do but sleep. I think of freedom, I think of returning to Mulberry Lane and the house. I imagine looking in through the window to see Tanya and the kids sitting around the table with Andrew Myers. I imagine myself walking in to the house when the kids go to bed and I imagine killing Andrew Myers.

The next day, after a night of tossing and turning, the temperature has dropped. I can see my breath. Every time I look out the window it’s grey outside. I can’t tell where the snow ends and where the fog begins. The snow has settled but there’s another blizzard coming. The news reports ‘snow conditions’ and ‘snow news’ throughout the day.

I sit on an armchair waiting for Frank to walk in. I’m in here alone, except for a man named Goyle. I don’t know his real name and I don’t know his problem but he is

clearly not all there. He leans forward. His weedy arms grip onto his bony ankles whilst his saliva drips from his bottom lip and chin onto his clothing.

Uncomfortable watching the guy, I look away and think about the tablets I've been taking. I have gone two days without taking any medication and I feel no different whatsoever. This must mean something surely?

Frank comes in and nods to me.

"Ya'right?"

"Yes, you?"

"Not bad. I've spoke to some people and they wanna do it."

"Good, who's in?"

"My mate Diego has been here since he was eighteen and now he's twen' eight, he has access to all the shit: gardening, cleaning, mail, cooking everythin'. He has ages to go till he gets out so he can help. He doesn't want to escape, he wants to help. "

"Okay."

"There's Freddy, he's an old geezer, he's the same as Diego, he wants to help. He'll cause a fight to distract the docs for us to get out."

"So how are we going to get out?"

"Pretty simple to be honest, today they'll loosen the cleaners and storage building's thin metal wall so we can cut it open tomorrow to get out."

"Who's they?"

“My men on the outside, they’ll be waiting for me to get out and then they’ll drive away.”

“What about the rest of us?”

“We all fight for ourselves outside so we don’t get caught.”

“Right okay then.”

“You’ll know when we’re doing it tomorra, when the alarm goes off for back up, that’s when the brawl happens. Loads of us will try escaping but only us lot will get out in the cleaners and storage building. We all meet there once the brawl starts here; got that?”

“Yeah I suppose.”

“Good, see ya’ tomorra’.” Frank says as he pats me on the back and leaves me to go and sit on another chair in another part of the room.

I look to the television screen which is still reporting on the blizzards across England. I then look over to the staring and dribbling man. I don’t know what else to do, so I go back to my room.

In my room I stare at the writing on the wall. I pick up a pencil and write ‘Liam Graynnil’ on the wall. I then write the letters in the name and then spell out Ryan Milligan crossing out the letters.

As I stare at the two names, I draw a line through Liam Graynnil and circle Ryan Milligan.

I stand on my bed and draw a quick sketch of the house and then draw two lines below it. On the left line I write Andrew Myers’

Will, leaving the house to Tanya Milligan who then left it to the estate agents to sell it for her, selling it to me. I move over to the right line and write my name, leaving everything I own to my wife, now ex-wife.

She got the money, divorced me and now lives with Andrew Myers and the kids.

I move along the wall and write the names of the group. I list them one below each other.

Don – Dead

Shola – Dead

Simon Cann

Andrew Myers

I stare at the names; these are the four men in the book. These are the men involved in setting me up.

I can't believe Simon would do it, he pretended to be my friend, he pretended to care. I gave him my story to read. No wonder he wanted it, he wanted to destroy my story and swap it with the Liam Graynnil version.

When I first moved in, Simon was the first person I met, he made sure to be friendly with me and he knew I had no one else so he knew I'd accept his friendship.

I punch the wall in anger. How stupid was I? I shouldn't have fallen for it.

When I had killed Shola, those two men who set his house on fire must have been Simon and Andrew because Don and Shola were both dead, leaving two of them to finish the job. The four men were working together; they had plotted against me along with Tanya.

The five of them were planning to drive me nuts. They did all of those things, they followed me, they did things inside my house, they moved the children's toys around. They did everything and the only way I can prove this is to get Tanya and Andrew to admit it.

When I get out, I will make them confess and I will be proven innocent. The thought of freedom is warming. I feel my tensed muscles relax all over my body sending a shiver down my spine. I lay my head on the pillow. I think of ideas to get evidence of my innocence; there are many ways to do this but I need to be careful. First of all, I need to get to Mulberry Lane undetected. If I'm seen, the police will find me no matter what the weather is like.

One thing I need to find out is who was the one who decided to target me and why did Shola, Simon and Don help?

I think for a moment, why would Tanya do this to me? Surely she must be the one to begin all of this, all of these lies to make me seem unstable.

It has to end. It will end tomorrow.

One quick call to Sandy: “Tomorrow.” Is all I say and then hang up and it’s sorted.

When I open my eyes it is the next morning, early morning. It’s dark out and still snowing. I turn to stare at my wall, the wall of truth. I think I’ve cracked the secrets and motives of Tanya and Andrew. It was all about money, I was the target, I don’t know why, but I do know Simon, Shola and Don were chosen to help and probably offered money too.

They played on my mind, I don’t know the details but I know they were in my house; they did things to the house whilst I slept or was out. The fox cam videos, I was not in any of the footage, you could not see my face so how was that possible evidence against me?

Everything circulates in my mind, I know most of the details but now I need the evidence. I have many options, but which path to take to get the evidence?

Now all there is for me to do is to be patient and wait for the alarm to go off. After that, there won’t be much time before all the doors are locked down and I won’t reach the cleaners and storage building.

I lie in bed staring at my ceiling and wall alternately for five hours. The time is coming, the medication and water has come through the door hatch, for a third time in a row I don’t take it.

I leave my door open, waiting for the alarm to sound. I poke my head out and look both ways. The lights flicker, the light outside is dull.

I step back into my room and stare at the wall. All my pencil markings begin to make sense in front of me, my mind is working. I'm set to get the evidence and prove my innocence or take my revenge but either way, I'll make Andrew and Tanya pay.

I stare at the crossed out letters, I stare at the phrases and 'Liam Graynnil?'. As I concentrate, a piercing alarm rings. Glass smashes and people shout. I step out into the corridor. A man bursts into the corridor and barges one of the nurses onto the floor. He spits in her face and tells her to stay down or he'll rape her. She tries to reason with him, she gets to her feet so he punches her in the face. I can't worry about this now, I need to get out. This is the time.

At the end of the corridor, there's a locked door. A male doctor runs up to the door with a bunch of keys. He puts the key into the hole and unlocks it. As I sprint up to him, Frank grabs the man and throws him into the wall. The doctor turns to grab him but Frank punches him in the stomach and throws the doctor into the wall again. I get there just as he's kicking him in the head.

"Let's go Milligan." Frank turns and shouts to me.

I run behind him, on guard against anybody who tries to stop us. We run through endless

corridors. I have ever been allowed to come down here; this corridor is only for the workers and the visitors.

We come to a right turn and Frank runs down towards double doors. If my reckoning is right, it leads to a yard. Frank charges towards the doors and kicks one of them open. Flakes of snow flurry into the corridor. Frank barges his way out into the yard followed by me. I stand outside and I lose my breath. I feel like a computer restarting; the air tastes fresh, I watch as my breath fades into the air.

I look up and watch the flakes float down.

I follow two sets of footprints; Frank's and somebody else's, up to the storage building. I see Frank standing next to a Mexican; he must be Diego. I nod to him. We do not need introductions. I see the gap in the wall, someone else has already escaped, most likely Freddy who was working with Frank to make all this possible.

“Come on, let's get out of here.” Diego says in a mixed Mexican and south London accent.

As he says it, we hear the crunching of the snow outside, there are guards approaching the building. Diego slips out through the gap in the wall. I'm next but as I kneel down to duck through, I hear the shouts of the security.

“Stay where you are!”

I look back to Frank; he nods to me and mouths: ‘get out’ as he pulls out a knife.

I duck through the hole and run along the road. Diego is gone.

I look for the car Sandra would have left for me.

I can't see the car for the blizzard. I look behind and see Frank emerging from the hole. He runs in the opposite direction.

I spot a lump of snow on the side of the road. It can only be a car.

The first thing to do is search for the keys. I kneel down and look underneath the car. As I look across beneath the car, I see the keys behind the tyres on the opposite side behind the back wheel. I scramble round the other side to get them. Then I reach the mound of snow and knock it onto the floor around the car. Only when the windows and lights are clear do I get into the car and turn the engine on. As the engine starts, I turn the heat onto full. I put the car into second gear and lifting the clutch slowly, the car begins to roll forward. I see the sat nav and a black jacket on the passenger seat. I pick the sat nav up and press 'go home' on the screen. It calculates the route and says it will only take thirty minutes. But in this weather, more like an hour.

I begin the journey back to Mulberry Lane. It's only when I'm on my way to safety that I realise I'm shivering.

No.2 Mulberry Lane

I have been driving for hours. The roads are treacherous, the flakes coming down and suffocating the land.

As I drive, I look up to the road ahead of me. There are abandoned cars enclosed in snow on the side of the road, side-roads are silent and covered in the fresh, untouched snow.

I drive past the park; its climbing frames and swings look like clouds formed into the shape of a park.

The tyres crunch their way through the snow, there's the road sign: Mulberry Lane. I turn into the cul-de-sac and look down the road. Shola's house is gone, leaving open land in front of the woodlands, but that's the only difference.

I let the car roll; I switch off the lights and turn into Simon's drive. I push the door onto latch and then push again to shut it properly, creating minimal sound.

The lights in the Cann's are off. I walk up to the front door and put the keys in the letter box.

As I walk away from the house, the front door opens.

"I heard you'd be escaping," Simon says.

"How did you hear that?" I ask.

"I've got contacts."

I turn around and walk towards Simon. "I know about you Simon, I know what you've done to me. I know you were involved in setting me up."

“What are you talking about? At least I know that you’re insane.”

“Oh you know what I am talking about, Mr S.”

Simon stares at me. I return the stare and we stand only a few centimetres away from each other. He tries to slam the door, but I put my hand out and push the door back into the house forcing him back. I step inside the house and close the door behind me.

“Mr S? What is that about?” I say to him.

“It’s complicated Ryan you wouldn’t understand.”

“Oh is it? Well to be honest I couldn’t give a toss about your pathetic name. All I care about is Tanya and Andrew living at number two.”

“Who have you been talking to?”

“I’ve got my contacts.” I smirk.

“You don’t understand any of this.”

“Oh yes I do, this is about money, this is all about a conniving bitch who set me up to get my money. She set me up to get everything I own but you know what? That isn’t going to happen.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I’m sure it’s only a matter of time and all this will come crashing down on you too.”

“Don’t do anything stupid Ryan.”

“Shut up you back-stabbing bastard, don’t make out you care for me, you’re just worried that you’re going to be going to prison.”

“Get out of my house.” Simon bellows at me.

I grab his shirt in my hand and slam him against the wall. As he tries to push me off, I tighten my grip and throw him across my body and across his coffee table. He lands on his back and stays down looking up to me. I walk over to him and kneel beside him. I grab his shirt again and push his head against the floor amongst the smashed glass from the coffee table. Simon gasps and I punch his face. Simon grunts in pain and holds his face. I lift him by his shirt and punch him again. Simon falls back and his eyes are shut.

I go back outside and stare at my old house. I look up to the house; the downstairs and landing lights are on.

The snow suffocates the greenery and the path that leads up to the front porch.

I stand on the pavement at the bottom of the path. I feel as if I cannot go any further. It feels as if there's a force field around the house protecting it, stopping me from entering. I remember being up there holding the children's bodies. I remember dropping them onto the grass. I look away; I can't bear to remember any more of that day.

I cautiously step up the hazardous icy slope. As I reach the top, I lean against the wall and look in through the window next to the door, into the hallway. I see the refurbished stairs, the new kitchen and the new doors. The basement door has a new lock on it.

I sneak around the side of the house into the back garden. The shed has been replaced by a bigger one but everything else is the same. I

kneel down below the kitchen window. I hold my breath and try to listen to any movement or voices inside, but there's nothing. I stand up to look inside. Tanya is sitting at the kitchen table typing on a laptop. She closes it and leaves the kitchen to go into the sitting room.

I crouch back down and make my way past the window. I hear a bang from somewhere nearby. I quickly walk past the kitchen door and move to the side of the house pressing my back to the side of the house. I listen for movement.

I hear the shuffling of boots and then a shovel digging through to the path under the snow. I hear a deep breath and then the excitable screams from children. Then the booming voice of Paul Brooke says: "Come on you two little devils, get back in, it's a school night."

I smile to myself and walk back to the front of the house. Paul has a point, it's a school night. Alex and Sammy will be in bed and hopefully asleep.

I stand on the porch outside the front door. A male figure puts on a jacket. I see Tanya go up to him and put her arms around his shoulders and kiss him on the lips. I listen carefully and hear the words I never wanted to hear.

"I love you." Tanya says.

The words hurt, I am angry. My mood changes from anger to fury, I always wanted to make him pay but now I want her to pay

too; especially her. My eyes don't water as I expect them to but her words repeat in my head as I watch her go upstairs as Andrew comes out of the house, leaving the door open ajar. I glare at him as I crouch in the shadows of the porch. I watch Andrew go down the porch steps and over to the rubbish bins. I feel like going up behind him right now and killing the fucker but I can't, I can't. I need the evidence. I creep into the house. I stand in the hallway and look at the newly painted walls and ceiling. I look at the new doors that make the hallway seem more refreshed and modern.

The sitting room has also been modernised. As I take in the huge renovation since the fire, I hear the front door slam and shoes rubbing on the front door rug.

I hide behind the sitting room door. I lean against the wall and breathe slowly. I hear him slip off his boots and go into the kitchen. I step out from behind the door and Andrew leaning over the sink washing his hands. Andrew shakes off the water and bubbles from his hands and dries them. I grab his t-shirt and throw him behind me into the kitchen table. Andrew hits his head on the table and looks at me, the shock registers in his eyes and tries to scurry back up onto his feet. As he tries to stand, I kick him in the stomach forcing him onto the ground. Andrew looks up to me and I punch him in the face.

I introduce myself: “I’m Ryan by the way, Tanya’s ex-husband and your previous client: Liam Graynnil.”

He stares at me. His lower lip shakes; his face is covered with blood from his nose and mouth. His hair is a mess and his eyes widen as he realises who I am.

I’ve had enough of his face, I want to kill him. The temptation to kill him right here and now is appealing but instead I punch him on the jaw knocking him out cold.

Looking down at his body, I feel like just holding his mouth and nose. Killing him now will not give me as much satisfaction as seeing him going to prison, being beaten and abused, that’s what I want for him.

I run to the front door and open it ajar to scare Tanya when she comes downstairs.

I hear the stomping footsteps from above; Tanya has always had heavy stomps. She’s the type of person who makes sure everyone can hear that she is going upstairs and she certainly lets me know she’s coming down the stairs as I hear the stairs creak and the hollow bumping of her flat feet hitting the carpet.

I hide behind the kitchen door and listen to her. “Andy, darling where...” She doesn’t finish her sentence as she sees his body. She panics, her breath becomes faster and louder.

She goes to the front door. I look out from behind the kitchen door and I see her leaning outside, looking left to right whilst the snow swirls past her and into the hallway.

I hold my breath and creep towards her. As she comes back inside and shuts the door, I grab her, holding her mouth, muffling her screams.

“You bitch.” I whisper in her ear.

I go over to the basement door and say:

“Where’s the key?”

Tanya tries to scream louder, shaking her head.

“Tell me now.”

She screams again. I have to do something to make her tell me. So I clench my fist, sticking my middle knuckle out further than the rest and jab her lower back. Her legs give way.

“Tell me.” I say again.

I put my forearm across her neck and pull her towards me. She squirms in my arms, her head butting against my chest, her teeth trying to sink into my hands. The more she wriggles, the harder I crush her neck. She begins to slump, she must be giving way; she must be close to passing out when she gives a high pitched muffle.

“Kitchen.”

“The keys are in the kitchen?” I ask.

She nods and with that, I release my grip and throw her onto the floor.

“Go and get it,” I say. “If you make a sound I’ll kill him and then you.”

“Ryan please, please don’t...”

“Now.” I say pushing her on her way with my foot.

She goes into the kitchen and gets the keys.

“Unlock the door.”

I follow her from the kitchen back to the basement door; she unlocks it, pulls the metal latch up and opens it. As she does, a waft of cold air blows past my face; the familiar smell of the basement. That musky scent, it reminds me of the teddy bear and the pink table and then the children's bodies.

"Go." I say and nod towards the door.

She walks inside and down the stairs. I follow. We reach the basement which now reveals the extension.

"I like what you've done with the place." I say as I grab Tanya by her hair and throw her onto the floor. "Stay down."

I look around the basement for anything to tie her up. There are wooden chairs and. I fetch two of them. Behind the chairs are the pink table and the teddy bear on top.

There's a bag of cable ties and I pull some out, pick up the duct tape next to it and go back over to Tanya. I pull her up by her hair and put her on the chair, binding her hands behind her back and then I tie her legs to the legs of the chair.

"Stay." I say to her like I would a dog, then I put a dirty cloth in her mouth. She tries to push it out but I put tape over her mouth. I watch her eyes water and her face turn a light pink colour.

I go back up the basement steps and into the kitchen; Andrew is in a press-up position pushing himself up off the ground. I run over to him and elbow the back of his head forcing him back down onto the ground.

He grunts and clutches his head.

“Get up.” I say pulling him up by his shirt. He stumbles to his feet and I drag him along to the basement door. As I reach the top of the stairs Andrew grabs me, I pull his hand away and toss him down the steps. I watch him rolling and grunting down the stairs. As he hits the concrete floor I hear Tanya’s muffled scream. I follow him down and drag him over to the other chair to tie him up like Tanya.

His head hangs down, his face dripping blood.

“We haven’t got long down here. Simon will call the police when he wakes up I’m sure.” I say.

Tanya stays quiet and Andrew continues to look at the floor.

“Oi you, look at me.” I say to Andrew.

His head slowly looks up, his face is a mess. “I’m Ryan by the way, but you might know me as Liam.”

Andrew shakes his head and looks down again. I put my fingers under his chin and make him look up at me.

“You’re weak and pathetic; you know that?”

Once again Andrew doesn’t answer me. I walk over to the stand and look at all the equipment resting on it. There are saws, hammers and pliers. As I pick up the pliers, it leaves a dusty silhouette on the shelf.

“They’ll do nicely.” I say.

I turn around and Tanya begins to scream; Andrew looks up.

“Oh so you’ll look at me now?”

I walk over to him and through his shirt; I clutch his nipple with the pliers. I squeeze and he screams. The stronger I clench the more he squeals. I have so much power and it is time to get the confession I need.

“Are you going to do everything I say?”

Andrew nods quickly backwards and forwards.

“I can’t hear you.” I say as I squeeze my fingers closer together.

“Yes I will and I’ll tell you everything, just don’t hurt Tan or the kids.” Andrew says breathing deeply.

“They’re my kids. Why would I hurt my kids you lying bastard?”

I release the pliers, his sigh of relief makes me boil up inside. I go back over to the stand pick up a claw hammer and a pack of nails. Andrew’s eyes grow wide. He tries to move away, his back arches and his head moves back.

“No, please no!” he cries, with tears and snot dribbling down his face.

I pull a nail out from the bag. I place the nail, sharp end down, above his knee and raise the hammer above it.

Tanya’s muffled cries increase, her eyes pour with tears. Her face is much darker now; the redness has spread down her neck. She shuffles in her chair, her thigh muscles tensing.

I pull the hammer up to my head and line the nail up to his leg. He begins to beg.

“I’ll tell you everything! You’ll get my confession! You’ll get *our* confession just don’t hurt us.”

And with that, I smack the hammer down and hit the nail into the chair’s arm. Andrew sighs with relief and Tanya stops struggling. I look at his face and then at the urine dripping down onto the floor.

“Oh my God, thank you.” He says.

I want to smack him around the head with the hammer but instead I hit his knee as hard as I can. As the hammer impacts the knee, there’s a loud and clear crack. His screams are unbearably loud. I repeat the action on the other knee, which creates the same sound.

“Don’t you dare thank me and don’t you dare ask me to not hurt my kids, I would never hurt them, even though you made me believe I could, you bastard!”

I use the claw end to then hit his thighs. Blood splatters onto my clothes, it seeps into his cotton trousers, dribbles down his legs, into his shoes and onto the floor.

I toss the hammer aside and walk over to Tanya and rip the duck tape from her mouth. She spits the chemical-smelling cloth out onto the floor, followed by an explosion of vomit. I step back and watch her dribble the mess into her lap.

“You both know why I’m here and why I’m doing this to you don’t you?” I say.

They are both silent looking at the ground.

“Fucking look at me.” I shout. They both look up to me and I continue to speak. “So

let's start from the beginning, why did you plan to do this to me?"

Neither of them answers.

I go over to Tanya who flinches when I raise my hand. I feel down her legs and pull out her mobile phone. I look at the background picture of Sammy and Alex at the park. Alex stands on the top of the red climbing frame and Sammy hangs upside down on the frame. I smile and zone out for a moment, staring at their faces.

I go into her phone and then place it on the ground next to Tanya. I then go up to Andrew and raise my fist. He shuts his eyes and shrieks, I laugh in his face.

"Still no answer to my question? Okay, let's see what else is over here." I say as I turn and walk towards the stand again.

"We chose you because we had to!" Tanya shouts.

"Shut up Tanya." Andrew says.

"You had to choose me, your husband? Why is that?" I say as I look on the stand and choose a screw driver.

"Because you were the right person to do it to." Tanya says.

"The right person?" I ask, holding the screw driver and walking towards Andrew.

"Yeah Andrew said he needed someone with a creative mind. Someone we would be able to manipulate." Tanya says looking at the ground.

I go back to Andrew and hold his head with the screw driver above his eye. He begins to shout and plea once again.

“Do you regret doing it now?”

“No, I don’t.” Tanya says.

“Good.” I say as I stick the screw driver into Andrew’s eye. As I pull it out, blood shoots out of his eye which makes it look like a fountain pumping blood. Letting go of his head, he moves oddly, his head sways, his screams die down and he begins to groan. I pick up the pliers and crush his index finger until it cracks. I drop the bloody pliers onto the floor and speak to Tanya.

“So why did you marry me? Was it just to do all of this?”

“I married you because I needed someone, I couldn’t cope on my own and you were the only one there for me.”

“So you didn’t even love me?”

“No not really.”

“But you had kids with me Tan.”

“I had to make it believable to myself and to you.”

Surprisingly I do not feel hurt, I feel fine and ready to get the answers I need.

“Well that’s fine because I don’t love you at all, in fact you’re a waste of space and the kids will not miss you when you’re gone.”

“I’m not going anywhere without my kids.”

“Oh yes you are, you’ll be going to prison.” I look to Andrew whose head dangles down.

“Mr Andrew Myers, psychiatrist; it’s great to finally meet you after all this time.” He does

not answer me so I slap the top of his head, as I do, more blood drips onto the floor. “I know you’re there, wakey wakey! You’ve got some explaining to do.” I wait for him to speak but he doesn’t and instead, he groans. “So you needed someone to completely manipulate and brain-wash is that right?”

He doesn’t answer and so I walk around him and he suddenly answers. “Yes.”

“I ask the questions and you answer, that’s how this is going to work. So what’s the process? All this stuff you did to me was to make me freak-out and feel threatened, scared and paranoid is that right?”

“Yes.” He replies again.

“Okay, I’m sure you can explain better, so you tell me the plan behind this.”

I pick up another chair and sit opposite them, waiting for Andrew to explain.

“We needed someone with...” Andrew struggles to speak, taking deep breaths and pausing after every few words. “...a creative mind and somebody... who would be susceptible to brainwash. We needed someone who would... be able to be asleep but... with a sound from the room be able to create a philosophical image... in their brain which seems so realistic to them, we needed someone who could create hallucinations by themselves with voice recognition.”

“Intelligent guy. Voice recognition what do you mean by that?” I ask.

Andrew begins to cough; he spits out some blood and continues to speak: “When we

drugged your food or when you were drunk from your whiskey, we'd make it possible for you to dream about what we want you to dream. You would be in a relaxed state... Tanya would speak and we would play recordings of Sammy and Alex, by doing that... you would dream of Tanya, Sammy and Alex. It's kind of like a perception of vision; the sound triggers the image in your mind."

"Right so that's how I dreamed of Tanya and the kids nonstop because you were making me?"

"Yes." Andrew whispers.

"Okay but let's go back a bit, so when Tanya left me, she came to you with my kids. You had already left Mulberry Lane I'm guessing?"

"I didn't leave at all and she didn't come to me straight away. She took the kids to her parents and told them you were mentally unstable and she needed to sort things out so that when you went there, they hid the kids and said they hadn't seen any of them."

"What about the police, they must have questioned them?"

"No, the police didn't question Tanya's parents... And even if they did... her parents wouldn't have told them anything... about what was going on. Tanya made sure of that."

"How long were they there for?"

"I don't know, they were there a lot for at least four years whilst me and Tanya were setting up the basement extension for us to live in and hide in, waiting for you."

“How did you know I’d buy the house?”

We persuaded you in your sleep. We constantly spoke about the house, the layout, the basement; everything so that when you came here, it felt as if you had been here before, it made you feel comfortable here.”

Everything Andrew is telling me angers me. They literally made all my decisions for me over the past four years and they’ve had a hold on me until now.

“Right, so I got the house and then what?”

“Well... I got Simon to help. He agreed to help me...”

“How did you persuade him?”

“Easily, we are best friends, our friendship is strong, we’re like brothers, he needed some cash incentive and the threat to Sandra’s life, that soon made him come around.”

“Good friends then.”

“Well he helped and he played you.” Andrew says.

This time I don’t hurt him and I ignore the comment. “So Simon became my friend, he pretended to care. Okay, I get that you got him involved. What was his role?”

“His job was to drop hints and to help me reveal *Killing for Your Love* to you and make you work it all out with Liam Graynnil. Simon dropped many hints about the house, saying the basement was creepy, he said about my Will going to somebody who he cannot remember, he said about the basement occasionally locking sometimes so that when

you read the book, you would see these details in there and think that it is all true.”

“So all of this was just for money from selling the house? And the basement extension was for you to hide in when I was home?”

“Yes. I fortunately have contacts in the estate agents for the house. I simply wrote a Will leaving the house to Tanya Milligan, the house went to her and she then let the estate agents take care of the sale. She sold it to you so that when you eventually admitted murder or were killed, the house would go back to Tanya as your wife for her and her children to live in and then for me to move in.”

“All of this just for money and a house?”

“This is my house, Tanya is my wife to be and the kids will grow up with me as their dad.”

“Well that worked out well didn’t it? So tell me, the other steps of how you messed with my mind?”

“Whilst you slept... we didn’t only speak to you, we made little changes to the house, we moved the furniture, we left doors open or closed them...”

“What about the writing on the wall?”

“That was to match the fake interview I wrote. I characterised Liam Graynnil to be a man who liked puzzles and mind games, which is what I did to you... I made the name from your fake patient number and using the rest of the letters, I came up with the surname Graynnil. That then gave me the idea to write things around the house using the articles

about the local killings, using blood and scratching it into the kitchen table using the letters from the basement which I wrote on that man's body in the basement... I knew it would work, I knew you would believe in Liam Graynnil after working out the name, the phrases and the change of story."

"Explain the story to me." I say.

"The only person who knows all the details and thought of your books is Tanya... She knows your writing style, she knows what would make you tick and she knows how you think and feel when writing... She re-wrote *Killing for Your Love* and gave that copy to Simon to give back to you..."

I turn to Tanya who is still crying. "You are a scheming cow." I say, but she does not reply.

"It was meant to be written as a true story and more like a journal of Liam's life and your split personality activities at night. It helped that Sandra took you to one of the victims in the book, it meant it would hit you harder then."

"I'm sure you're really happy about that."

"I'm glad it all worked out."

I punch him in the face, but he makes no sound.

"So explain what Shola and Don's involvement was in all of this."

"Don was a man who was fearless, he's been involved in a lot more shit than this, bigger things too. He was willing to help for a price but he was worth it."

"Did you think he'd be killed?"

“Not at all but you killed him so whatever happens, you have to live with that.”

I do have to live with it but now I see it completely different, he deserved to be killed for doing that to me. “Did I? Carry on; what about Shola?”

Andrew begins to laugh. “Yeah, of course my old man was going to help his son.”

“Shola is your dad?”

“Yeah and his name isn’t Shola, that’s just what Simon told you and his wife. John Myers is his name.”

“Was his name?” I say.

“No, is. He’s not dead. The guy you killed wasn’t him. My dad wasn’t just a vet, he was a scientist; he’s a clever man. He gave us the idea of using fox cams to follow you, well, to film me as you.”

“So the fox cams were set up?”

“Yes, I was dressed as you. Then we would use a dog to film ‘you’. We didn’t use foxes to run around filming you, even though it is believable. Dad got your scent and made it a treat for the local foxes so that when you were out and about, they would sometimes pick up your scent and follow you. That’s why you saw foxes around here and running around in Dad’s shack. But there you go; I’m sure he would love to explain it properly but he’s not here.”

“Where is he now then?”

“He’s in Spain now with my mum.” Andrew laughs.

“Okay, so in the book you made up some kind of gangster scene where four men were chasing me because they thought I had killed Tanya and the kids, correct?”

“Yes.” Andrew says, out of breath.

“So the four men are you, Simon, Don and Shola?”

“Yes, they’re the made up gang. Mr S acted as leader.”

“Mr S being Simon?”

“Yes. Some retard who worked for Simon called him Mr. S so it stuck. I didn’t want to use the initial of his surname either so I made it S.”

“Why did you burn Shola’s house down?”

“To get rid of the evidence and body so it couldn’t be identified...”

“The two men who burnt the house down, was that you and Simon?”

“Yes it was.”

I stare at the top of Andrew’s dangling head, he seems unresponsive but is still able to speak and tell me everything. I look to Tanya who seems to have calmed down now.

I sigh and shake my head in disbelief.

“Well I don’t know what to say. What you’ve done has ruined my life, your lives and the kids’ lives and everyone else involved but you don’t seem to care.”

I stand up from my chair; pick it up and throw it against the wall; pieces of wood fling across the room.

“I’m going to go and see my kids. The police will be here any second I expect. Have a good life.” I turn away and walk towards the stairs.

“Do you think anyone will actually believe you? You’re mentally unstable Ryan, remember?”

“I do remember yes but do you remember I’m actually not?”

“They don’t know that though do they?”

Andrew sniggers.

“No they won’t but they’ll believe you.”

“What makes you think I’m going to tell them everything I told you?”

“You don’t need to, they know.” I say as I walk back towards Tanya. “The confession from you both is on here.” I say as I press the button to stop the recording. “By the way Tan, thanks for being my wife and giving me those two beautiful children, I’ll tell them you love them.”

“You leave my kids alone.” Tanya bellows at me, she begins to scream and trying to head-butt me.

Andrew continues to hang his head, Tanya continues to scream whilst I send the recording to Sandra’s mobile number as a backup file.

“See you in court.” I say as I walk up the basement stairs.

I open the basement door and leave it open. I turn left and walk up the stairs and onto the landing. I can see flashing blue lights as a car pulls onto the drive. The police van and Range Rovers pull up in front of the Cann’s

and my house. I quickly walk across the landing and see a door with 'Sammy's room' on it and next to it: 'Alex's room'. I go into Sammy's room. The street lights give enough light to see her smooth skin and chubby cheeks. Her hair scattered on her pillow and mouth gaping open. Her duvet hangs down onto the floor, only covering her legs. I pick the duvet up and cover her body up. I kiss her forehead and then go into Alex's. He faces away from the door, with his right leg over the duvet hugging it. I stand over him and lean over and kiss him on his head.

I stealthily walk out of his room and close his door.

As I look out of the front windows, I see the men outside; I spot Sam and Hughes charging up the slope.

I go downstairs and stand in the hallway. I walk over to the door and swing it open. As I do that, I take a step back and lay face-down on the floor with my arms outstretched.

I hear the group of men charge into the house. I look up to see one run into the sitting room, one in the kitchen, two upstairs and another two down into the basement. Sam runs in, stares at me and shakes his head.

He tells me: "Stay down."

He kneels and places the cuffs on my wrists.

"Where's this blood from?" He asks me.

"It's from Andrew Myers, the man who set me up. I have all the evidence to prove my innocence on Tanya Milligan's phone and I also have someone else who can back up my

word. Just ask Sandra Cann, your mother. And question your father on his involvement, Sandra will back up everything.”

Sam doesn't respond; instead he shouts to Hughes to take me out of the house. Sam runs down to the basement and Hughes comes over to me and pulls me up off the ground.

“Sandra has told me everything Ryan, you're safe now. I'll do everything I can to help you.”

“Thank you detective Hughes.” I say with a sigh of relief.

“Call me Miles.” He says as he walks alongside me out onto the porch, down the path and into the Range Rover.

As I stare around Mulberry Lane, I see Paul Brooke and his wife standing outside; his children stare out of their upstairs windows. I look to the Brekken's old house. There's an elderly lady standing at her window, the curtain taut. I look to the Cann's. The Audi reverses out of the drive, its wheels spinning, flicking the snow around it. It crashes into the Range Rover I'm in and then it speeds off out of the road. As he reaches the end of the road, it crashes into a police van. Simon gets out of the car and is grabbed by a policeman and thrown onto the snowy ground.

I look back to my house and see Tanya being escorted down the path and into another police car.

I see a small, hunched up middle-aged woman walk out of the house holding Sammy and Alex.

Sammy and Alex both look around and walk over to a red VW Polo on the other side of the road.

“Miles can I talk to them quickly?”

“Yes wait a second,” he says, getting out of the car.

Hughes runs to the woman. They speak to each other. The kids look to the car, as does the woman and they walk over to me.

I begin to cry, I can't believe I will finally be reunited with my kids, I need them back, I need to see them again and be a dad to them.

Hughes opens the door and lets the kids climb into the back of the Range Rover with me.

“Hello darlings.” I say as they both shout: “Daddy” at me. Their high-pitched voices make me burst into tears. I lay back onto the door behind me and hug them both at the same time, as best I can with the handcuffs on. I kiss the tops of their heads.

“Did you miss me?” I sob to the both of them.

They both simultaneously reply: “Yeah!”

Sammy looks up to me, I look into her sleepy brown eyes as she asks: “Where were you daddy? I missed you so much.”

I can't control myself; my tears continue to pour out from my eyes. I press Sammy's head against my mouth and I kiss her head.

“I have been looking for you both for six years.”

“Mummy didn't know where you were.” Alex says.

I don't know what Tanya told them but hopefully it isn't anything too bad.

"Well I didn't know where you two went. All three of you disappeared one night. Mummy didn't tell me where you had gone"

"Is that why mum is with the police?" Alex asks me.

"Yes. Mum's going away for a while, but I will do everything I can to look after you and get you back. Hopefully you'll be living with me soon. Would you like that?" I ask them.

"Yeah!" They both scream; clutching their arms around my neck, I feel their small hands rubbing my head and feel their soft cheeks pressing against my bristles.

"For now though, you two, you're going to be staying with this lady here, you have to be good for her and then I will come and get you from her and you'll come and live with me."

"Okay Daddy." Alex says whilst Sammy continues to clutch my head.

"Off you go. I love you both." I say.

They both jump down onto the ground, turn and say "I love you too."

Hughes winks to me and shuts the door. The woman holds both of her hands down and Sammy and Alex hold onto one each. They walk alongside her to the car, constantly looking back at me.

I rest my head back and close my eyes.

A New Life

It's been four months since the truth came out. If Sandra hadn't told Hughes what happened then I would be up for felony charges of torture.

Hughes covered up what I did and he put across what happened realistically in court. The court bought it and didn't question him. It backed up with my story that me, Hughes and my lawyer, Gillian put together.

I was charged with trespassing, but because it was my first official offence, I was let off with a warning, which I was surprised about.

Sandra also backed me up and submitted the recorded file to the court which they listened to. They heard the screams and the shouting and questioned me. I said that I was threatening and aggressive but I did not harm them. When they heard Andrew's cries they questioned why he screamed and as Gillian told me to say, I said: 'no comment'.

The outcome was, with a lack of evidence, they could not charge me with torture. But the recording of Tanya and Andrew's confession and the confession of Simon Cann and Sandra's version of events was more than enough to send Tanya, Andrew, Simon and Shola all down for a long time.

If it wasn't for Sandra coming to see me in the institution I would not be here now. I'd be in there or worse. I wish I could thank her properly, but I haven't seen her since.

If Hughes hadn't helped me before the police came, I'd be in prison. I did however send him some money to say thanks.

Of course Gillian was a great lawyer who also got a fat pay check for her good work.

Everything is good and more importantly, I got custody of the kids but with the eye of social services watching me - which I can deal with.

As we walk along the river in Surrey, the kids see a park.

"Ah Dad can we go to the park?" Alex shouts, jumping up and down in front of me.

"Well I don't know; have you been good enough for me?" I say.

"Yes we've been so good."

"Our school reports were really, really, really, really good!" Sammy shouts.

"Were they?" I ask.

"Yes!" They both shout.

"I don't know, I can't remember any school reports."

"Daddy, yeah you do!" Alex shouts running up to me. He grips my hand and looks up to me; his brown eyes glisten. "Please." He smiles, showing his new grown adult teeth.

"I suppose so, go on then."

They both scream and run to the park ahead of us.

I jog to keep up with them as they climb over the fence. I walk in through the gate.

"There's a gate here." I shout to them.

They giggle and run straight to the climbing frame.

As I walk over to the bench to sit down, I see a blonde woman walking her little dog. But it's not just any woman, it's Sandra.

"Kids, stay in the park for a second, do not leave okay?"

"Yes daddy." They both shout.

I hop over the fence to hear them both shout: "There's a gate," with the deepest tone they can manage.

I walk over to her. "Sandy?"

As I say it, she looks up.

"Oh my god, Ryan!" She runs up to me, arms akimbo. I pull her in and hug her tightly.

She pulls her head away from my chest but still keeps a hold of my waist.

"How are you?" She asks.

"I'm great thank you, everything is really good actually. I got the kids back." I say, pointing to the park. "But it's all thanks to you Sandy. I don't know how I can ever thank you."

"Ryan don't worry about it. You don't need to thank me," she says.

I nod my head and gaze into her tired eyes.

"How are you Sandra?" I ask her.

"I'm okay. My divorce went through. Sam's absolutely gutted about what his dad did, but apart from that it's all good. I'm so glad to have bumped into you. I've been thinking about you so much recently and I've needed a friend," she says.

“Well I’m here for you Sandy and I don’t want to lose contact this time.” I smile and stare into her eyes. “Why don’t you come over and meet the kids? They’ll love you.”

“Oh no I’m sure you won’t want me ruining your day.”

“Oh no you’ve made my day so much better. Please come over, you can come round mine and we’ll have a proper catch up together.”

Sandra looks away and then back at me and then past my shoulder to the kids and then back at me. “Okay why not,” she says smiling.

“Great, come on then, I’ll introduce you to them.” We walk back to the park. Side by side, we wander, letting our hands knock against each other and our shoulders rub, but neither of us pull away, if anything, we edge closer together.

The End

Acknowledgments

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- *T. J. Blake*

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1

A man sat slumped with his back against the wall, injured and staring at the last flickering light, at a vandalised station on the London Underground; the bricks and tiles scattered across the floor. The bloodstained walls have made it unrecognisable. No one else was around. He sat in the corner of the stop, deeply hidden within the shadows. The entrance was barricaded with collapsed concrete and bricks. Specks of dust floated down from the ceiling onto the ground and covered the man in a sheen of white.

Complete silence was occasionally interrupted by loud screams from above, mostly from women and children. As the screaming stopped, murmuring and deep roars began. The sounds were not completely clear, but resembled a heavy smoker clearing his throat.

The man emptied his pockets; a wallet was all he had; it contained only a bank card and driving licence. Tom was thirty-years old, with roughed-up black hair and stubble on his face. He wore a suit that had seen better days. His shirt was covered in blood and there was a deep gash on his shoulder, with blood trickling slowly down and further staining it. As he stared at his driving licence, he inhaled and exhaled wearily, and mentally went over the events leading to his current circumstances...

Today's been hard. How could a day go from being so good to so fucked up so fast? I don't even know what's going on anymore. How am I going to get help?

Tom slowly rose. Dust fell from him, creating a smoky atmosphere. He choked. In pain, he clutched his injured leg, fell into the wall and slid onto the ground.

Blood dribbled from a wound on his leg; it had been oozing blood for some time now. Trying to shake off the pain, he slowly and carefully pushed himself upright.

Breathing heavily, he used all the strength in his legs and balanced first on his left foot and then his right, testing the strength to ensure the limbs would bear his weight. He began to limp toward the blocked exit. Tom moved some of the debris. After a few moments, he kicked the barricade in frustration as he realized it was completely blocked with monstrous pieces of concrete that would require heavy equipment to move.

He knew there was no choice but to walk through the tunnel to the next stop in search of a clear exit. The thought of this journey into the dark with no light at all to assist him sent a shiver down his spine, his palms began to sweat and the hairs on his neck stood on end. He stepped off the platform, onto the tracks, and stared weakly into the gaping black maw of the tunnel. Tom took a cautious step toward the darkness. He was shaken when he heard a scream echo through the blackness. It sounded

like a grown man. He took one step; followed by another. Then yet another step, until he stumbled into something on his left side. He knelt cautiously, trying to protect his injured leg as much as possible. He leaned forward, squinting to make the best of the feeble light. Tom saw that he'd tripped over the corpse of young man, who seemed to be in his early twenties. He wore a green polo shirt and blue jeans, soaked in blood. The clothes clung tightly to his physique. His arm was covered in blood, with deep scratches all over it; the entire arm had a strange, lumpy, chewed look. The bile climbed into Tom's throat; he vomited violently and fell onto his hands and knees.

Screams faded into the distance, but Tom attempted to block them from his mind. He stared at the filthy train tracks; the musky scent of the tracks and the smell of the rotting corpse overwhelmed his senses, making him nauseous. Tom continued to focus on the dust-filled tracks. He watched the clumps of dust rolling from his knees, past his hands toward the tunnel, blown by a breeze that entered the stop behind him.

He placed his palms on the grimy wall and pulled himself to his feet. He stepped away from the wall and stood upright, facing the tunnel. Clenching his shaking fists, he began to walk toward the tunnel. As he stumbled past the corpse, the shadows wrapped around him; dragging him in. He disappeared into the darkness...