

Prologue

She dashed across the cold kitchen floor. The sound of his feet pounded in her ears as he raced down the stairs. It wouldn't be long before he caught up with her. Her thoughts spun wildly. She had to get away. Hide somewhere. Anywhere. As the back door swung shut behind her, the evening air felt cool on her tears. She stared around in terror at the darkness, searching for somewhere to hide. The garden was overgrown with scratchy brambles. Frantically she ran across the weedy lawn, the dry grass prickly beneath her bare feet, forcing her muscles to keep going, faster and faster. Any second now he would emerge through the door behind her.

She darted into the shed. Bent almost double, she struggled to catch her breath. Her chest was burning. Her lungs felt as though they would burst. She was drowning. As her breathing slowed, she became aware that her legs ached painfully from running. They were shaking so violently she could barely stand.

He burst in, slamming the door against the shed wall. With a roar he launched himself at her, dragging her onto the ground. She hit her head as she fell, but she didn't care. All that mattered was that he was there. She grappled feebly with him, but was no match for his vigorous assault. It was happening again and she was powerless to stop him.

Over his shoulder, through her tears she saw a figure hovering in the doorway, one hand raised in a futile gesture. But there

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was no point calling out for help. Scrabbling on the ground, her fingers closed on the handle of something very heavy. In that instant, she knew what she had to do. With a surge of adrenaline she raised the hammer as high as she could and swung it down.

There was a loud crack, like a window breaking, and he slumped forwards. Whimpering, she struggled out from beneath him. It wasn't easy. His inert body weighed down on her, but she managed to crawl free. Groaning, he rolled away from her, onto his back, exposing his genitals. Yelling in fear and ecstasy she raised the hammer again.

CHAPTER 1

Amy glanced fearfully at her watch.

‘I’ve got to get going. He’ll be expecting me.’

She sat up and swung her slim legs out of the bed.

‘Stay a bit longer. You only just got here. Stay.’

‘You know I can’t.’

‘Of course you can.’

Guy propped himself up on one elbow and leaned across to pat her pillow with his free hand.

‘Come back to bed. Can’t you forget about him for once? What’s he going to do? You’re not his bloody prisoner.’

Amy twisted round and caressed his smooth chest delicately with the tips of her dark red nails. Blonde curls swung around her face as she shook her head.

‘You don’t know him like I do. You don’t know what he’s capable of when he’s in a temper.’

Guy lunged forwards, grabbed her by the wrist, pulled her back down onto the bed beside him and kissed her, savouring her perfume and the smell and feel of her body still warm from lying in bed.

Guy had never met anyone like Amy before: on the surface so intimidating with her sophisticated, knowing manner, yet beneath that show of confidence more vulnerable than anyone he had ever known. At twenty-three his previous relationships had been short-lived affairs with shallow ignorant girls, mannequins with screechy voices. Amy was a mature woman, wealthy and classy, informed about life and the wider world. It seemed to him almost miraculous

that she would treat him as an equal.

‘So who’s this mystery woman of yours?’ his mates clamoured to know.

‘I can’t say.’

‘She married then?’

When Guy shrugged the lads had chuckled and slapped him on the back. Only one had warned him to take care.

‘What about her husband?’

‘Don’t be a prick,’ another one chipped in. ‘He’s getting his leg over, isn’t he? She must be a looker at any rate, and that’s all there is to it. Guy’s not going to be banging her forever, are you? Get out before the problems kick off, and you’re alright, mate.’

‘It’s not like that,’ Guy had begun then stopped, embarrassed to admit that he was in love.

His mates had roared with laughter.

‘He’s got it bad.’

A few months earlier, Guy would have shared their amusement if any of his friends had turned soft but since meeting Amy his perspective had changed completely. He couldn’t stop thinking about her. Not having her to himself was driving him crazy.

Amy shook her head, pushing him away.

‘Stop it, Guy. I’ve got to go. I’m late.’

Extricating herself from his embrace she slipped out of bed and he lay back, watching her blonde hair skim the top of her round white shoulder. Her profile didn’t do her looks justice, emphasising her straight nose which was a shade too big and her pointed chin, while her long hair concealed the piercing grey eyes which were her most striking feature.

‘Maybe we should just forget the whole thing,’ he grumbled,

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watching the curve of her vertebrae as she crouched down to gather up her clothes.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked without turning round.

‘You’re never going to leave him, are you? It’s the same thing every week. I mean, what the hell are you doing, staying with him? What are you waiting for?’

She turned and looked down at him, her grey eyes troubled.

‘I’m working on it. I do want to be with you, you know I do. But you’ve got to let me deal with this in my own way. You just have to be patient. It’s the only way.’

‘Amy, I want you to come and live with me all the time, now. Why does it have to be so complicated? Just leave him. What are you waiting for? Pack a bag and come here. Tonight. In fact, don’t even bother going back for your things. We can get you new stuff tomorrow. I’ll take the day off and we’ll go shopping, I’ll buy you anything you want –’

She sat down again, cupping his shoulder in her hand. He seized her wrist and kissed her fingers, one after another.

‘Oh Guy, he’d take everything, the house, the car, everything’s in his name. He’d even take the dog from me. You don’t know what he’s like when he doesn’t get his own way. He’s vindictive. I’m scared of him, Guy.’

‘Why don’t you let me deal with him then? There’s nothing for you to worry about, trust me. I’ll take care of everything. We don’t need his money. I can take care of you.’

‘You don’t know him.’

She paused, watching his face closely, then looked away.

‘Sometimes he can be violent when he’s been drinking. He yells at me – threatens me – it’s happened more than once –’

Guy sat upright, gripping her hand so tightly she winced.

‘What do you mean he threatens you? Jesus, if he so much as touches a hair on your head – Just leave, Amy. Do it tonight.’

His eyes shone with passion and she smiled.

‘Oh Guy, don’t be so naïve. I’m not worried for myself. He won’t hurt me, not really. But he’ll kill you if he finds out about us.’

Guy laughed uneasily.

‘Not if I kill him first,’ he blustered, flinging himself back on his pillow. ‘If he so much as touches you, I’ll do it. I swear I will.’

Amy perched on the edge of the bed without looking at him, her shoulders tense. Although she spoke softly, he heard every word.

‘You know what to do.’

She pulled on her shoes, stood up, smoothed her pencil skirt over her thighs and, with a flick of her blonde hair, was gone.

Guy lay on the bed gazing up at the ceiling, biting his lip. He wished she had the guts to leave her bastard of a husband. It was hard to ignore the nagging suspicion that she was never going to give up her affluent lifestyle to move in with him. What did he have to offer a woman like Amy? Turning his head from side to side on the pillow he considered her suggestion. She made it sound so simple.

‘The restaurant’s called Mireille,’ she had told him, warning him not to write it down.

She made him repeat the address until he knew it.

‘He leaves after it closes around one in the morning, earlier on a Sunday. All you have to do is follow him and– Well, just make sure he doesn’t get home, that’s all.’

At first he hadn’t been sure he understood. Finally she had grown impatient.

‘Oh do I really have to spell it out to you? Once he’s out of the way, everything will be ours. It all comes to me. We’ll be

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free of him, and you'll never have to work again.'

'A kept man,' he had laughed, not believing she was serious.

But she had leaned forward until her hair fell across his face as she whispered, 'You could do it for me. For us.'

He had kept silent, not knowing what to say. Thinking about it, he still wasn't sure if she was seriously asking him to kill her husband.