

Revenge

The Fall of Louis Turner

Suburban Vigilantes Crime Series
Book One

Frank Daly

SAMPLE CHAPTERS

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Foreword

Revenge: The Fall of Louis Turner is a novel based on the short story “Vengeance”, which is available as a free eBook on FrankDalyBooks.com as well as on Amazon. It has appeared also in *Stanley’s Last Trip and Other Stories*.

In the original short story *Vengeance*, Louis Turner takes the law into his own hands, to avenge the failure of the police to bring a rapist to justice. *Revenge* expands the story to include the background of Louis’s estranged crime family and how he is slowly subsumed back into their world when an unfortunate set of circumstances threaten his lifestyle. The desire to avoid sinking from his successful career back into poverty drives Louis to make corrupt choices, leading him down a path which makes it increasingly difficult to return to his prior life.

Chapter One

The Apartment

1st September 2018, Primrose Hill, London.

Louis would always remember what triggered Annalise's obsessive behaviour. It was about five months earlier in April 2018, when his neighbour Annalise, who lived in the apartment below him, was attacked by a burglar. She was a jolly sort of person before that, and they often enjoyed long conversations in the hallway when leaving or entering the apartment block. When he looked back to that incident, he realised it was the turning point in her life and also in his.

Louis Turner was a fifty-five-year-old writer. Six feet tall, he was slightly overweight due to a sedentary lifestyle and occasionally unhealthy diet, which had led to a general flabbiness and a bit of a paunch. His once dark brown hair was greying and receding; it had a kind of salt and pepper look to it as did his beard. But though his ageing was evident to everyone else, Louis still felt like he was in his early forties.

His apartment was on the top floor of a small block consisting of twenty-four apartments. There were only two apartments at that level, each with a separate stairwell and entrance to provide maximum privacy. The apartment had been in poor repair when he bought it in 2000 and he had had it completely refurbished. When the building work was complete, the flat was a brand new one, encased in an old 1980s shell of an apartment block. One of the features which had drawn him to the place was the large terrace which looked out over the edge of Primrose Hill park. He could sit out there in the evening, looking across the parkland to see people from afar walking to the top of Primrose Hill. At that vantage point there was also a spectacular view across the lower parkland to some of the London skyscrapers beyond. It was by far the best place he'd lived in; perfect for his lifestyle which involved mostly working from home.

March 2017.

“Louis,” said Annalise one evening in March 2017, which was more than a year before the incident, “why don’t you drop down to mine for dinner some evening?”

“That would be great, Annalise,” he replied, but he was apprehensive. Ten years earlier, when he was living in another apartment block, he had succumbed to the advances of a lonely woman living in the apartment below him. He knew convenience rather than attraction had prompted the invitation. Although the one-off sexual encounter had been exciting and pleasurable, he knew in his heart that there was no future in it. Every time they passed each other subsequently at the entrance to the building, there was a constant and awkward silence between them, reminding him self-consciously of the encounter. Louis had sworn never to make that same mistake again, and yet here he was, accepting an invitation from another lonely female neighbour.

This time though, he was cautious upon arriving at Annalise’s apartment. He was determined to maintain his distance; friendly but uninterested in anything beyond dinner. Dinner, it turned out however, was all that was on offer, proving a somewhat subconscious blow to Louis’s ego. Annalise had cooked a lovely meal of roast chicken, stuffing, carrots and roast potatoes, which reminded him of a previous girlfriend’s cooking from many years prior. Annalise was in her mid-forties, thin with shoulder-length black hair and a young-looking face. From Louis’s mid-fifties perspective, she was quite attractive and yet she wasn’t flirting with him; the evening was strictly dinner and friendly conversation. Strangely, her lack of interest only served to increase his attraction to her. That was possibly part of the game of biological chase surviving in his male genes, making women who are seemingly unavailable more appealing.

Annalise worked as an accountant for one of the more prominent firms in London’s financial district, and she was used to dealing with clients in a friendly but reserved way. And that was how she and Louis interacted: enjoying polite conversations with each other but nothing more. At the time Annalise’s behaviour seemed quite normal, whatever that is, nothing out of the ordinary and certainly nothing obsessive-compulsive about it.

Chapter Two

Relationship with Annalise

March 2017, Primrose Hill, London

After that first dinner in Annalise's apartment Louis returned to his place. Later that night he lay in bed and thought about her. He had to admit to himself that he was actually quite interested in her, regardless of his prior concerns that if it all went south, he'd be left only with the awkward encounters due to their shared place of residence. Deliberating on this, Louis decided that was no reason to pass up a potential relationship opportunity; he was getting on in years and the chances were increasingly fewer and far between. Although he didn't detect any romantic interest from her side, he reckoned a bit of effort might bring her around.

He thought about his half-brother, Henry, who was nearly ten years younger than him. Henry was the archetypical ladies' man, who, despite being in a relationship, was always on the lookout for someone new. He was a serial cheater. Whenever Rosie, his long-suffering girlfriend caught him at it, she would throw him out for weeks at a time, at which point he always ended up in Louis's spare room. If Henry was here now, Louis thought, he'd be giving me advice and encouragement. Or perhaps not; maybe Henry would only be in competition with him after meeting Annalise himself. Although he hated his half-brother's slovenly ways around the flat, he did enjoy his stays; a week or two was about the limit. Fortunately, Rosie had a forgiving nature, and usually relented after a while. She always wanted Henry back, no matter what he had done. Louis knew that Henry was a bit of a lowlife in this matter as well as on other issues. In some ways, it was precisely these differences that made their relationship interesting to him.

Now that Louis knew a bit more about Annalise from their discussion over dinner, he had enough information to start looking into her background. Initially, he felt that he was acting like a stalker, but then decided, isn't that

what everyone does these days? Research their love interest? Whatever the case he couldn't help himself. He Googled her name and then that of her sister Rachel, although Annalise had only mentioned Rachel briefly, saying that they weren't very close. He looked online for photographs, articles, blog posts, anything mentioning her name. He also checked Facebook and LinkedIn; It was Pinterest where he finally had some success. Pinterest seemed to be frequently used by women interested in design, art, home furnishings and fashion. Annalise had pinned an extensive collection of images found on other sites to her Pinterest account. Among the many images of health, hair and beauty products it became evident to Louis that she had a considerable penchant for shoes and coats. He almost felt like he was reading her mind in seeing online what interested and concerned her; things he might then use subtly to pique her interest for him.

Annalise had said she was curious about his writing, so Louis thought he would drop by in a day or two with copies of his books for her. He didn't want to appear too interested. Then, perhaps a week later, he would invite her for dinner at his apartment. Because he worked from home, he was there pretty much all the time and so knew Annalise's schedule, as well as her regular visitors, who, as it turned out, were mostly female. Over dinner at hers he had found out that she was not in a relationship and she did not appear to be interested in one. Perhaps she was happy as she was, Louis thought; well, he'd soon change that.

"Annalise," he said when she opened her apartment door to him, "As we were talking about it last week, I've brought you some of my books."

"Come in Louis. Sit down and have a cup of coffee."

He didn't need to be invited twice and she ushered him into her living room while she went to the kitchen to make the coffee. He took a seat on the couch but then got up to look at her books, neatly arranged in the bookshelves. They had been arranged by topic; not a single one out of place. Louis liked this; she shared his inherent sense of order.

Her books were mostly about art, photography, politics, and philosophy. There were also some crime novels, but Louis found himself looking for at least one romance novel which he might use as a starting point. He had no luck, and then she came in from the kitchen, carrying a tray with two cups of coffee and some chocolate biscuits.

He put three of his books on her coffee table. They were romance novels, a genre that did not particularly appeal to him but that he had continued with

due to the success of his first book of its kind. His agent had persuaded him to build on his success, which proved a prosperous move for nearly sixteen years, until about 2015. By that stage his romance writing well had run dry and he found himself in a creative wasteland where he had languished ever since.

“My books are a series of romance stories, but I see from your bookshelves that that’s not really your area of interest.”

She shook her head.

“No, Louis, I have to admit, I’ve never read a single book in that genre.”

Louis smiled.

“I’m not really interested in reading them either; it’s mostly a women’s genre after all. But I have had to read romances to be able to write them, and so far, I have managed to make a good living from it.” He knew he was lying in omitting mention of his three-year creative drought.

She glanced briefly at his three books but left them on the table as they continued chatting about other topics.

When Louis got up to go, he invited her up to dinner at his apartment for the following weekend. He guessed he’d have to impress her with something other than his novel-writing prowess.



The following Saturday, Louis spent the entire day preparing an elaborate meal for Annalise. She was delighted with his efforts, and afterwards they sat out on the terrace sipping wine and exchanging funny stories from their pasts. A few hours slipped by and they’d opened another bottle of wine.

“So where were you living before here?”

“In Harrogate. We had a lovely house.”

This was her first mention of a past relationship.

“It’s a long story, Louis, but after the divorce we had to sell the house. We had been living there for ten years and I thought I’d be there forever. It broke my heart to let it go, but I couldn’t afford it on my own and neither could Nick, so four years ago, we put it on the market, and I moved here.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Annalise. It’s surprising, isn’t it, that we’ve spent four years living here as neighbours and this is only the second time we’ve had dinner and a good chat.”

Although Louis didn't want to press her for details about her marriage and divorce, it seemed like she wanted to talk about it.

“It all started out so well,” she said. “Nick and I seemed to be a perfect match. He was an architect, I’m an accountant, and at one stage we nearly set up a business together. Fortunately, we didn't do that, as dividing it would have been one unholy mess. Just sorting out our personal finances and joint property was bad enough.”

Louis nodded but decided he didn't want to talk about his own failed relationship with Rebekah unless Annalise asked, particularly as his actions had caused the breakup. For now, he was just happy to listen. Although Louis had never thought about it before, he realised that admitting his break-up was due to infidelity on his part might make Annalise very wary of him. But if he lied now and it came out later it might be even worse. As he was trying to think of what to say, he lost the thread of what Annalise was talking about. When he tried to focus again, he noticed a tear in the corner of her eye. Did she still have feelings for her ex-husband or was it something else?

“Nick travelled a lot on business and his mother had come to live with us, but she and I didn't get on. She had driven her own husband away and began driving a wedge between myself and her son. It was unbearable, but when we argued about it, Nick always took her side.”

As she continued her story Louis’s attention waxed and waned, but he persevered. He wanted to give her the impression that he was riveted by her story, and she moved closer, enjoying what she thought was his full and undivided attention. When she was practically on top of him, she slipped her hand softly around the back of his head and pulled his face gently towards her, kissing him long and slowly on the lips. Louis savoured every moment of it. She pulled back for a moment.

“I hope that wasn’t too forward. It’s just you’re such an attentive listener, and suddenly I was overcome with a desire to kiss you.”

“No, Annalise, not at all. I actually really like it when a woman takes the lead.”

She continued kissing him, and he ran his hand slowly along the smooth skin of her bare arm and around her back.

Before long they moved to the couch in the living room. Louis grabbed another bottle of wine on the way, although he worried that if they finished it, he might be struggling to perform. Earlier on, he had slipped into the bathroom and popped a blue pill to be ready in case she wanted to have sex.

But he was letting her lead the way; he'd be happy with whatever she wanted to do.

Much later, after they had slipped out of their clothes and made love on the couch, they retired to bed. As they lay in each other's arms between the crisp sheets, Annalise was soon fast asleep, but Louis's mind remained active, savouring the moments of the evening and contemplating their future plans together. Listening to her gentle breathing, he slowly moved his hand over her soft, warm hips.

The following morning, he got up early and made her breakfast. When he brought it in to her, she opened her eyes.

"I could really get used to this," she whispered, "come back to bed."

Annalise didn't leave until nearly lunchtime, meaning Louis got very little work done that day. But he didn't care. It had been a delicious distraction, and for months his writing had been virtually non-existent anyhow.

Their relationship grew over the following months; they often spent days in each other's apartments. Louis even left one of his laptops down in her place so he could get up and write should the inspiration hit him. Alas, that was a rare occasion; no matter what he did it seemed like his muse was well and truly gone. His relationship with Annalise, however, was a welcome diversion for the harsh realisation that he was a washed-up, over-the-hill author with not a single romance novel left in him. By now, he had admitted his writing woes to Annalise. She tried to encourage him but it was to no avail.

After about four months the honeymoon-phase of the romance was over, and reality began to surface. Their relationship was interrupted by Annalise's five-week foreign business trip. While she was away, they spoke regularly and Louis looked in on her apartment as well, but when she returned it seemed like something had changed. There were no arguments, no new love interests, it just felt like the spark was gone, something which neither of them wanted to talk about. Finally, Annalise broached the subject over dinner and Louis reluctantly had to agree. Although he knew it was going nowhere, he had still been hanging on to the hope it might just get better again. But Annalise had a better grasp on reality; she said it like it was. They'd had a great time, but the party was over. They could still continue to be good friends though.

Soon enough things had returned to the state they were in before their relationship. They chatted from time to time when they met in the hallway or on the stairs but that was it. The affair was well and truly over.

Louis had returned to the loneliness of living on his own and trying to write, but absolutely nothing was happening. At that time, he hadn't the vaguest idea of what would happen to Annalise, and how that would prove the catalyst that would change his life forever.

Chapter Three

After the Attack

18th April 2018, Primrose Hill, London.

Louis heard about the break-in at Annalise's apartment after the fact from one of his other neighbours; he was a heavy sleeper and had slept through the commotion on the floor below.

According to his neighbour, Annalise had apparently been woken about 2 am by the sounds of an intruder. He had broken into the empty apartment below, and when he saw the open French doors of Annalise's apartment on the second-floor balcony above, he scaled a drainpipe to get into her apartment. Louis was incredulous when he heard about the break-in, particularly that he had slept through the noise of it, but another neighbour confirmed the story. However, although he knew that an attack had taken place, no one had details about what had actually happened inside the apartment.

The police and an ambulance had been called and Annalise was quickly taken to hospital for treatment. A week later, Louis looked out his window and saw a taxi draw up on the street below. Annalise got out of the car and seemed to struggle as she walked the short distance to the main entrance of the building. She looked shaken up and Louis felt sorry for her.

Understandably, Annalise had been confident that leaving her balcony doors open on the second floor would not pose a security risk. Following the incident, her shutters were perpetually down, both literally and metaphorically. Every day, walking by her flat, Louis noticed ever increasing security measures had been implemented. First it was the extra locks on her front door. On several occasions he had heard at least three separate locks opening for visitors to her apartment. A week later he saw that metal grille shutters had been installed inside her windows both front and back. He

heard some workmen fitting new equipment, which he could only imagine consisted of extra security cameras, alarms and possibly more locks. He would discover much later that his hunch had been more or less right.

A few days after the incident, he knocked on Annalise's door to find out if she was okay. He heard shuffling in the apartment before she opened the door, followed by three loud clicks resounding through the hallway as she unbolted the locks. When she pulled the door, it was only opened slightly, and Louis could see there was a security chain holding it. She peered nervously through the gap between the door and the architrave, and he could see that she was anxious and flustered.

"Yes?"

"Annalise, I'm so sorry to disturb you, I was concerned about what happened a week ago, I hope you are okay?" he said.

She nodded, but he knew she wasn't okay. He hoped she'd invite him in for a minute, so they didn't have to continue the conversation through the gap in the door, but no offer was forthcoming.

"I see you've had some extra security installed."

"Yes, I felt it was necessary."

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"No. Thanks, Louis, I think I have it all in hand. I have to go now. It's time to write in my journal."

There they stood for a moment longer, in awkward silence, Louis looking at Annalise through the gap in the door. It was evident she was not going to invite him in, so he bade her farewell and continued up to his apartment, pondering what she might be writing in her journal. Maybe it was a form of therapy for her to get the recent events out of her head and onto the page.

A week later he woke up in the middle of the night, a rare occurrence for him. He had heard something and was immediately alert, concerned that another break-in might be in progress. He listened in the darkness, straining his ears for unusual sounds. He heard what sounded like crying coming from another apartment, switched on the bedside lamp and got out to investigate. He poked his head out through the curtains, peering into the darkness of the road below. The streetlamps only barely cut through the gloom of the totally deserted street, which was usual for 3 am. He went into the bathroom, where a vent connected to a common shaft throughout the apartment block to allow steam from the showers to escape without causing condensation. He realised

that the sobbing was coming from one of the apartments below, probably Annalise's, but he couldn't be sure. The only way to be confirm it would be to creep down the stairs and place his ear to her door, but he decided against this, it would be too creepy. Also, since she now had the place covered in security cameras, she would know if he went down there. The soft crying continued, and Louis knew that it would keep him awake.

He decided to close the vent and the bathroom door. The resultant quiet and the aid of earplugs allowed him to drop off again.

In the morning when Louis awoke, he wondered if it had been all a dream, but when he saw the closed vent in the bathroom, he knew it was real. It started him thinking again. Quite possibly it was Annalise who was crying, and he was concerned about her, but was nonetheless loath to call at her door again after the last encounter. Working from home himself, he already knew she had hardly left her apartment since the incident. He decided to keep an ear out for the next time she went out. He would follow her down to the ground floor in the hopes of running into her in the foyer.

Several hours later, when he heard the sounds of her multiple locks, he grabbed his coat, listening at his apartment door for the sounds of her door being closed again.

Once Fort Knox, as he called it, had been opened and closed, he heard her walking down the stairs. He left his own apartment and quickened his pace to catch up with her.

"Annalise," he called, upon reaching the front door, "how are you?"

She turned to glance at him for a moment; her black-ringed eyes and tousled hair said it all.

"Can I do anything to help?"

She shook her head and continued wearily to the car park. There was no point in following her; she obviously didn't want to talk, so Louis let her be.

An hour later, Annalise was back, and he pressed his ear to the apartment door, listening to her plodding slowly up the stairs. There was the familiar sound of three locks opening, but now it sounded as if she was following a kind of ritual. Each one was opened and closed three times before being definitively opened. Strange. It piqued his interest. What was she up to?

As his mind wandered, fascinated by the sounds of his neighbour's new behaviour, he started to fall behind with his work. It was like listening to the noises of a rare bird in the wild.

After that, anytime there was the slightest neighbourhood disturbance, like unruly children playing outside or a late-night party celebration, Louis could be sure that the police would arrive, invariably at Annalise's insistence. For the first few months after the break-in, Louis saw police lights flashing outside the apartment block at least twenty times and heard the subsequent interactions between Annalise and the police officers below. But eventually, or so he assumed, the police grew tired of responding to callouts prompted only by the imagination of his disturbed neighbour, and during the next noisy incident, Louis heard her pacing up and down her apartment loudly. Her shoes clicked on the wooden floors almost rhythmically as she paced out her frustration at being ignored. He felt so sorry for her and wished he could help her, but it was obvious to him that she didn't want his help, and indeed no one could help her with the distress that was only playing out in her head. He often wondered if she was seeing a therapist. If not, she certainly needed one.

Over time, Louis heard the turning on and off of taps and the opening and closing of windows, further evidence of Annalise's increasingly obsessive-compulsive behaviours. The incessant sound of repeated actions floated upwards to Louis's apartment and interrupted his flow of thoughts. He began to notice specific time patterns associated with each of the repeated actions. It was starting to drive him mad and he resorted to wearing headphones and listening to music to filter out the quirks of his neighbour below.

Chapter Four

The Rise of Louis Turner

June 1985, East End, London.

Louis Turner started writing in 1985 after completing a university degree in literature. His first novel, a science fiction romance, took him a year. He realised, however, that the book fell between two genres and very few people were interested in both; his work, which he had slaved over night and day, generated little interest. After six months and twenty odd rejections from prospective agents he realised the book was doomed. Despite positive feedback from writers' groups he had to resign himself to the fact that it was not a masterpiece. His belief that agents would snatch it up and initiate a bidding war between publishers was mere fantasy, as was the delusion of selling the rights to a producer for a blockbuster film adaptation. Although the dream had spurred him on as he was writing, it had no basis in reality.

Louis was still young and eager however; he swept off rejection like a dog shaking off rain and set to work again. His new novel sat squarely in one genre, namely romance. He was well aware that writers of romance were predominantly women and indeed, most readers of romance were also women. This might possibly put him at a disadvantage but did allow him to write from a different point of view, which would perhaps lead to something fresh and exciting for his future readers. It was nine months before Louis's new masterpiece was ready to send to prospective agents. His enthusiasm and optimism hadn't waned, he still believed that somehow, he would rise above the other 99.99% of first-time authors whose work was rejected for publication. He reckoned his book *Raw Passion* was smart, funny, sexy, and a good read from start to finish. His four beta-readers had assured him of this, 'though they were friends and so admittedly somewhat biased. Nonetheless, he believed them and, deciding to go with a female pseudonym, 'Louise Tyrone', he continued sending pitches and sample chapters to agents across the UK and abroad.

But the silence was deafening, and no one seemed interested. Louis was encouraged in the knowledge that JK Rowling's first Harry Potter book was rejected twelve or more times before she hit gold. Tenacity was required here, and he had plenty of it. He was working at the time as a barista in a local coffee shop, but it didn't pay enough for him to live on, even with the low cost of rent sharing a run-down house with three others. Louis soon took on evening shifts in a local bar to supplement his income. The long hours and meagre pay left him little time and energy to write and to source an agent.

"Are you coming to the party with us tonight?" his housemates would ask countless times, and mostly the answer was no; Louis either had an early morning start or wanted to make progress on his next book. Night after night was spent reading, researching and writing as his friends partied the nights away. They were living their lives while he contented himself *writing* about his imagined life. Although they lived in close proximity in the small house, Louis remained largely isolated from them. He might have been on another planet for the rarity of his connections with the others, and he often wondered how it was possible for him to be so different from them. He dreamed of house shares occupied just with writers, who could continuously encourage and bounce ideas off each other. Perhaps such house-shares existed but Louis had no way of finding them, so he settled for what he had, namely, the motivation to write and a powerful imagination.

Eventually his housemates stopped asking him to go join them and regarded him as a kind of a loner. But he knew he'd have to persevere and hopefully he'd eventually be successful. Occasionally Louis thought about Henry, his 12-year old half-brother, ten years younger than him. Although Louis did not get on with his mother Simone and so left home as soon as he could, Henry seemed to have a better relationship with her; perhaps then Louis himself was at fault? He was glad to be out and living his own life, even if it was a lonely one. He'd managed to get a university scholarship and now he had an arts degree. And though this qualified him for absolutely nothing, it had allowed him to discover his passion for reading and writing, two things sorely lacking in his life when he was growing up. Back then there was scarcely a book in the house. Now his narrow room was filled with literary classics, novels, and how-to-write books from second-hand bookstores and the nearby library. None of his other housemates were readers. They

preferred TV, music and sports. He was often embarrassed to admit that he had no idea who was playing in the sports matches they went on about or what the current top-40 music hits were.

Although Louis didn't fit in, his friends accepted him nonetheless, deeming him as being just a bit eccentric. They likened him to the nerdy tech guys they'd known in college and they left him to his own devices for the most part, something which, if Louis was being honest with himself, he actually preferred.

Something else Louis was also missing in his life was a girlfriend. When it came to asking girls out, he was hopelessly awkward. His average looks and less-than-exceptional fashion sense didn't help. This made meeting someone with whom he shared a mutual attraction challenging. Mostly Louis was fine on his own, tolerating the sounds of his flatmates' amorous exploits as they permeated the thin bedroom walls. Eventually, he met Belinda, a plump, bookish girl who enjoyed his quirky nature and taught him how to explore the female body, how to give and receive pleasure. He was not, however, an adventurous lover by nature, and soon Belinda decided to move on to new pastures. Alone again, Louis contented himself with his thoughts, his imagination and the numerous copies of Playboy and whatever other exciting magazines he acquired from the top shelf at the local newsagents. Although his sexual adventures were few and far between during this period of his life, Louis would still look back at that time with fondness, at his excitement while writing his early novels, which were fuelled more by imagination than experience.

In the early 1990s, when Louis was in his late twenties, things changed somewhat. His original housemates had moved on, got married, emigrated or just moved in with their girlfriends, leaving him stuck as if in a time warp with a new set of much younger guys as flatmates. Although he desperately wanted out, his first three books had been spectacular failures. He hadn't the means to move somewhere better, get a place of his own, or at the very least share with people of the same age, instead of these young bucks, fresh out of college, horny as hell, and pouncing on anyone in a skirt!

Louis was now a part of a writers' group which met twice weekly at a local cafe/bookstore. He grew interested in a woman who also attended the

meetings, and though she appeared to be at least ten years older than him, he sensed a mutual attraction. He was scared, though, that his sexual inexperience at the advanced age of twenty-nine would prove nothing but a considerable amusement for her and embarrassment for himself. Rebekah was from a Jewish family; she had a slight figure, dark hair, sallow skin and an infectious smile. Her cute breasts, barely visible through the chunky cardigans she wore, nonetheless were like a magnet for his eyes, never failing to catch his attention.

Once, on a warm day, he stole a glance at Rebekah's nipples as they pressed through her cotton t-shirt, proclaiming to the world that she was not wearing a bra. She caught him looking as his eyes roved over her lithe body and smiled, pleased that he had noticed her.

Rebekah became his first real love and long-term girlfriend. They moved in together after only a few months, though Louis was at that point still only a barista and would-be writer with three failed books under his belt and not a penny to his name. It didn't seem to matter much to Rebekah, who had plenty of money, but soon the inequalities in the relationship began to get him down. He felt downtrodden, like a kept man. Before Rebekah, when his lover was but a fantasy, he could be whoever he wanted in his imagination. But reality was proving harsh: he was a failed writer supported entirely by a rich older woman, and this bore heavily on Louis's mind every day.

Although he hadn't visited his family home in many years, Louis occasionally thought about his half-brother, Henry, who would at that point have been in his late teens. And then he thought about Rebekah, and how she was old enough to be Henry's mother. He had never told her about Henry or his mother Simone or his 'crime family' uncles. They remained his secret, his dark side, something he refused to disclose despite countless questions from Rebekah and entreaties to meet them. Although he loved Rebekah, Louis was also somewhat ashamed that she seemed much like a mother figure in their relationship.

Louis spent many years in that conflicted state, with nothing for it but to continue writing. Finally, in the late 90s, he wrote a novel which was taken on by an agent who found a publisher for it in a matter of weeks. His book was launched six months later after successfully managing re-writes, editors, publishing and the marketing requirements. His agent hailed him as an overnight success despite the nearly fifteen years it had taken to get there.

Rebekah was also delighted that he had broken through the barriers and soon would be earning a decent living from his work. Louis was unaware that Rebekah had, in desperation, paid his agent a considerable sum to take on his novel. Had he known this he would have rejected the offer, despite Rebekah's good intentions. But fortunately, the break gave him new confidence to continue with his writing. Although he was not a big drinker himself, he could fully understand why so many aspiring and even successful authors resorted to the comforts of the bottle to temporarily relieve their despair and fuel them for the long nights of writing wrought by inspiration.

The success of the book brought new challenges: book readings, signings and other events to promote his novel, which took him all over the country, often to places he'd never been before. It also got him a fan following consisting mainly of women in their early twenties, who, fresh out of college, hoped to snatch up a successful author. They were especially thrilled to find out that behind the female pseudonym was in fact a man who had written so beautifully about passion and love. But the desire and the steamy sex scenes were all fantasy; the reality of his relationship with Rebekah was an intellectual connection that didn't translate well in the bedroom. So Louis was not writing about *his* abysmally poor lovemaking experience, but rather experiences fuelled by his powerful imagination and occasionally inspired by porn films and magazines.

However, these pretty young things who converged on his book signings from across the country wanted a slice of the new best-selling romance author's "reality". His plain appearance was not a hindrance. After all, on book marketing trips, Louis was staying at high-class hotels paid for by the publishers. Many nights he found himself with beautiful young women, fresh from his book readings and ready for some experience, particularly excited by the promise of his passion-fuelled novels. But invariably they were disappointed by his poor performance in bed, and the times he wasn't feeling guilty about cheating on Rebekah, he spent feeling like an imposter.

One evening, upon returning from a book trip and after a few too many drinks, he finally admitted to Rebekah that his legion of fans often wanted more than his books. He boasted of his many nights of passion with them, even naming one of his lovers before realising he was digging an almighty hole for himself. Disgusted and hurt by his admissions, Rebekah was also

highly sceptical of his professed sexual prowess, given his dismal performance in her own bed. She wanted him out of the house within a day. Louis founded himself suddenly homeless and looking for an apartment. He initially settled for the first available flat but found that he was not comfortable writing there. Louis needed a place with potential which he could customise for his writing lifestyle. He could now afford to buy an apartment with his considerable royalties. Eventually he found a top floor apartment in a small block at the end of Ainger road. It was in need of refurbishment but it looked out onto Primrose Hill, a park he wandered through in the evenings for inspiration. At the hilltop, he also got to enjoy a view of the distant London skyline, etched by silhouettes of the glass and steel skyscrapers of Canary Wharf.

Although it was perfect, he missed Rebekah's company and tried many times to reconnect with her, but she refused to return his calls or answer his emails. Eventually he had to accept that it was over. Through one drunken night of boasting he'd ruined his best relationship and lost his soulmate. Now all he had to fill the void left by Rebekah's absence was his imagination. So he kept himself busy by decorating his new apartment and throwing himself into his writing.

In 2000, one year after he'd split up with Rebekah, he finally felt settled in his new luxury apartment. His refurbishments resulted in an exceedingly comfortable place in which to live and work, so much so that he'd completed three new novels. Everything was finally falling into place with his home and his career. Although he didn't have love, he reckoned two out of three wasn't bad.

It was 2015, sixteen years later, after ten successful novels, that Louis ran out of steam. He'd seen huge sales, book awards and two of his novels had been optioned for TV adaptations. But these successes had ground to a halt and he felt empty and unable to write a single word. He had yet to finish his last novel which was due at the end of the year. He was past his deadline but continued making excuses to his agent, for two and then three years. It was now 2018; Louis was a fifty-five-year-old washed-up author with mounting debts and a book three years overdue.

Louis's agent, Jill Matthews, was disgusted. Steve Parker, the CEO of the small publishing house with whom his books had been so successful, was now threatening to cancel his contract, and demanding the return of the one hundred thousand pounds advance they had paid him in 2015. His finances were getting worse month by month and Jill was shouting at him on the phone virtually every day to finish the bloody novel, but he just couldn't do it. Something seemed broken. Louis didn't know what it was; he just woke up one day feeling an intense resentment towards the romance novels he'd been writing. Nothing could drag him back to his desk. Everyone wanted a part of him, and he wanted out.

He needed something different to write about. But what? And where was he going to get the one hundred thousand pounds needed to repay his publisher's advance? That money was long gone, and Louis had been living on credit ever since. The banks, who had once been only too happy to lend him as much money as he wanted, were sending him arrears letters for non-payment of his loans. It was a total disaster. Somehow Louis would have to find something new to write about or else find a whole new career. He pondered it every day on his walks to Primrose Hill, where he looked off to the distant city. Somewhere out there was a story, a new beginning, and he had to find it fast before everyone caught up with him. At some point it occurred to him it might have been better remaining poor than to have reached this state of success, but be constantly worried about losing it all.

Chapter Five

The Attack

17th April 2018, Primrose Hill, London.

Annalise had been a bright and happy woman; her job as accountancy manager had kept her so busy that she often worked late and on weekends. Over the years, focussing on her career had eclipsed her opportunity for a relationship and possibly children. Nothing else had seemed to matter; she was rewarded by the company with a promotion to the senior management team.

Then the critical incident occurred. She was sleeping peacefully in her apartment one night when a noise awoke her. She stirred, opened her eyes and glanced through the half-closed bedroom door into the living room and the balcony doors, left open so she could enjoy the cool breeze from outside whilst safely tucked in beneath her warm duvet. The noise had seemed to come from there, and another creaking sound woke her fully and she strained to hear. Her mind raced through all the possibilities: was it the wind blowing through the French doors knocking a magazine from her coffee table? Perhaps a bird had flown in through the open door and was trying to get out. She briefly considered the possibility that a burglar had gained access from the balcony. But this thought she dismissed: her apartment was on the second floor! How would someone get up to it? She heard the noise again. It was as if someone had stepped on one of the loose floorboards in her living room. She got out of bed, put on her dressing gown and went to investigate.

The living room was in darkness. As she reached over to switch on the lights someone placed a hand over her mouth and stifled her scream. There was a man standing behind her in the dark; with his other hand he grabbed her arm. Her heart was pounding so hard she thought she'd have a heart attack. As she tried to scream again, she felt him put his mouth close to her ear.

His putrid breath enveloped her face, making her want to gag. She pushed to get away from him, but he held her firm.

“Don’t move or I’ll slit your throat.”

She froze on the spot, realising that this was more than a robbery, that this man might cut her, rape her, kill her. These thoughts flashed through her brain in the space of a second and her body tensed, ready for the worst.

He pulled a dirty cloth from his pocket and stuffed it into her mouth, pulling back his hand. She wanted to scream again but then saw his knife. It was a hunting knife with a long, jagged blade on one side, the type used for gutting animals after the kill. Her screams were muffled as he taped over her mouth with duct tape. He tied her hands behind her back. Each time he cut a piece of tape with the knife she could see the gleaming blade close to her face. Her eyes were wide in terror as she looked at him, his face covered in a balaclava.

“Don’t fucking look at me.” he hissed, “or I’ll cut you open.”

She closed her eyes, terrified. Her mind was racing now. How could she escape this terror? But there was nowhere to flee. The man dragged her into the bedroom and threw her on the bed. Everything was now happening in slow motion. Every millisecond lasted an hour as he pulled her clothes off, manoeuvred himself astride her, and then lowered his trousers. She stopped struggling and lay still, hoping that it would be all over in a few minutes. But she already knew that the pain and the bruising would last much longer.

It seemed an age before his thrusting and grunting finished and he lay still on top of her. As he slid off, she remained motionless, afraid he would resume at any moment. Was it over? She prayed: if there was a God, he would save her surely. But there was no mercy; minutes later, he climbed back onto the bed and forced himself onto her again. She was in agony, feeling like a rag doll battered and left for rubbish in the street.

After the second time, he withdrew to the living room, ransacking it in his search for money and valuables. Annalise prayed he’d take what he had come for and leave her alone. But he returned, and her body tensed up again.

“I’m going to leave you with something,” he said, taking the knife in one hand and lifting her now soiled dressing gown with his other.

He slid the knife through her skin, from breasts to navel. The cold blade slid through her flesh leaving a long, curved wound and a flap of skin in its wake. She felt blood covering her stomach and her lower body, and thought she was going to die.

“If I get caught and if you testify against me, I will return and finish this job off, slowly, until you bleed out entirely.”

She closed her eyes, terrified. She wanted to block it out completely until it was over.

“Do you hear me?” he hissed.

She nodded, not looking at him. He got off her and was gone. Overwhelmed by the pain, she closed her eyes and drifted into unconsciousness.

A few hours later she awoke, soaked in blood, remembering in an instant what had happened. She lay there, listening for sounds of movement or breathing, but all was still. The attacker had gone and left her for dead or dying. It took an hour for her to free herself from the tape bindings and then she crawled inch by inch from the bed to find her phone and raise the alarm.

Throughout Annalise’s hospital stay she could think of nothing but the shame of having been raped. She’d block out the memory somehow and keep it a secret. No one could ever know. A therapist specialising in cases of rape visited her in the hospital but could not get through; the horrors Annalise had suffered remained locked inside her head.

Upon her arrival, the police had told the nurses in the emergency ward that she had been attacked *and* raped. Standard protocol was followed, and DNA evidence was collected before cleaning her up. This Annalise forgot about, her mind clouded with fear and pain. But the DNA evidence was handed over to the police.

Days went by. Despite some physical recovery, Annalise was still very fragile mentally. She woke up mornings to asthma and panic attacks upon remembering what had happened to her. The hospital prescribed medication for the anxiety and gave her an inhaler to open her airways and counteract the effects of breathlessness from the asthma.

After a week of treatment that far from cured her mental trauma, they released her from hospital, recommending a therapist to help her continue recovery. The hospital wanted her to be accompanied home by a close relative or a friend, but Annalise said she had no one. She had lied: she did have a sister, Rachel, who lived at the other end of the city, but they rarely spoke. Had Annalise asked, Rachel would have helped her, but she didn’t; she would have had to reveal the awful truth about what had happened to her. So she struggled alone into the waiting taxi at the hospital entrance

which brought her back to the apartment block. Stepping out of the cab, she felt the eyes of the residents looking down through curtains and blinds, watching as she slowly made her way up to the main door of the apartment block. She didn't look up to see who was watching; she just made her way to her door. Then a sudden fear gripped her. What was behind that door? Could she go in? Her heart was beating with increasing speed; she felt a panic attack coming on. She reached into her pocket for one of the pills the doctors had prescribed her and sat down on the steps in the stairwell. Could she ever feel safe here again?

The medication kicked in after ten minutes and her panic subsided; her heartbeat and breathing returned to normal. She longed for some neighbour to come and help her, but no one knew what she had endured, and no one came. Finally, she managed to get up, open the door and get inside. The apartment was tidy and smelled fresh. Someone —the police? Some social service?— had arranged to have her home cleaned of the residue from her bloody ordeal. At least someone cared, she thought. This lifted her mood slightly until she entered the bathroom to take a shower. Standing there naked she saw for the first time the yellowing bruises on her face and body and the bandage on her stomach covering the place where her attacker had cut her. She removed the dressing slowly and looked at the healing wound, long and curved, about ten inches in length. Despite expert surgery there would be a permanent scar, raised and jagged, a constant reminder of that horrific night.

She thought about the police questioning her after the incident. She had been too scared to say anything about her attacker and insisted she remembered nothing, although she did remember. Instead of telling anyone, she wrote it all in her journal. Writing it all down and re-reading it seemed to ease the pain a little.

Annalise spent the first few sleepless nights at home fearful that her attacker would return. She stayed up long into the night, writing everything that had happened while it was still fresh in her head. She documented every moment of her ordeal, every thought, and a full description of her attacker. He was small and thin, probably in his late forties, his long stringy greying hair sticking out from beneath his balaclava. She had caught a glance of a tattoo on his neck before he forced her to avert her eyes. The memory of that tattoo was burned into her mind. She wrote about it in her journal along with a detailed drawing: a black upside-down cross with a diamond at each end of

it. A week of continual writing filled fifty odd pages in her journal with every little detail of the incident. It helped but it didn't alleviate her fear. She knew she needed professional help but somehow couldn't bring herself to seek it. Instead, she continued writing obsessively, recording every little detail that occurred to her.

She found comfort in establishing new routines, turning each lock three times, just to be sure: lock, unlock, lock again, unlock again and finally lock. She began applying this method to other tasks, such as turning the taps on and off, opening and closing windows, anything she had formerly done once was now performed three times in a kind of ritual, which seemed to grant each undertaking a particular importance. She didn't know why this was necessary, but it got so that no task was complete until she had followed this routine. Forgoing the routine made her uncomfortable, made her feel like something was wrong. Indulging in it made her feel safe and soon it became a part of everything she did.

Chapter Six

Coping

24th April 2018, Primrose Hill, London.

It was after her first sleepless night back home that she decided to install extra security in her apartment. She called a locksmith the following day who came and installed three deadlocks on the front door of the flat as well as a spy hole and a chain. He placed a metal sheet on the back of the door surrounded by a metal architrave. To Annalise it seemed like the door of a bank safe, which was exactly what she wanted; no one was going to break through that door into her apartment. A security company arrived to assess how to make the flat fully secure, and, over the next week or two, installed an alarm system linked to their office and CCTV cameras: outside her door, in each room and at each window of the apartment. All of them were linked to the computer in her home office. At a glance, she could see everything inside and outside her little domain. Triple-glazed windows with a metal grille behind them were also installed. When closed, they were impermeable. As the workers finished each stage of the security installations, Annalise finally felt safe in her home — her fortress — although she also felt less and less inclined to actually leave the apartment. She was already off work; her boss had agreed that she would need a month or two recovery time.

Several weeks later, DCI Preston, the senior investigating police officer, rang her.

“I’ve got some information for you, Ms Nolan,” he said, “we’ve caught your assailant.”

“How could you do that without my description?”

“At the hospital we took DNA samples left by your attacker; his sperm, hair and skin under your nails.”

She shuddered. She didn't want to know the details.

“Anyway,” Preston continued, “this man attacked another woman in similar circumstances to yours so when we caught him we ran the DNA search and have identified him as your attacker.”

Annalise was pleased to learn of the arrest but did not want to hear anything which brought back those dreadful memories.

“So what will happen to him?”

“He's in custody now. Due to the evidence we have he will most likely be denied bail and there will be a court case in a few months.”

“Will I have to testify?”

“Possibly. It depends on how he pleads in the court case. We will keep you informed.”

The stress of the potential hearing brought back terrible memories. The pitch of her voice heightened. “I told you at the time that I couldn't recognise him because of the balaclava he was wearing.”

“I know, but the defence lawyers may have to cross-examine you and the other victim at the trial nonetheless.”

She was hyperventilating now, terrified at the prospect of testifying, of the press revealing everything that had happened to the outside world. This thought alone proverbially tore open the wounds on her stomach and in her head. The thought of a court appearance made her panic. Her heart was pounding, she started coughing and felt breathless. She took a moment; the inhaler provided momentary relief.

“Are you okay, Ms Nolan?” the Preston asked, concerned at her reaction to the news. “Do you need some help? A doctor, perhaps? Or I could send an officer around to speak with you?”

“No, I'll be fine,” she managed to stammer. “Thank you for the information.”

“No problem, we'll be in touch when there is an update. You can however rest assured that this whole area is safer now that he is behind bars.”

Preston hung up. Annalise went to lie down to recover from the shock. Would this nightmare ever be over? Although it was only early in the afternoon she drifted off into a restless sleep, plagued by the fear that her attacker would return despite all her security precautions.

Weeks and months went by and Annalise became increasingly reclusive. She busied herself in her apartment reading, writing in her journal, surfing the Internet, watching TV and sleeping. She often slept for several hours in the middle of the day and then stayed up late into the night. She had all her food delivered, rarely venturing outside the apartment except to bring her rubbish to the bin in the basement car park, or for an occasional visit to her doctor to pick up prescriptions for an ever-increasing number of medications she was on. No one called on her and she didn't care. She was living in her little secure cocoon safe from any further attack.

Chapter Seven

Henry's Early Years

September 1981, Spitalfields, East End of London.

Henry Turner was Louis Turner's younger half-brother, and they were complete opposites. He was ten years younger than Louis and always had an immature outlook on life. He and Louis had never really gotten on.

When Henry was a kid, for as long as he remembered, he and his mother Simone were poor. After Louis got a scholarship to university in 1981 it was just the two of them in the small house. Henry was eight at the time and didn't have much of a relationship with Louis, who was eighteen, but, strangely, he started to miss him nonetheless once he was gone. Much later in life, he remembered thinking that perhaps it was because Louis had provided some stability in a house with a mother who was most certainly not normal. She didn't look after him, spending most of her time drinking, getting high and handling 'goods' for strange men who called at all hours of day and night.

All Henry's friends had parents who looked after their kids despite their poverty and everyone living in the Baker Lane, Spitalfields in the East End of London was poor. If the opportunity arose or you managed to make some money you got the hell out. That's why Louis had left, and Henry remembered thinking that's probably why his father Arthur had gone too.

As he was growing up Henry wondered when his opportunity to escape would present itself and where would he go when it did? He also wondered why his mother kept them in the rundown old house they lived in. Why didn't she move somewhere else? In later years he would realise that poverty kept her stuck there, as well as family ties; after her family had moved from Johannesburg, South Africa to London, she had lived on a street nearby.

Though in the 1980s the only remaining family who lived close by were Henry's two uncles. Simone had never said much about them, and they rarely came over to visit, but Henry's friends on the street had told him that his two uncles were part of a criminal gang. They robbed shops and banks, sold drugs and ran a prostitute ring, and some of the women plied their trade not far from Henry's house, though he was mostly in bed asleep during their late night/early morning workhours. Once, he and two friends stayed awake and crept out of the house around midnight. They wanted to see what it was like to be out and about when only adults were around. They saw drunks falling out of the local bars and police cars coming to take them away and on their way back home they saw a beautiful woman just standing alone under a streetlight, smoking a cigarette and waiting.

Billy, one of Henry's older friends, knew she was a prostitute. He informed Henry, still innocent for his age, of this fact.

"She's a pro," he said, pointing her out in the distance.

"What's that?" said Henry.

The other two laughed and decided to set him up.

"Just go up to her and ask how much she charges."

"Charges for what?"

The others laughed again.

"You'll find out soon enough."

So Henry did it. He went up to the woman standing under the lamp.

"Get out of here," she said gruffly, but Henry remained, looking up at her while the other two hovered in the distance to observe what would happen.

"You're beautiful," he said, looking up at her.

She smiled. "You think so?"

Henry nodded.

"How much do you charge?"

His friends burst out laughing.

"Fuck off out of here you little shit."

"My friends say that you're a pro but I don't know what that is."

She smiled at his naiveté and, figuring his friends had set him up, bent down close to him. He smelled her strong perfume as she drew near him and she kissed him on the forehead.

"Go home now," she whispered, "it could get dangerous around here late at night."

Henry's friends ran up as she walked off. "Wow, you kissed a pro," they said with awe and admiration.

When Henry was a teenager, he began to hang out nights with his friends, drinking and smoking hash in one of the abandoned houses in the street behind where he lived. Every few months another family would pack up and leave, and no one else came to take their place in the dilapidated terraced houses so they fell into disrepair and were taken over by gangs for late-night drinking parties and the occasional precocious sexual experience. Henry often wondered how long it would be until his house was the only occupied one, given that every second house was boarded up. But the house they lived in was all that Simone knew and she was determined to stay. Henry imagined he'd have to be there for a few more years, at least until he finished school and moved out to begin his real life. He was fifteen and had learnt a lot since the age of eight and the night the prostitute kissed him. He was becoming a ladies' man; girls constantly vied for his attention. It was his bad-boy attitude rather than his looks that they liked, and, since he was now dealing drugs, he always had a free supply for his girlfriends. As the evening parties grew wilder and people lit bonfires behind the abandoned houses the police began coming around on a nightly basis. Sometimes there were street fights between the local teenagers and hapless strangers who'd lost their way and wandered into the Baker Lane patch.

Henry had been arrested for fighting or drunkenness and his mother had to go to the police station on several occasions to get him out of the holding cell. She knew that it was only a matter of time until he was charged and sent to juvenile detention or prison. And that is precisely what happened when he was nineteen. Though he had merely wanted to protect an innocent against violence and theft, Henry was the one apprehended. Earlier, after finishing a six-pack of beer, Henry had decided to go to the local chipper for fish and chips, but there was a long queue outside the shop; everyone was hungry after a night of drinking. As he waited he saw two guys on a scooter drive close to the queue of people, and as they slowed down the guy on the back reached over and grabbed a girl's handbag.

"Hey. Stop. Help." She screamed, but the guys just laughed and revved the scooter about to drive off.

Shit. I can't let that happen, Henry thought, and he grabbed a brick from a nearby construction site, throwing it at the scooter driver and hitting him on the back and stunning him. The driver crashed the scooter and both guys fell, uninjured, to the ground. The girl saw her bag lying on the street, snatched it back and ran off before things got worse.

The bigger guy got up, pulled out a chain and started swinging it at Henry. "Why the hell did you do that?"

The other guy was standing beside him now; he'd taken out a long knife with a serrated edge, ready for action.

"We're going to teach you not to interfere in our business."

Henry had a flick knife in his pocket. He knew it was illegal but he needed the protection for precisely the type of situation he found himself in now. The two guys began to circle him and he pulled it out. Lucky for him an onlooker picked up the brick Henry had originally thrown and hurled it at the two guys. It hit the guy with the knife, knocking him down and wounding him. The other guy continued towards Henry swinging the chain and shouting.

"Come on you coward. Let's see what you're made of."

Henry waved the knife back and forth ready for action.

"Okay," shouted Henry, "do your worst."

The guy swung the chain wildly at Henry's head. It landed with a blow on Henry's shoulder, knocking him back momentarily. Henry lunged at him with the knife but missed. The chain pounded him again, this time catching his leg and knocking him down. The guy swung the chain around, preparing for a third hit, but Henry dodged it, got back up and lunged at him, catching him with the sharpened blade and cutting a long wound in his forearm.

He bellowed in pain, dropped the chain and threw a punch at Henry's face. But he missed, and the momentum of his swing drove his fist onto Henry's knife. He screamed in pain and fell on the ground, blood surging from the wound, just as a police car arrived. Two officers jumped out and grabbed Henry, kicking the knife out of his hand and restraining him.

"That bastard was attacking me," shouted Henry as the police snapped the cuffs on him.

"I saw you attacking him with your knife," said one of the officers.

The guy with the cut hand had kicked the chain into the nearby bushes, and he stayed on the ground making out to be seriously injured. The ambulance had now arrived to bring him to hospital and Henry was taken to the police station, charged and thrown in a cell overnight.

The crowd had all disappeared at the sound of the police cars so there were no witnesses to corroborate Henry's story.

It was a year before the court case was processed and Henry was found guilty. He stood in the dock waiting to be sentenced.

“Henry Turner, you have been found guilty of grievous bodily harm, a heinous knife crime, which this country abhors and wants to stamp out. I am applying the maximum sentence I can for this offence as a stern warning to you and others that this society will not tolerate knife crime. You are sentenced to two years in Feltham prison.”

Henry went to prison an amateur and came out as a professional criminal, an expert on drug dealing, guns, and knife techniques, complete with a new network of guys to contact for robbery and drug supply. He was a fast learner when it came to being streetwise, surviving his prison-time with just a scar on one hand which he got during a prison fight. His involvement in several incidents in prison and a bad behaviour record condemned Henry to serve the full term.

Upon being released he decided to join the army to learn combat skills which he felt would be useful. He wasn't sure if he would be accepted due to his prison record, but he was, and he wasn't the only military man with a prison record. There weren't many other options when you'd been inside.

It was 1993, and the only conflict UK was involved in at that stage was Northern Ireland. But he had to sign up for four years so anything could happen over that period. As it turned out he served a tour of duty in Belfast in 1993 and another tour in Bosnia in 1995 as part of the peacekeeping force.

In 1996 Henry was discharged from the army. He had matured a lot, gaining training and experience with weapons, explosives and hand to hand combat. But the only legal jobs requiring his skill set were police and security jobs, both of which were off-limits to him because of his prison record. He remained unphased; he was quite content to remain involved with criminals. There was a lot more money in it and he could kick back and relax for a while when it suited him. The army had been too much hard work and not enough pay. Now it was time to re-set the scales, make a little cash and just enjoy his life.

Henry didn't have a place to stay when he got discharged from the army. He hadn't seen his mother in several years and headed to her house to catch up on things and hopefully stay with her until he sorted himself out. It was a

Friday afternoon when he arrived at the house and there was no answer when he knocked on the door. The blinds were down on the windows so he couldn't see inside. The place looked the same as it had been a few years earlier when he had left. It was still a dive; no work had been done on it in decades. He hopped over the side wall and climbed in through a window at the back. The place stunk and the kitchen was a mess. His mother hadn't cleaned up in weeks. The food bin was overflowing with stinky curry takeaway cartons and beer bottles. He heard snoring from the living room and looked in. There she was, conked out in the early afternoon, surrounded by more cans. Nothing's changed, he thought. He threw his backpack on his old bed upstairs and had a shower. When he came back down she was still asleep. even his noise hadn't wakened her. He shook her shoulder.

"Hey, wake up. It's Henry. I'm back."

She woke with a jolt.

"What the hell."

She was waving her hands about; she thought someone was about to attack her. Then she recognised him.

"Oh, you're back. How was it?" she asked, as if Henry had just returned from a holiday.

"It was shit, but I made it through."

"Are you staying long?"

"No, just a few weeks until I find somewhere to live."

"Did they get you a job?"

"No. But I'll find something."

He was only back home for half an hour and already he felt the depressing atmosphere of the house and being around Simone. He made up his mind to be out of there in a few days rather than a few weeks.

Within a week he'd found a place about half a mile away. It was little more than a storeroom at the back of a shop where one of his friends lived, but he was in prison at that time so the place was empty. He could stay there for at least a few months until something better came up. He met his old mates down in the pub and soon it was just like he'd never been away. But inside, he felt different. Travelling to Belfast and Sarajevo had hardly been a world tour but the army had nonetheless given him a slightly broader perspective on the world than he had had before.

Chapter Eight

Police Update

10th June 2018, Primrose Hill, London.

Annalise was at home all the time with nothing else to focus on except her problems, which meant it took a week or two for her to calm down about the possibility of having to testify in the court case against her attacker. Eventually it drifted to the back of her mind though, replaced by other anxieties. About six weeks later the DCI Preston called her again.

“Ms Nolan, I have an update on the case against your attacker.”

Annalise was terrified.

“Will I have to testify in court?”

“No, you will not have to go to court.”

Her relief was palpable, albeit short-lived.

“I’m sorry to let you know, however, that the case against your attacker has run into a major problem.”

“What do you mean?”

“We are not going to proceed with his prosecution in either of the rape cases.”

Annalise couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

“Why? Last time we spoke you told me that you had DNA evidence against him.”

“Yes. But,” the officer hesitated for a moment, trying to explain, “there was a major mix up in the police labs. The evidence was wrongly filed and associated with another case. Without DNA evidence there is no way for us to really proceed, so the Director of Public Protections has advised us to drop the case and release him immediately.”

Annalise felt like she had been hit by a bolt of lightning. They were going to release him. How could that be? Would she ever be safe now?" She began hyperventilating.

"We are going to arrange for police security at your apartment," Preston said, hoping this would make her feel somewhat secure. She didn't reply, she just hung up and reached for her cigarettes. Her doctors had told her to give up smoking, especially with the onset of asthma after the attack, but she'd only been able to cut down to four or five cigarettes a day with a couple of extras at times of stress. The nicotine caused her to cough but also calmed her down.

When Ed Mercer had been arrested for the two rape cases, police had reported to the press withholding his name, as they feared it might lead the press to discovering and publishing the victims' names. His name and details, however, were released illegally on social media, then echoed by the press, since it was already public knowledge. Several weeks later when the police dropped the case the media had a field day, lamenting the release of the suspect whose case was backed with DNA evidence. When Louis read the reports he wondered if Annalise had been one of Ed Mercer's victims; the approximate location and dates seemed to match. If she had been raped by this man when he broke into her apartment, he thought, it would explain the complete change in her demeanour and her lifestyle. It was only a hunch and he guessed he was never going to know. Annalise wasn't going to tell him despite their past relationship and ongoing friendship. She had become distant; she had no close ties to anyone anymore.



The last call from the police prompted a new wave of security measures on Annalise's part. She began locking herself inside any room she entered to ensure she would never be subject to another surprise attack. She kept her apartment keys on one big keyring which she kept with her at all times. At first this activity was aggravating but soon became just another routine for her.

She continued documenting her thoughts and fears in her journal; it was the only thing which gave her comfort. With page after page of neat writing, she felt like she was purging herself of negative thoughts and anxiety, locking them inside the journal. But new fears quickly arose to replace the ones she

documented. She felt like there was a relentless source of new concerns just waiting to surface; something she dreaded constantly. Would it ever end? Perhaps she should make it stop? What future did she have? Only this daily hell. Suicide would undoubtedly be an end to that pain and misery; a happy release. But how? She contemplated how she might die by her own hand, noting the ideas in her journal, but no option was easy. She was aware of the Exit organisation in Switzerland, which helped terminally ill people to die with dignity at a time of their choosing. But they would never consider her case a worthy one; she knew they would only advise therapy. If she chose to die it would be her and her alone; no one would help her. Before the incident she had never even considered her mortality. As a healthy woman in her forties she was more concerned with matters of life than those of death. Now it seemed that it was the only viable alternative to her miserable existence.

To distract herself she decided to write to the police commissioner to express her disgust that a known rapist had been allowed to walk free due to their incompetence and no one was being held accountable. She was the one who was in captivity. Venting her anger helped for a short time but was ultimately just a pathetic cry against a sea of troubles pounding her mind night after night.

END OF SAMPLE

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