

AUTHOR OF WHEN DARKNESS FALLS

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN



HIDDEN DANGER

"IT'S LIKE YOU'RE LIVING THE NIGHTMARE YOURSELF"

HIDDEN DANGER

Kathleen Harryman

HIDDEN DANGER

Copyright © 2019 Kathleen Harryman

The right of Kathleen Harryman to be identified as author(s) of this work has been asserted by their accordance with section 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author(s).

Any person who commits any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the product of the authors imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

Edited by Eeva Lancaster

Formatting by The Book Khaleesi

www.thebookkhaleesi.com

Cover Design by Kathleen Harryman

<https://www.kathleenharryman.com/digital-artwork>

First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

BOOKS BY KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

THRILLER

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LOOKING GLASS
WHEN DARKNESS FALLS
HIDDEN DANGER

ROMANCE

THE PROMISE

POETRY

LIFE'S ECHOES

COMING SOON

PARANORMAL

ANGELS AT WAR TRILOGY:
BOOK ONE: THE BLACK FEATHER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge thank you goes out to Alastair Cargill for the use of his scientific brain. When I told him what I wanted to accomplish with *Hidden Danger*, he embraced my idea with encouragement and a sense of adventure. I really enjoyed our discussions and all the advice that he gave me. There are few people who can listen to the mumbling of a thriller author who writes from the killer's point of view.

To Stuart Rollins, for helping me with the technical aspects of natural gas. For his understanding as I explained what I wanted, and how I was to achieve it. We had quite a conversation in Glasgow. I hope those that overheard us discussing how-to blow-up houses and kill people, understood that it was for fictional purposes only.

To the lovely people at The Book Khaleesi and Eeva Lancaster for their editing and formatting services. You really know how to make a book shine.

I'd also like to acknowledge all the independent authors out there who have supported me over the years. There are some wonderful authors in every genre you can think of. Books to entertain children, young adults and adults. I have made some great friends over the years, and if you get a moment to check out my Twitter feed, you'll find them there.

When I started writing this book, I never foresaw how my life would change. On the 27th of April 2018, I lost one of the most precious of people in my life, my Dad. I feel fortunate for the years we had together. He is never far from my thoughts and is always in my heart. I could never have started this writing journey without him, and I know that each time I

HIDDEN DANGER

write, he is with me, guiding me, and helping me. It is in remembrance of him that I make this acknowledgement. I shall forever be grateful for the love he gave me.

When hard times come, it is then that we discover our own strength. If I have half the strength my mum has, I will be strong enough to see this life to its end. Altered, but happy. I am blessed for she really is an exceptional person. She encourages me daily to keep writing, and to be me.

To my sisters, Maureen and Julie... you are both unique and special to me. Our strength is our love for each other.

I would also like to thank my husband, Stephen. He is a wonderful and special person... one I could never manage all this without. Thank you for your faith in me.

This book would be nothing without you, dear reader. I hope that you find a world to lose yourself in within these pages. Thank you for supporting me.

Dedicated to Stephen

PROLOGUE

I find it strange how we view our young as a species. Faces full of innocence, we miss the inner person hiding inside. It's why we react with astonishment, revulsion, and fear when faced with their evil deeds. Our shock resonates like a siren echoing across the silence of our souls. The burden of our social expectations becomes damaged. Psychologists take advantage of this, programming us to think it's not the child's fault. That external factors are to blame, contributing to their behaviour. It is a peculiar analysis; one I've exploited many times. Youth, for now, is on my side. It's like a ticking bomb. *Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.* One day, I'll be old, and people will no longer blame external factors for the evil I have done.

My name is Rita Jackson. I am sixteen years old and a serial killer.

I've been killing since I was eight. Are you shocked by that? Perhaps you're wondering how an eight-year-old child could commit such terrible acts. It's that programming I mentioned earlier... it has you questioning my deeds. You seek justification for my actions. Instead, you need to consider the possibility that the young can be evil. Or we will continue to shock and frighten you with our repugnant deeds. Child

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

killers are few, yet we touch you deep in your core. The crimes of the young will destroy and rip your delusions apart. To you, our actions are unquantifiable. You seek answers where none exist.

Society dictates that our young be carbon copies of ourselves. Such rationale makes it impossible to understand the hideous action of the child killer. It clouds your judgement and prevents you from seeing the monster. It is why I continue to take advantage of my youth.

Many have fallen prey to my young looks and tender age. Your lack of understanding allows me to keep killing. All you see is a child, and never the monstrous creature that hides within.

Never forget, I am evil.

A beast lives inside me.

When the Beast woke, I realised my true destiny. I recognised it as being a part of me. It was me. I don't suffer from schizophrenia, though I appreciate the links psychologists will make. I don't have psychotic episodes. I'm more than capable of distinguishing my own thoughts and ideas. I don't hear voices whispering inside my head, other than the Beast's, which is acceptable to me.

However, should the police catch me, I will ensure that the psychologist has knowledge of the Beast. I may find it necessary to put on a display to persuade them of my non-existent condition and convince them of a mental illness I don't suffer from. If it stops the legal system from throwing me in prison, I'll use it. Insanity is always a good plea.

The Beast is the creature that lives inside me for the kill. It hungers and ravishes at the tender flesh within my body. I do not look to it for ideas, I'm conscious of what I do and the monstrous perceptions my actions have on others. The Beast

HIDDEN DANGER

is an aspect of me I acknowledge and embrace, as someone would embrace their selfish nature. My mind is clear. I understand that what I do is unacceptable to society.

A person has many sides... personality traits. The Beast is one of mine.

For you, killing someone is too repulsive to contemplate. Such notions cloud your cognitive processing and invades your cerebral thoughts. You're reasoning is limited, rendering you incapable of moving away from the fear that pounds at your heart when faced with the likes of me.

You want to live.

I want to kill you.

It's a game that's centuries old. The predator has always hunted the weak. Society hasn't moved forward, it's an illusion. In reality, all society has accomplished is to build a concrete fortress to hide within. You've made the game more interesting and very entertaining. The evolution of our species only brought more players to the contest. Humans aren't only studying animals, but themselves. Isn't that what psychologists are doing? Studying our species for answers to theories that are unsolvable. The solutions they're providing aren't answers. They're meant to comfort, not enlighten. People hate to face the truth, assembling invisible shields wrapped in lies, to keep out reality. Someone like me comes along and we put a dent in the shield. Your anxieties become an epidemic. So, the psychologist pours on an elixir of calming words, convincing you my upbringing is to blame. Did someone subject me to torturous and cruel acts at a young and impressionable age? Your young are safe. Children like me are exceptions caused by actions unforeseen, which broke down the mental receptors prohibiting normal behaviour.

But let me correct you... I was evil from conception. I know

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

your social wiring requires you to dispute that sentence. Are we not defined by our environment? Our family? Our experiences? I would disagree. My mum is a very nice woman who's loving and kind. She's never hit me or locked me away in a cupboard and has always placed my welfare above her own. She did make me wear dresses and put ribbons in my hair, but that's not a contributory factor in the making of a killer. It was just irritating. I hate dresses, ribbons and looking cute. My brother Jack is ten years older than me. You could say I was a mistake, but you'd be wrong. I'm mum's miracle baby. My parents adopted Jack when he was eight after the doctors told her she couldn't have kids. Turns out, the doctors were wrong.

So here I am, the miracle child, with morals laced in evil and loving it.

You might be thinking that I've missed someone. What about Daddy? Let me tell you, I'm my father's salvation. Without me, he's nothing. He knows I'm evil, but he doesn't know how monstrous I am. At the moment, I need him to clean up my kills and dispose of the bodies. Like most dependencies, it won't last forever. He hasn't worked this out yet, but he will... the day I kill him.

That's how it happens every time. None of my victims saw death coming until it was too late for them. Daddy, of all people, should understand this. I'm outgrowing him. His usefulness is diminishing as old age creeps in. Death is catching up with him, licking at his heels.

But, like my victims, he's blinded by his perceptions of me. He'll never comprehend my true capabilities or the evil person I am. Daddy wants to be the killer, but his weak mind prevents him from committing murder. He has to satisfy his urges by witnessing my kills. I don't just destroy one life

HIDDEN DANGER

when I kill someone... I crush the life of my victim's families as I suck the life out of their loved one. Until Daddy found his little girl killing animals, he'd kept his obsession with death hidden behind TV programs like *Born to Kill* and *True Crime*. Now, he has a front-row seat to every one of my kills. And I get to remind him just how much he needs me.

Trust me when I say psychologists are brainwashing you. They want you to trust in their theories. That they can save someone as wicked as me. Well, you can't save people like me. We are what we are, and no amount of brain fixing can rescue us from ourselves. Are we not all unique? Our tolerance thresholds differ, and my tolerance to cause harm and kill clashes with yours. That doesn't mean I'm crazy, so stop looking for excuses and quit labelling me. A psychologist categorising my behavioural traits will not keep you safe. The labels change nothing. Serial killers keep on killing. People keep on dying. And more labels and categories are created to justify their presence. A behavioural category will not stop people from committing heinous crimes. It's there to make psychologists feel that they're necessary, as more of them are created to respond to the ever-increasing need.

But they're playing with your mind. These are just illusions to protect your mental well-being. In truth, they are conditioning you like lab mice.

There is a psychotherapeutic method known as Flooding, designed to enable the sufferer to overcome phobias. They force a person to face their worst fear. Such techniques are unethical nowadays, as it causes intense distress. Systematic Desensitisation (SD) has replaced Flooding as it's seen as being calmer and more appropriate. SD exposes participants to their fear gradually. I think of my killing spree as Flooding. I'm a rip-the-band-aid-off kind of person, instantly releasing my

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

victims of their fears and anxieties.

There's an expectation within humanity that domesticated animals will evolve beyond their basic instinct. You cannot change an animal or refine its temperament and alter its genetic requirement to hunt by labelling it a pet. You cannot remove nature from the beast no matter its environment.

While I recognise that our behavioural development is part environment (nurture) and part innate (our nature), the percentage split isn't even. Nature has more influence. If you're looking for proof, look no further than the domestic cat that keeps bringing the dead mice home; or drags the bird through the cat flap with its insides hanging out. That's evidence that we retain our nature even in the most domesticated environment. Trust me, no amount of petting and loving will make the creature forget the impulses it was born with.

Humans are still animals, and our animal instincts remain, albeit hidden most of the time. Psychologists presume that study and research can explain human nature... but they can't.

As the world advances and psychologists and law enforcement learn more about the behavioural traits of the killer, the more the killer learns to adapt and hide. The hope you seek doesn't exist. All psychologists are doing is opening a mental pathway to lessen your fear. They want you to buy into their fairy-tale. Therapy cannot suppress a killer's nature. It's just a band-aid. The inner person remains.

So, while you're living with the fantasy they fed you, I'll keep killing. Hope is merely a stupid word to keep you from facing the truth. Let me tell you... there is no hope. Not when I'm around. Are you shaking your head? I'm trying not to smile. It's a malevolent smile which you'd do well to heed. Take the warning, or death might claim you.

HIDDEN DANGER

I'm a fair person. You're surprised I say that, aren't you? You're lucky because none of my other victims received a warning. Let's see if you'll take the warning or continue believing that someone as young as me cannot be a born killer. That with therapy, a psychologist can save me. If I were you, I'd stop listening to the psychologists and question your social expectations. Start viewing people like me as a threat, because one day, we just might meet.

1

Rita Jackson

*S*he threw back her head and laughed. Her long blonde hair spilling down her back. Her blue eyes sparkled with excitement as she pouted her plump, cerise, glossy lips. The skirt she wore skimmed the tops of her toned thighs. Long, bare, tanned legs bewitched the male customers in the coffee shop. Her heeled sandals rang out a soft beat upon the wooden floor as she walked, flexing the muscles in her legs. Friends flanked her. Their eyes cast downward as they looked at the iPhone resting in her palm.

I nodded in the woman's direction, tapping my pink Converse shoe on the metal table leg. "She's next." I sipped on my full-fat latte. For the first time today, I smiled.

The early afternoon sun beat down, slipping beneath the dark red canvas awning of the coffee shop. The canopy offered little protection from the sun's heat. Unprotected skin sizzled and burned as UV rays bit unto uncovered flesh like fire ants. As I'm a redhead, I used nothing less than a 50 SPF. I never tanned, just burned.

HIDDEN DANGER

Positioned in the shade, I enjoyed the sun's heat. I sat back against the woven cane chair, relaxed and unnoticed. No one looked in my direction. Uninterested in the young girl enjoying a day out with her dad in Whitby. With my abundance of freckles and my long auburn pigtails, innocence radiated from me. The sightseers walking along Baxtergate would never suspect I was a serial killer. When selecting my victims, Costa Coffee was my favourite place. They littered our streets like flies, offering protection from the weather, no matter the season. Costa Coffee was a place people would never associate with a serial killer. That was the problem with society... it never stopped to consider that a serial killer might do '*normal*' things. A serial killer would need to appear '*normal*' to conceal their true nature... which was what I was exactly doing. While I didn't agree with the term '*normal*', I accepted it because of the convenience it afforded me.

Whitby was the next desirable place on my serial killing list. With its links to the supernatural, it possessed a dark history. Bram Stoker's visit to Whitby in 1890 provided him with an atmospherical location for his gothic novel, *Dracula*. The fictional killer brought hordes of tourists and their money to its beaches. It was time for Whitby to embrace a new killer... the Gas Man. Once the town was linked to a serial killer as renowned as the Gas Man, its popularity would grow by significant proportions.

It was Goth Weekend. This event was first established in 1994 by Jo Hampshire and claimed to be one of the premier Goth events in the world. Twice a year, around April and October, Goths flocked to the coastal town of Whitby. However, some costumes on display leaned more towards bondage and S&M. I watched a man walk past with a metal cage around his lower jaw, wearing the tightest black leather trousers I'd ever

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

seen someone squeeze themselves into. A set of handcuffs dangled from his belt hook. My suspicions were confirmed. He didn't understand what an actual 'Goth' was. His dress was as factious as vampires.

I hated him on sight. Research was essential, no matter how trivial the subject appeared. I couldn't respect anyone who neglected such fundamental details. He'd chosen his costume with his limited assumption of what a Goth would wear. The name Goth stemmed from the Germanic Tribes; Visigoths, who lived between the Danube and Dniester rivers, and the Ostrogoths, who lived in what we know now as Ukraine. The Romans found them barbaric and uncultured and harassed them for centuries. Later came the black clothing and dramatic makeup.

I'd toyed with the fantasy of a serial killer weekend. Imagine everyone dressing up as their favourite serial killer — like the Gas Man. My lips curled in distaste. Fantasy dissolving, as the man walked past. No doubt, everyone would walk around wearing a gas mask. Pleased with their faux authenticity of the serial killer. Given the pressure the police were under to catch the Gas Man, I'm sure they'd appreciate it if I went around wearing a gas mask. I'd be easier to identify and catch. Alas, it was a whimsical notion.

There I sat... the Gas Man. My fingers twisting around my auburn pigtail. Harmless to the onlooker. Unnoticed and preoccupied with selecting my next kill. People were so busy that their lives blinded them. They remained confident in their preconceived ideas of a killer, never seeing what was in front of their faces. I realised that it's difficult to look at me and see a killer. At sixteen, I looked young for my age — more around the age of twelve. Zillions of freckles lined my cheeks and nose. I had soft, baby-faced features in which sat liquid brown,

HIDDEN DANGER

trusting eyes. The average sixteen-year-old would hate the fact that they looked more like twelve than sixteen. They would apply makeup in thick layers to disguise their very youthful appearance.

Me? I loved it.

The media gave birth to my serial killer name — Gas Man. Their assumptions towards my gender were provided to them by professional profilers. Their hypothesis corrupted by memories of the Yorkshire Ripper, who had terrorised the citizens of Yorkshire back in the 1970s. Peter Sutcliffe killed thirteen women and attempted to kill seven more before the police stopped him in 1981. West Yorkshire Police received much criticism in their handling of the case. The police had brought Peter Sutcliffe in for questioning on two separate occasions. At the start of Sutcliffe's reign of terror, his victims had been prostitutes, taken while they walked the streets of the well-known red-light districts of Yorkshire. The police and press presented a united front in the embryonic stages of Sutcliffe's killing rampage. They accepted the murders because of the victim's profession. Categorised as an occupational hazard, the police response had been routine. The critique would influence their handling of such cases, even today. Mistakes like that didn't just vanish. Their stain remained.

While the Gas Girl would have been a more appropriate title, it would be inconceivable to the police and their profilers. Girls don't kill.

Besides, Gas Girl didn't induce the same intimidating fear as Gas Man. Perhaps it's the word 'man' which made it sound more threatening. How they reached this conclusion was easy to understand, even without the haunting presence of Peter Sutcliffe. The body count was increasing at a worrying rate. It wasn't logical for a girl of my age to be the killer. My victims

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

came from the various towns and cities which made up Yorkshire. The geographic size of Yorkshire is 11,903 km². About 4,596 miles. A lot of ground for a 'girl' killer to cover, with no means of transport other than a push-bike which sat in the garage covered in cobwebs, and local transportation like buses, taxi cabs, and trains. It conjured up a comical vision of a girl sitting in a taxi and screaming, "Catch that man. I want to kill him!"

Despite there being a serial killer operating in the area, Yorkshire was a beautiful county. You should experience its Roman and Viking heritage, Norman castles, medieval abbeys, and its two national parks — the Peak District and Yorkshire Dales. Its cities included York, Leeds, Sheffield, and Huddersfield, etcetera. Have a look around but choose a day when I'm not around looking for my next victim. You might not get the chance to brag about how beautiful Yorkshire was. You could be famous suddenly as one of the Gas Man's victims. Your picture could adorn TV screens and social media. You might be thinking... *not under those circumstances*. Well, as they say, you can't have everything.

I looked across at Daddy as his eyes devoured the newspaper clasped between his chubby hands. Prior to the birth of the Gas Man, he'd never picked up a newspaper. Never mind contemplated reading one. The Gas Man was front page news, and he'd developed an intense thirst to lap up everything the paparazzi wrote about the serial killer. Caught within their web of lies and make-believe, Daddy hungered for more. Like a spider ready for the fly, the media spun its well-crafted silken web. Daddy drank it up, the thirst never wavering. I'd laugh at his newfound obsession if I considered him funny, but his delusional reasoning made me irritable. He was a rash I wish I could scratch away. Watching me kill did not make him the killer. He

HIDDEN DANGER

was getting too cocky, taking my killings and turning them into his glory. Cocky spelt sloppy. Too many killers found themselves in prison because they saw themselves as invincible.

I was having a lot of fun playing with the police and their profilers. Random... it was key to staying under their radar, allowing me to keep on killing. If I wasn't careful, Daddy would bring my killing rampage to a premature end.

My eyes swung toward the woman still tittering over her iPhone, her friend's laughter encouraging her to continue.

The rustling of paper drew my attention to the fat man next to me. Like a chauffeur, Daddy drove me around Yorkshire as I selected my victims. It wasn't a difficult job, and it suited him. In his warped mind, he had become the Gas Man. An illogical and egotistical, distorted image. I was the killer, not him. He might be fatter and older than me, and at a hundred and ninety centimetres presented a more imposing figure, but still, he didn't have what it took to kill. I was the lure, Daddy the restrainer. My tolerance was fast diminishing and useful or not, I found myself exasperated at how often I needed to remind him of his status. Perhaps, I had been too subtle. I smirked inward. My brother Jack would laugh at the idea of me being subtle. My directness at home was legendary.

Long before our law enforcement admitted they were dealing with a serial killer, social media had picked up on the increasing body count. It showed the power social media had on our everyday lives. People tweeted 'Gas Man - a serial killer at large.' Facebook users published 'Gas Man strikes again - are we safe?' The paparazzi were quick to add their own pressure onto our police. Photographs of gas masks peppered newspapers and mobile screens.

My healthy fixation for oxygen led them to my serial killer name. The body's requirement for oxygen fascinated me and I

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

liked to suffocate my victims, slowly, watching them as they struggled to come to terms with death. Some cried and begged, while others became angry. Once their body stopped twitching and death claimed them, I carved the image of a gas mask into their right cheek. Some would consider my serial killer name a lazy attempt by the paparazzi at finding a more unique and threatening nickname. Me? I wasn't bothered at all. As long as people kept fearing me, and I could keep on killing, I had no complaints. I had enough to contend with, with the sluggish slob sitting next to me.

Daddy looked over the newspaper, his eyes following the incline of my head to the girl and her seemingly identical friends. Cloning has been around since 1952 when scientists successfully cloned a tadpole. In 1992, scientists at the Roslin Institute near Edinburgh revealed a cloned sheep known as Dolly. By 2005, scientists had cloned their first human embryo. While there are those that object to human cloning, the women here weren't among them. They looked alike and acted alike, losing their individual identities and turning into clones of each other.

"She seems popular."

I rolled my eyes at his comment. He wasn't a risk-taker, nor was he imaginative. That's what he needed me for, amongst other things. "It'll make it more interesting," I coaxed.

He continued to stare at the clones for a prolonged second. I picked up the empty coffee mug and tapped my fingers against it. As my stubby nails sent out a soft ringing noise, I watched Daddy's eyes lower back to the newspaper. I allowed him time to ponder my suggestions. The art of manipulation was to allow for gentle processing. Rush them and people will never do what you want. Manipulation is a time-consuming and taxing process.

HIDDEN DANGER

It was her popularity that attracted me. I hated her on sight. Flanked by her friends, laughing and gaining attention by the second, she made popular look easy. She was the image I worked hard to project to the world. To gain people's trust, I became the very thing I despised. I wasn't interested in people, other than killing them. I disliked having to converse with them, pretending their silly problems interested me. Loners made society uneasy, viewing them as recluses or mavericks. To look and act like everyone else are traits that made someone popular.

Popularity has its problems, though. Without individual personalities, they were boring. Yes, they were pretty with their long hair in varying shades and beautiful made-up faces. Their skin almost orange from too much spray tan and their super skinny bodies encased in super tight trousers and skimpy tops. Their oversized handbags hooked over one arm, with the ever-present mobile phone grasped in the other hand. Boring.

It wasn't suitable for a killer (*if they wanted to keep killing*), to present the world with their lack of emotional connection. The world demanded 'normal' whatever that meant. Therefore, I was forced to conceal my true nature. Not having the same emotional constraints induced fear in people. Like the women in the coffee shop, I pretended to be a clone, adhering to society's demands.

I'd read an interview with psychologist James Garbarino which grabbed my attention. He was an advocate for giving teenage killers a second chance. A load of dribble based on unfounded theories that didn't consider the true workings of a killer's mind. That was my opinion, as imperfect and judgmental it might be. As a teenage killer, I had more experience in this matter than Garbarino. His hypothesis outlined that underneath the layers of violent and sociopathic tendencies, there

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

was a person who needed *'help.'* Quite a laughable conjecture to one such as me. I view psychologists as egotistical. Their notion that they could save a killer meant that killers were mindless creatures that could be controlled, manipulated and reprogrammed.

That's where they got it all wrong. Killing was an instinct. How could they overwrite the brain's natural impulses based on the creature's nature? An alligator will eat you if presented with the opportunity. The basic need for food overrode the conscious brain. An alligator would look at humans the same way we view chocolate — as a yummy snack. Garbarino might want to *'help'* someone like me, but he couldn't save me. I had a deep loathing towards professionals like James Garbarino.

Psychologists operated under the illusion that they understood a killer's viewpoint, but a psychopath's brain functions are different. Without the predisposition to kill, one can't truly comprehend why killers like me kill and enjoy it. Garbarino spoke of moral dilemmas. Those morals are theirs, not mine. I have none. When I kill, I am made whole. How could the likes of Garbarino internalise that?

Psychologists are singular in their analysis of us. They'd like us to conform with the labels they assigned to us. Their encroachment upon my mental wellness was unwarranted. I had no self-righteous need to inflict my view upon the clone girls in the coffee shop. I might not like them, but I had no need for their brain's cognitive reasoning to echo my own. Years spent observing behaviours did not enable a person to fathom the inner working mind of another. A killer was an artful schemer. Even when captured, their answers and actions depended on their level of boredom and self-interest. Imprisonment of the body did not prevent the mind from seeking chaos. The game between psychologists and law enforcement did not affect them.

HIDDEN DANGER

A killer would still play with your mind, if you let it.

I ground my teeth as Daddy shuffled the newspaper. The act reminded me of his presence. I despised the fact that I needed him. My small body forced me to accept his help and it infuriated me. At eight, when I'd first killed, I'd been unaware of my limitations. As I grew older and wiser, I found I could no longer ignore my body's shortcomings. They screamed at me daily. Daddy's existence was a constant reminder of my body's frailty, like the itching of an insect bite that was hard to ignore.

Perhaps I should swat him away, stop him from biting at my nerves. I smiled, appreciating the image of his head squashed at an odd angle beneath a giant swatter. Daddy's attitude towards me was changing. The delusional fool was under the misplaced notion that he could control me. I couldn't allow this new-found attitude of Daddy's from developing any further. The necessity of finding a replacement had become more urgent.

I eliminated my problems in a simplistic and enjoyable fashion; I killed them. Him being my father changed nothing. I felt nothing for him but irritation. An emotion I would be better without. His arrogance would be his destruction. He was getting older and slower. Daddy didn't notice his body ageing, but I did. It was slowing down, his muscles complaining at night, and his increasing body mass created its own health problems. His beer consumption was another issue he refused to recognise. His liver, I was sure, worked overtime to cope.

I breathed deep, filling my lungs with warm air. The Beast woke; its paws stretching, claws raking at my tender skin. In silence, I nodded at the Beast. We needed a plan... one that would lead to Daddy's beautiful and untimely death. Our heads inclined as one as we considered our options. Together, we drew up a mental list of activities Daddy performed for the

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

Gas Man. For me.

1. Chauffer.
2. Cleaner.
3. Muscle.

The Beast and I appraised the list. It was short, making Daddy easy to replace. When I killed, Daddy watched with eyes glistening with unsuppressed pleasure, as the light died from my victim's eyes. Life was fragile. It hung on by a delicate thread. That fact remained unappreciated until someone like me came along and extinguished it. Daddy also excelled in his role as the Gas Man's cleaner, with his big bottles of bleach and long, black rubber gloves. His driving skill was suspect, though. We trundled along at a steady slow rate.

My gaze lingered on him as he continued to read the newspaper article. Beneath the layer of fat was muscle, though too much exertion led to profuse amounts of sweat, and yet he still believed he could control me. My eyes stared at his face where a smile tugged at the corners of his lips. He'd forgotten he was a nothing. A nobody. It took a special person to take a life and to feel no regret or remorse.

My killer-self awoke when I was eight, triggered by the cat next door. I observed in deep fascination as it stalked, toyed, and killed its prey. When the killing blow came and the mouse lay still, the cat walked away. Its fascination dying at the same point the mouse took its last breath. At that moment, I felt the Beast stir inside me. This strange, almost alien being whispered in my head, calling to the dormant killer within. I now understood why I could never give mum the emotional warmth she craved from me. Like the cat, I was a predator, and I will seize the advantage and kill. Freedom opened its door and I liked

HIDDEN DANGER

what I saw. The Beast raked claws against my flesh as it stretched out its paw. Its head raising with interest. I wanted to kill and taste the moment death came.

The next day, I sorted out the cat.

My Beast encouraged me to mimic its actions.

To stalk it.

Play with it.

Kill it.

And leave its lifeless body to rot.

Instantaneous gratification flooded my body. I understood the cat's need to kill. To be the hunter. My Beast smiled inside me, satisfied for a while.

Being only eight, I hadn't learned, nor had thought about, covering my tracks. The only thing I cared about was my next kill. When Daddy found me covered in cat blood, he smiled. Revulsion never fell across his face. Instead, I became the solution. No longer would he have to satisfy his urges by watching televised re-enactments staged by TV producers. Naivety was not my blessing, however. At only eight, I was incapable of understanding Daddy's weakness. Unconcerned, I welcomed the opportunity to learn how to become a better killer. Under Daddy's careful instruction, I moved from the common pet to people. My youthful innocence evaporated. But Daddy stagnated as I grew. It wasn't long before I came to understand how much he needed me. The older I became, the more Daddy's usefulness waned. He was the cage that my killer-self paced within in. While he lived, he would forever try to control me and suffocate me. I would never reach my potential.

I cocked my head, flipping my pigtail over my shoulder. My brown eyes lingered on the group of girls. "You know, we could make this a mass kill. That would be something new."

In slow motion, Daddy lowered the newspaper. He looked

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

back at the girls, his hazel eyes sparkling with interest. He was so easy to manipulate. His tongue snaked out, wetting his lips. I watched his Adam's Apple as it bobbed. Like a fish on a hook, I'd caught him. The Beast raised its head and together we surveyed our prey. My palms became sweaty. My pink t-shirt sticking to my skin. I uncrossed my legs, re-crossed them, lifting my mug off my skinny jeans. My eyes never left the Clones.

"I suppose we could do that."

I smiled. *Yes, I suppose we could.*

It was time for the Gas Man to evolve, and Herman Webster Mudgett was my chosen source of inspiration. Born in the 1800s, Mudgett was a serial killer well beyond his time. Mudgett reinvented himself when he started working at a pharmacy in Edgewood, Chicago. Now known as Dr. Henry Howard Holmes, he embraced this new chapter in his life and started seducing women out of their money. H. H. Holmes had been an intelligent and respectable man on the outside... a killer and con man on the inside. His three-story house trapped his victims within its soundproofed rooms. It was a house of deception, with secret passages, trapdoors, and body-sized chutes that led the dead to two furnaces. Holmes used gas to asphyxiate them. You could never escape the body's need for oxygen. The connection I felt with Holmes was more than just one killer appraising the other. We both had an insatiable appetite for starving our victims of oxygen. However, the most attractive fact about Holmes was the status he carried as America's first serial killer. Holmes was an original. Rumoured to have killed twenty-seven people. Even today, no one knew the exact number of his victims. He professed to the murder of several people found to be alive. With only ashes to identify the body count, there was no way of confirming the full total. Holmes also confused authorities with his confessions. Even when captured,

HIDDEN DANGER

Holmes didn't finish playing his games. An intelligent mind required stimulation, and Holmes found his new stimuli in playing with law enforcement. I wanted to be like Herman Webster Mudgett, also known as Dr. Henry Howard Holmes, but better.

Off the A64 eastbound sat an old derelict farmhouse which I'd passed many times while travelling in Daddy's van. From my limited vantage point, the roofs looked shabby. Windows were missing, boarded-up, or broken. The owner had left it to rot. That didn't matter, I'd offer it a new life. Give the farmhouse purpose and make it beautiful again. Holmes had converted his three-story home into a killer's paradise. I would have Daddy convert the farmhouse as well. I didn't expect to find electricity or gas to feed the property. But even if the utility feeds were live, I wouldn't use them. I needed the farmhouse to remain off the grid, to keep its unassuming, dilapidated identity.

Technology in the 1800s wasn't what it is today. A killer needed to be smart. When Daddy caught me killing, he'd seen an opportunity and invested in it. I'd watched enough programmes like CSI and True Crime to understand how significant traceability and evidence were to the police. They played a key factor in capturing the killer. Growth in profiling enabled the police to get a clearer picture of the perpetrator. They were no longer looking for a monster, but a person where the monster lived.

Howard Teten and Patrick Mullany were the earliest credited with using behavioural analyses for problematic cases. Teten developed a hypothesis using evidence found at the crime scene to determine the perpetrator. I found Teten's theory fascinating. I wondered what he'd say about Daddy's habit of

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

pouring copious amounts of bleach over my victim's lifeless bodies. Once treated with bleach, Daddy wrapped the corpse in an unused plastic sheet. He would then dump the body on the roadside, miles away from the actual murder scene. It must be difficult to form a correct analysis when the crime scene itself wasn't available. The police never made public if they'd found one of my crime scenes, and I never went back to find out. Killers who revisited their crime scene got caught.

I never crossed the arms of my victims. I left their faces on display, uncovered. I wasn't sorry for the life I took and didn't want to present the illusion that I was. The urge to play with the profilers was strong. To mislead them and cover the faces of the dead as I stared down at them. Like the cat played with the mouse. Playing with the local law enforcement and their advisors was tempting, but the kill took precedent. Too many killers became absorbed with the mind games and they lost. The only thing I left the profilers was my signature — a gas mask carved into the right cheek of my victims. They might think that the bleached bodies were part of a cleansing ritual or showed an obsessive tendency. I looked at Daddy. He was a neurotic chap, with his compelling need for cleansing the bodies and removing the evidence. The kill was the important part, not the game. Daddy's need to dip the corpse in the corrosive substance would become redundant at the farmhouse. Like Myra Hindley and Ian Brady who buried their victims on Saddleworth Moor, the farmhouse sat within several acres of land. Enough space to bury the bodies. Daddy would realise only one of us was in charge then... and that's me. He could try and take credit for my kills. The world was full of spineless, unimaginative people like him. But I won't let that happen.

I took a deep calming breath. My anger dispersed as air expelled.

HIDDEN DANGER

I thought about an article I'd read on former FBI Agent John Douglas. Douglas was very influential in the science behind criminal investigation and criminal profiling. The studying and comprehension of profiling are important for someone like me. If I understood how profiling was being used to catch the perpetrator, I could use it against the profiler. God bless a profiler's need to write books, appear on TV shows and the internet. Human nature hasn't evolved. We still carry the basic need to be applauded for our work. Told '*well done*' and patted on the head, like a dog longing to hear it's a '*good dog*.' It hinders the fight against crime. Too many people like to boast about how they'd caught the killer or prevented a crime. They put their work into books, did TV interviews and such. Douglas believed that to understand the artist, you looked at the artwork. I must admit that I viewed my kills as beautiful pieces of art. Douglas also reasoned that to understand the criminal, one must study the crime. It was no longer enough for killers like me to kill. We had to be smart.

The Gas Man was a complex killer. It seemed the police and their advisors could not comprehend that the killer was a girl of sixteen years/ Or perhaps they looked at the artistry of the kill and concluded the perpetrator was male, with a job that led him to encounter a wide selection of people. A job which required him to travel. Perhaps their theories made them think that the Gas Man's occupation was that of a long-distance lorry driver. It would make sense.

It wasn't easy for the profiler to see me. No one wanted to believe in the possibility of an eight-year-old girl evolving into the Gas Man. Eight is such a tender, impressionable, innocent age. The police and their profilers would never catch me. Until they saw the evil in their young, their reasonings would always have its limitations. And because of that, killers like me will

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

continue to kill... unnoticed.

Society will never change or adapt its point of view of people like me. Like a myth or fairy tale, preconceived ideas are hard to let go. People wanted to believe in the innocence and the beautiful purity of their young.

Technology worked for the police and the killer, like a game of spider and fly. I would never become a fly, that title would belong to Daddy, but he's too stupid to realise it. I've spent hours researching to ensure I remained under the police radar. Being careful prevented correlations from forming. My enjoyment came from mixing things up, like a bag of sweets.

The police had yet to locate all my victims. I made sure Daddy placed some in deep graves rather than leaving them all by the roadside. I enjoyed keeping pieces of the jigsaw puzzle hidden.

Once, I overheard a chap say serial killers were stupid. Yet most serial killers managed to murder several people before being caught. Not so stupid, if you asked me. The chap's dead now, so are his opinions, buried in one of those deep graves of Daddy's. Perhaps now, he had a better understanding of a serial killer's mind. If he'd been clever, he'd never have allowed me to kill him.

The metal legs of the chair scraped across the concrete as I stood up. "Fancy another?"

"Don't mind if I do."

The mugs clanged as I picked them up. I sauntered over to the barista, past the group of Clones. I smiled as I walked past them.

My smile said, "Which one of you am I going to kill first?"

The Clones ignored me, like so many stupid people before them.

This would be fun.

2

Jack Jackson

I rubbed the sweat from my palms down the leg of my jeans as I watched Daisy Jones walk down the aisle. It was only our wedding rehearsal and yet my nerves were already spiking. My mouth felt dry, my throat parched. Daisy smiled, flashing her perfect white teeth at me. My heart rate amplified, its loud, insistent beat drumming in my ears. Her faded blue boyfriend jeans swung around her slim legs. The large yolk neck of her t-shirt slid off her shoulder at one corner, revealing the white strap of her bra. She shook out her long blonde hair as her blue eyes locked onto mine. My tongue snaked out, licking at my dry lips. I'd always considered Daisy out of my league; she was gorgeous, intelligent, kind-hearted and sexy. Yet, there I was preparing to make her my wife.

A stupid grin played across my face, as my eyes slid to my kid sister, Nutmeg, as she trailed behind Daisy in her role as a bridesmaid. She rolled her eyes at me and I shrugged in response. Rita might have outgrown her pet name, but I still

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

called her by it. Rita sounded so old for a sixteen-year-old. Nutmeg was friendlier, softer.

Terrance and Ruth Jackson had adopted me at eight-years-old. My biological mother had been a druggie who overdosed six months after they'd taken me into foster care. My birth father, I was led to understand, was in prison for stabbing his mate over a bottle of whisky. Somewhere, I had three older sisters; if they were still alive. I hadn't thought of finding them and ask them to shine a light on my past. They were twelve and ten years older than me, and at the time I was adopted, well established in prostitution. They were my past. One I had no desire to connect with.

I spent the first eight years of my life in an unpredictable and volatile environment. It made me overprotective towards my little sister. Not that my adopted parents were anything like my biological ones. However, I couldn't ignore my instinct to protect Nutmeg. The term *'Joe Average'* would be a fitting way to describe Terrance and Ruth Jackson. Dad worked for a small building firm which was expanding its business across Yorkshire. That meant he spent a lot of time away from home working on the bigger jobs. Mum worked part time at the local supermarket. Rita came along four years after my official adoption at nine years old. Being adopted didn't mean I loved my sister any less than a biological brother would, or that I saw Nutmeg as anything but my sister. DNA was not always an important ingredient for family. Nutmeg didn't need my protection. She was more than capable of taking care of herself. Sometimes she scared me. She possessed a dark coldness when her temper soared. Over the years, I'd seen her learn to control her anger. However, there was still odd times when her control slipped, and the cold white heat of her anger radiated from her. Other than

HIDDEN DANGER

slamming doors and throwing things, she'd never given me cause to think she'd act on her temper.

A shiver ran down my spine at the memory, causing the skin on my arms to tighten as the hairs stood to attention. Still, I was her brother... her big brother, and I couldn't help but feel like her protector.

Nutmeg's multi-coloured dyed hair caught the sunlight spilling through the series of stained-glass windows. The windows ran the length of the church walls, coming to a stop before the altar. Shades of red, purple, yellow and blue highlights glistened from her head like a kaleidoscopic crown. She resembled a crazy rainbow, which suited her wacky personality. Dad's reaction to Nutmeg's choice of hair colours had surprised me. He wasn't a man to overreact, however, as soon as he saw Nutmeg, his temper rocketed. The newspaper fell to the floor as he leapt out of his chair. The article he'd been reading on the Gas Man's latest kill forgotten.

"What the hell have you done?"

"Amazing, isn't it?" She smiled. I watched as she spun round and round, the multi-coloured strands flying around her.

"You look ridiculous. Like a bloody rainbow!" Dad had looked at Nutmeg in disbelief. "This changes everything!" His voice shook in anger. "What the bloody-hell were you thinking?" His anger amplified, and he became more agitated. "You'll ruin everything! Everything I've worked hard for... gone." His hands spread out in front of him, swiping at the air. "You know that don't you?" Nutmeg's eyebrow shot up. Dad ignored the silent question.

His eyes never left Nutmeg's hair as he spoke to me. "Jack, text your mother. Tell her to get some hair colour!"

"What colour?"

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

His hazel eyes swung in my direction. Sparks of green and blue fury locked onto my own. I wished I'd never asked.

"Ginger! What other bloody colour were you thinking!" Dad's attention spun back to Nutmeg. "When your mother gets home, you change back!"

Nutmeg's deep brown eyes stared at him, unblinking. A chill ran down my spine. "Make me." Her voice held a quiet coldness to it. Far more threatening, unlike Dad's shouting.

Dad looked like he would combust on the spot at Nutmeg's defiance. A deep shade of red began to creep up his neck and cheeks. "I'll make you all right!"

"No, you won't." Her crazy hair tumbled forward, catching the sun. Her eyes blazed and sparkled as though there was someone, or something else living inside her.

Dad moved to grab her arm. On instinct, I moved forward, although he'd never hit us before. But kids have a way of making the gentlest of people lose their temper beyond reason and control.

"Touch me and you'll lose me," her voice cut through the room like a steel knife.

Dad and I froze. Me waiting to see what he'd do next, and Dad contemplating Nutmeg's words. His eyes locked on hers. A slow smile spread across her lips as Dad moved away.

"That's what I thought." She sounded triumphant.

Dad turned, the momentum of his footsteps carrying him out of the room. The door banged and rattled against its frame as he left.

Nutmeg turned to me. "Well? Isn't it gorgeous? No one will forget me now." She twirled, her hair flying around her. I just stood there transfixed, unsure about what had just happened.

Nutmeg was a plain girl. Apart from her freckles and brown, deep set eyes, there wasn't much to remember. I guess

HIDDEN DANGER

if you've seen one girl with freckles, you've seen them all. Now, with her multicoloured hair, she was hard to forget. As far as stupid actions went, 'hair-gate,' as I referred to the incident, paled into insignificance. Lord knows what dad would have done if Nutmeg came home and proclaimed herself pregnant. I still didn't understand Dad's reaction to Nutmeg's hair colour. There was no logic to it. I was missing something... I just didn't know what.

Nutmeg stuck out her tongue at me, snapping my thoughts back to the present. My lips twitched, and my nerves melted away. Dad slapped me on the back as Daisy stood next to me. I took Daisy's hand as instructed by the vicar. Nutmeg shuffled behind us. The loose-fitting, colourful shirt I'd dared her to buy swaying around her denim shorts. I never thought she'd wear it. Now, with so much colour going on, I wished I'd kept my mouth shut.

"Nice of you to dress for the occasion," I said in a low voice as the vicar began talking.

Nutmeg looked down at her shorts and garish patterned shirt. "You're welcome. What about the shoes?"

My eyes slid to the Doc Martens with their thick, black rubber sole. "Nice touch, but aren't they a bit too girly? Metallic pink! Really?"

"The lady in the shop called the Doc Martens' colour, *Pink Pony Gold-mix*. Not metallic pink."

I took another peak at the shoes. "I bet they did. Pink Pony Gold-mix sounds more expensive than metallic pink."

Nutmeg rolled her brown eyes at me. Daisy squeezed my arm. I looked at the vicar who was gazing at me with an expectant expression on his face. Oops.

* * *

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

I looked up at the blue sky hoping the good weather would continue until after the wedding. It was important that nothing spoiled our wedding day.

"You're such a dork! Fancy fluffing your lines like that. You'd better not do it on the big day." Nutmeg laughed at me as we stepped out of the church into the sunshine.

"All right, that's enough cheek from you or you'll be walking home." I tried to sound stern. The smug smile on her face said I'd failed.

"No, I won't, because we both know you'd never leave me here to walk the seven miles home on my own. There's a serial killer on the loose. Remember?" She lifted her arms. "And before you say anything, no purse. See? So I can't get the bus. HA!"

Smart arse.

"I could always lend you a few quid for the bus."

"You? Part with money? That's a new one."

"It'd be worth it."

"Come on then, part with the dosh." She held her hand out, calling my bluff.

"Just get in the car."

"HA! Told you." She spun around. The sun caught her hair as she made her way over to my car.

Daisy laughed at me. "She's a smart kid, your sister."

"Hmm, maybe too smart." I threw my arm over Daisy's shoulders as we followed Nutmeg to the car. "Sorry, Debbie and Sandra couldn't make the rehearsal." Daisy had been so disappointed that her friends didn't make it. She'd wanted all her bridesmaids at the rehearsal, not just Nutmeg.

Daisy wrapped her left arm around my waist. "Their bosses are total arses. At least they can come to my final fitting, I guess."

HIDDEN DANGER

I nodded. "Work's pretty crap for a lot of us at the moment. Two more were made redundant last Friday. It's ridiculous! We're stretched as it is, with the increase in production and less of us to manage the orders. I'm not sure how we will cope with it all."

I worked for a small bakery in Leeds, which supplied several supermarkets with quiches and pork pies. I met Daisy when she came to audit us. It had turned out to be the best day of my life.

"You're not moaning about work again, are you?" Nutmeg leaned against my silver Volkswagen Polo 1.9 TDI 100 Sports car.

I frowned at her. "Don't you go scratching the paintwork! I haven't finished paying for it yet."

"I'm not scratching it. Geez, it's only a car."

Daisy laughed. "You have a lot to learn, Rita, about boys and their cars."

Nutmeg sent Daisy a sharp look. Sometimes, I got the impression that she didn't like Daisy. Perhaps, I was being hypersensitive. Nutmeg often had a strange expression on her face when she looked at people. Her head was a scary place. Pop bands or boys didn't fill her head like your average teenager.

I clicked on the car's key fob. The indicators flashed. "It's open, you can climb in." I called out, hoping to get her off the paintwork before she scratched it.

Nutmeg smiled, draping her body across the car and lifting her Doc Martens against the door. "Hey, I could be the next VW Model! What do you think?"

"I think if you don't get off the car, you'll be walking home. And I don't care how far it is or who's lurking around."

Nutmeg tossed her multi-coloured hair over her should-

KATHLEEN HARRYMAN

der. "You're no fun."

"Oh, I can be a lot of fun. It's not my fault you're not funny."

Daisy nodded her head. "I'll second that. Jack is a fun guy."

Nutmeg shot Daisy another cold stare as she moved away from the paintwork and opened the back-passenger door.

I sighed in relief. My relief was to be short-lived. "Hey watch the fabric! I can see boot marks from here!"

Nutmeg threw her hands in the air. "Get off the paintwork! Don't mark the fabric! Geez, Jack, you're getting more like mum by the second. And no, that's not a compliment. Don't do this. Don't do that. Geez, give me a break from your constant nagging, why don't you?"

I looked at Nutmeg and shook my head. "Mum's not that bad, and I'm not nagging. Wait until you get your first car, you'll be the same."

"Yeah right! Like I could afford a car. I can't even afford lessons. Dad says he'll teach me when I'm old enough, but I don't see it happening."

Daisy opened the front passenger door and slid into the seat next to me. I watched the top as it lifted away from her chest, offering me a little more flesh. She caught me looking and winked. I smiled back at her.

"You going to drive or sit there with that daft look on your face?" Nutmeg huffed.

Daisy laughed.

I loved the sound.

I placed the key in the ignition and the engine rumbled to life. I looked in the rear-view mirror at Nutmeg. "Geez, don't nag, will you?" I watched her eyes as they lifted to the ceiling at my impression of her, which I thought was fantastic. "What?" I

HIDDEN DANGER

raised my hands.

“You’re not funny. You know that, don’t you?” She stuck her knee into the back of my seat, making me laugh as I drove out the church’s car park.

“I thought it was funny. I am a funny guy.”

“Yeah, ‘course you are. If I was one of the infected in *The Living Dead*, I’d find you funny too. In the real world, you’re not funny at all.”

Daisy laughed next to me. I couldn’t stop myself from joining her.