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Trust Nobody

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CHAPTER 1

5 August 1962

'What the fuck . . . You planned this. Daisy, you bitch!'

She lifted the heavy hammer drill and pointed it at his head.

'Eddie, you deserve it,' she said, depressing the trigger. The machine whirred into life. The noise was deafening and the thing bucked in her hands but she was ready for it. What he'd done had sickened Daisy. Her brother-in-law kicked and strained uselessly at the nylon stockings that bound his wrists and ankles tightly to the iron bedstead. She could smell his fear and it mingled with her own.

Her heart was beating fast and as noisily as the drill. Never before had she attempted anything like this, but it was necessary. Necessary to frighten him into submission before he took charge of her life like he ran everyone else's.

His head was thrashing from side to side. Daisy could feel sweat running down her back and between her breasts as she moved the drill nearer to his temple.

'Don't fuck with me, Eddie.' He suddenly stopped writhing and looked her full in the eyes.

'You won't hurt me.'

'You don't know for sure, do you, though? Susie's fifteen. Too young for you, you bastard.' The noise and the vibration of the drill were making *her* nervous, let alone the man on the bed. What would happen if Eddie wouldn't promise? If he didn't stop making life difficult for her? She knew she couldn't go all the way with this but she daren't let him know that. Seconds ticked slowly by. Who would break first, she wondered, him or her?

'For fuck's sake put the thing down before you bloody drop it.'

Daisy pulled back, relief coursing through her.

'You'll leave her alone?' How she kept her voice steady was a bloody miracle. He nodded. 'This caff ain't no knockin' shop, understand?'

'I understand. Now switch the fuckin' thing off!'

She depressed the button and laid the drill down beneath the bed where she'd hidden it earlier. The minute it was out of her hands Daisy felt a whole lot better.

'Give you an inch an' you take a fuckin' yard.'

A huge sigh came from the man on the bed. 'You're clever, Daisy. I'll give you that. Luring me up here. Now untie me.'

'You didn't need much luring, Eddie Lane, an' I'll leave you for a bit longer to ponder on keeping promises.'

He laughed then. That laugh which melted women's hearts like they were ice creams on a hot day. Only it wasn't working on her. She had too much to lose, this time.

'I should be the one with a smile on my face.' She nodded towards his spread legs, his shrivelled penis. 'Not such a big man now, are you, Eddie?'

'Untie me.'

Ignoring him she looked around the bedroom. Cheap, scuffed furniture. A dressing table, double bed, wardrobe and chair. A window scanning the panorama of a grey, muddy, ship-filled Portsmouth harbour. The room smelled of stale cabbage and sweat, mixed with Jeyes fluid. Cold, unlet. A spare room. And when Daisy had cleaned it up she was going to ask if Susie would like to move in. At least she could watch over her then.

Susie was at present keeping an eye on things downstairs in the cafe and Daisy knew instinctively she could trust her. Doling out cups of tea, black like treacle, wasn't that difficult and Daisy knew the girl wouldn't dip her fingers in the till. And if she did? Then Daisy herself was to blame, not Susie.

This room was identical to Eddie's across the hall, except his housed expensive suits and smelled of cologne and had pictures of Marilyn Monroe in pin-up poses stuck over one wall. It was also a hell of a lot cleaner. Eddie didn't like mess or clutter in his life.

'There's another thing,' Daisy said.

'Something else I'm not doing right, Dais?' He was certainly back to his cheeky self.

'Bert left the management of this place to Kenny; he was Kenny's ol' mate not yours. You made sure Kenny's banged up in Winchester for two years. You're Kenny's brother, I'm his wife. So it's my job to look after this caff and its rooms, okay? Me, not you.' She jabbed her index finger first at herself then at him to underline her point. 'So you get no say in anything, okay? You want to stay here, fine. That's what Kenny wanted. But this place is my responsibility.'

A frown crossed his features, hardening his steel-blue eyes. He was a good-looking bastard – and he knew it. But there was evil in him. Her eyes flicked over his hard-muscled body.

'How could you do this to me, Dais?'

'Didn't take much persuading, did you? You thought because I slept with you once when I was feelin' really low, I'd do it again. Well, I made a mistake and that won't fuckin' happen again. From now on I'll tolerate you, but touch Susie again and believe me, if I don't fuckin' kill you when you're awake, I'll get you when you're asleep.' A look of determination bloomed in her clear eyes. 'This shithole of a caff is gonna be made into somethin' worthwhile for when my Kenny gets out. I'll make sure of that even if I nearly slog meself to death doing it. An' it's gonna be a clean place. You ain't gonna bring no scandal or coppers to this place, see?'

'I understand. You gonna untie me now, please, Dais?'

She moved to the foot of the bed and released the knot on one of his ankles. He didn't move but watched every action she took. Then he calmly flexed his foot by circling his ankle.

'Much better,' he said.

Daisy unplugged the drill and began coiling the frayed flex around it. Opening the bedroom door, she stepped into the wooden-floored hallway. Before closing the door again, she turned back to Eddie and said, 'If you can't get free now, you ain't worth shit! An' another thing.' This was going to be a cruel jab at him, knowing how much he idolised his favourite film star pin-up. So did Daisy. And it had stunned her when she'd heard the news on the wireless earlier. She flung at him, 'Marilyn Monroe was found dead in bed this morning.' She didn't wait to see his reaction to the news.

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Daisy hadn't shown it, but she was still trembling when she reached the top of the stairs. Thank God she'd pulled it off. It was never going to be any good appealing to Eddie's better nature. Most of the time he never had one. He was a selfish bastard. She had to start as she meant to go on, keep the bastard in line. She pushed open the door to her room. Two large bedrooms were on this top floor, one Daisy's and one Vera's.

Vera was a prossie. But she never brought anyone back to the cafe or her room: 'This is my little nest, ducky. I conduct my business outside. This is my home. Mine and Kibbles'.'

Kibbles was the biggest tabby cat Daisy had ever seen. He seldom left Vera's room, where he had a tray to do his business in and a food dish always filled with tasty morsels. Vera left her window open and if he wanted to roam he sometimes appeared in the cafe or in Daisy's room to sleep like a furry doughnut on her bed. He was sitting on the windowsill now.

'Come on in, then,' Daisy said, pushing up the sash-corded window. Kibbles stepped daintily inside, purring loudly. 'Wish all blokes were as easygoing as you.' He jumped down from the sill to twine himself in and out of her legs as she put the drill safely away in the cupboard. If Eddie was going to come after her, it would be soon. It wouldn't take him long to free himself and the last thing he'd want was for anyone to know how she'd tricked him. Somehow she didn't think he'd bother, though. He knew which side his bread had marge on, did Eddie.

She tugged at the cotton curtains on their plastic wire. It was raining and she wanted to shut out the sight of the water running down the window panes. She could see the ferry boats in the harbour, like black beetles crawling across the stretch of water that separated Gosport from Portsmouth, the lights of Portsmouth and the Dockyard glittering through the deluge. If she'd left the window open she could have almost tasted the silt and mud oozing from the slimy Solent waters. Even on a fine day the seas were grey, not like the blue they painted them in the magazine adverts. From the cafe below came the mellow voices of The Everly Brothers, soothing her yet reminding her of Kenny.

Two fuckin' years Kenny had got. She sighed. If he'd only waited another couple of days his future would have been settled.

But no, they'd gone out on a job together. Him and Eddie. Some un-thought-out tinpot caper that had ended in a chase across the allotments for Kenny, and a cell for the night. And Eddie home and clear.

Breaking and entering. Two years. Another of Eddie's bright ideas that always worked for him and which left someone else to carry the fuckin' can. And while her husband was on remand, Bert goes and dies and leaves the cafe and building to be managed by Kenny. He wasn't even conscious enough beforehand to be told Kenny might not be around to do the job. The place opened early for working men's breakfasts and normally closed around seven after cooked teas. If there were still customers willing to spend money, Bert never bothered to close up on time.

Bert had liked Kenny. Well, who wouldn't? As unalike as chalk and cheese, the two brothers. Kenny soft and fair with hair that he was forever pushing back from his forehead. And he teased Bert a lot, made him laugh. Not watchful like Eddie, who reminded Daisy of a black crow. Nice to look at but ever mindful of a chance to peck at whatever he could get for his own comfort. Daisy shuddered at what she'd just accomplished. Who would have thought she, a mere woman, could put the wind up Eddie Lane?

Kibbles meowed so she picked him up, burying her face in his mackerel-coloured fur. He smelled of Californian Poppy, Vera's perfume. She smiled to herself. Vera was one of the best.

'Milk, is it?' she whispered into his warmth.

There was a bottle of sterilised on the draining board so she set Kibbles down and poured him a saucerful. 'I've got to go down and see if Suze is okay,' she said, scratching Kibbles behind one ear. The rain would make it a slow evening in the cafe.

Leaving cat and milk on the sink top, she went over to patch up her make-up.

Her reflection stared back from the mirror. Short blonde hair, blue eyes, and large even white teeth. She knew she wasn't especially pretty. Not like Susie with her doll-like features or striking like Vera, pushing forty but with a good figure. Vera was like one of them movie stars. Hedy Lamarr, perhaps? All dark hair and gypsy looks with red lips. Daisy thought herself too skinny.

She remembered her mum used to say she never stayed still long enough to put the weight on. Well, she was now in her middle twenties so what she saw in the mirror was what she was stuck with. She'd never be taller than her five-foot-two but she thought if she had a best feature it was her eyes. Joan Collins eyes, she'd once been told. She spat on the mascara brush and rubbed it across the block then caked it on her lashes. She was lucky they were already quite thick and dark for a blonde. She knew she had no right to moan about her looks. Or anything else, now. A place to live, money coming in, and apart from Kenny being inside for sixteen months – time off for good behaviour – she was better off than she'd ever been in her life before. Thanking her lucky stars and leaving the door ajar for Kibbles, she went out and down the stairs.

The house had five rooms in all, two at the top of the building. They were large rooms with butler sinks and gas stoves, though Daisy never cooked on hers. She didn't even know if the stoves were safe to use or not. And three rooms on the floor below, all supposedly furnished. Bert had been canny. It was easier to evict undesirable tenants from furnished accommodation. Even if the furniture consisted of only one chair and a manky bed, it was classed as furnished.

The lavatory was downstairs in the yard at the back of the cafe and used by the cafe customers as well. High on her list of priorities was to whitewash the fuckin' thing and give it a good scouring. It stank to high heaven, no matter how much Jeyes fluid she sluiced around. She must do the passageway too that ran the length of the ground floor from front to back of the place. The street door opened on to the passage which also led upstairs. No access for cafe customers but it could be reached through its kitchen this way. The double door of the cafe encompassed the corners of North Street and North Cross Street.

As she walked down the stairs she saw the room Eddie had been in was now empty.

Bert had slept in this room, but since his death and Daisy's moving in she'd slowly erased most of the old man's stuff. She'd kept a photo of him and Kenny and herself taken one day in the cafe by an enthusiastic punter with a new camera. Bert had stood

that photo by his bedside. Until the heart attack claimed him. The photo was now down in the cafe on the top shelf where customers could see it – to remind everyone that Bert's Cafe would remain Bert's even though Daisy had been in residence for a couple of months now. She'd never change the name. Never. He'd been a decent bloke and well liked. And made a bloody good cuppa.

Daisy could hear muffled noises coming from Eddie's room opposite and decided to leave well alone.

At the bottom of the stairs, near the kitchen, someone had knocked over the metal mop bucket that always stood on the cracked lino and the water had swilled over the floor. The smell of disinfectant was strong. Daisy set the bucket upright, squeezed out the mop and soaked up the grey water. When she'd finished, she let herself into the cafe.

'Hi, Dais,' rang a forced cheerful voice, accompanied by a shy grin.

'All right, Suze?' Without waiting for a reply she added, 'Slow tonight?' Susie nodded. The smell of bacon frying reminded Daisy she hadn't eaten since this morning. Susie nodded towards three men lounging over by the jukebox. 'Wheel of Fortune' was playing now. An old record but it was Eddie's favourite. Kay Starr was singing her heart out.

'Just making them lot bacon sarnies.'

'Make me one?' Susie added more rashers to the pan, where they sizzled and spat enticingly.

'They're waitin' for Eddie. He said he'd meet them half an hour ago. You don't know what's 'appened to him, I suppose?' Daisy shook her head. She had the feeling Susie was glad she'd joined her. The girl was nervous around men and with good cause. She'd only agreed to be in the cafe because there was a counter between her and the customers, poor little sod, thought Daisy. Susie forked the rashers over in the pan.

'Perhaps he's been a bit tied up,' Daisy said. 'I know he's upstairs.'

Truth to tell there had hardly been any real violence in the cafe since Daisy had taken over a few months ago. This corner of the town was run down. Bomb damage had left scars, waste grounds where purple fireweed blossomed amongst the old prams and

dumped mattresses. Bert had ruled the cafe with a fist of iron and Daisy hoped she was going to be able to do the same. But she did need Eddie while Kenny was inside.

The Lane brothers were well known in the area. Especially the dark one with the temper. Bastard Eddie might be but he didn't tolerate anyone shitting on him or his own.

'That's making my mouth water,' Daisy said. Susie was forking the fragrant rashers onto the marged bread.

'You want brown or tomato?' She nodded towards the sauce bottles.

'I don't expect you to wait on me, Suze,' Daisy answered. She upended the brown sauce bottle, slapped on another slice of bread and cut it crossways.

'Here you go,' Susie called out. One of the men ambled over.

'Put 'em all on one plate, ducks,' he said. He had bad skin and a dated Elvis Presley hairstyle that didn't curl properly at the front. He wore the usual uniform of leather bomber jacket and jeans. 'No sauces.'

Without a word Susie complied and he slouched back to his mates, clutching the plate. Daisy felt Susie freeze beside her as the kitchen door opened and Eddie came in.

'Evening, girls,' he grinned. His eyes found Daisy's. She always forgot how tall he was until he stood near her.

'Some mates of yours here,' she said. 'I was going to tell 'em you was tied up but you're here now.'

'Bitch,' he muttered, picking up one of her sandwiches and taking a large bite. Then he put it back on her plate. 'Mmm, nice that, Dais.' He then glared at the men.

'C'mon, let's get outa here.'

'Aw, Eddie, I only just started eating,' said the youngest-looking of the three.

'Fuckin' bring it or leave it. I ain't waiting.'

'You look nice tonight, Eddie,' Daisy said. And meant it. He had on a dark navy suit, new, and it fitted perfectly across his broad shoulders. 'Shame such a good-looking bloke can be such a shit.'

He grinned. It was to Eddie's credit that he never bore a grudge.

He usually paid back a grievance straight away. Then forgot about it. He never even glanced at Susie.

Eddie swept past Daisy and opened the street door. One of the blokes, the auburn-haired, good-looking one, said, 'Goodbye, Mrs Lane.'

'Get a move on, Bri,' Eddie snarled at him. 'You too, Cal.' They followed him into the rain, and Daisy turned to Susie who looked uneasy.

'It's going to be all right,' Daisy told her. 'I had a bit of a word with him. He won't touch you again. I promise.' Susie looked like she didn't believe her.

'I want you to come and live here with me, Suze. I don't want to think of you sleeping on the moored-up ferry boats, understand?' Susie gave a half smile at Daisy which never reached her light blue eyes. The cut on her lip had stopped bleeding but it was still swollen. Daisy guessed that had come from the gold signet ring Eddie always wore. Tomorrow the swelling would be more pronounced. The bruises on her upper arms and legs which she'd reluctantly showed Daisy earlier would still be there in the morning too. She was just a fuckin' kid, for Christ's sake. Daisy walked over to the cafe door and slipped the top and bottom bolts into place, then she turned the red cardboard sign round to 'Closed'.

'No arguments, Suze. I'll make us a nice cup of tea and you can tell me all about it.'