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Opening Extract from...

TOXIC

Written by Jacqui Rose

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Bree Dwyer chewed nervously on her fingers. She felt sick and was dog-tired having been up most of the night listening to every sound and jumping at every car light which came onto the site.

She glanced up at the large white, glittery-faced clock as she stood in the kitchen of her immaculate, newly decorated static mobile home which was situated just outside the village of Ashdon, close to Shadwell Wood.

She shared her home with her husband and little Molly and Kieran, and on the odd, miserable occasion, her mother-in-law, who only lived next door.

Sighing and taking a sip of orange juice out of an Arsenal mug, Bree tried to swallow, but her mouth was too dry and too sticky, and her stomach kept alternating between painful cramps and butterflies.

She wasn't ill, she knew that. Though she wished that was all it was. No, her problem was just down to good old-fashioned nerves. Because today was the day she was *supposed* to be leaving her husband, Johnny, once and for all.

A sudden wave of nausea rushed over her, forcing her to run to the bathroom and lean over the toilet bowl as the sweet sickly water rushed into her mouth. Starting to shake and praying it wasn't the start of a panic attack, which she often suffered from. She took a deep breath, terrified at the thought of what she was about to do. A moment later, Bree Dwyer began to vomit.

Flushing the toilet, which was entirely encrusted with Swarovski crystals, Bree rinsed out her mouth, pushing her long blonde hair behind her ears. She caught sight of her reflection in the mirror, but quickly turned away. Hating what she saw. Hating seeing the look of fear in her green eyes, reminding her of a startled rabbit.

Holding onto the basin, Bree squeezed her eyes shut, took another deep breath before counting down from ten. Okay, she was ready. It was about to begin.

'Molly! Kieran! Quickly! Come on babies, we got to go.'

A few seconds later, Molly, who'd just turned six and proudly told anybody who'd listen, appeared at the bathroom door, clutching one of her stuffed giraffes.

Her long corkscrew blonde hair tumbled down in waves over her tiny, little shoulders. She spoke, sounding like someone much older than her age.

'What's the rush? Where are we going? Are the others coming?'

Bending down to hurriedly button up Molly's butterfly print blouse properly, Bree shook her head, speaking in a whisper as if there was somebody listening. 'No, darlin', they're not.'

Molly scowled. Her button nose wrinkling up. 'Why not? I want them to come.'

Nervously, Bree looked around. It seemed like her heart was pounding so hard in her chest, it was just about the only thing she could hear. 'I know sweetheart, but if they do, then they'll find out about the surprise.'

Molly's face suddenly lit up. She called in excitement, 'Kieran! Kieran! Come on, there's a surprise.'

Panicked at the volume of her daughter's voice, Bree gently shushed Molly, putting her finger over her lips. 'Shhh! We got to try to keep quiet, darlin'. We don't want anyone hearing us, do we?'

Smiling and kissing Molly on her forehead, Bree tried to push down the rising panic, attempting to ignore the thought she'd started something she couldn't finish.

'Well, what is it? What's the surprise? Is it for me?' Kieran Dwyer, although only nine, was the spitting image of his father. Both in temperament and looks. He stood at the bathroom door, grinning widely. He loved surprises.