CIRCLE OF INNOCENTS

It Must Remain Unbroken…



STEPHEN D. CURTIS

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In loving memory of Harley.

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CHAPTER 1

Monique was speaking in French again, little utterances of pleasure escaping from her lips and venturing through the slowly widening gap in the doorway. In his mind's eye, Wayne Terry was once again pushing that door open, remembering the French girl's writhing ecstasy all too clearly. Thirteen years had passed since he had caught them together, and yet he was still trapped in that moment – a fifteen-year-old-boy looking on helplessly, watching Monique, the only girl he had ever loved, being pleasured by his own mother.

Thinking back to his mid-teens often caused Wayne to punish himself for not seeing the truth prior to that night, and yet his lack of sight could only have been down to the naivety of his years. Perhaps his father leaving inexplicably should have been a signal, especially when Monique moved in only a few short weeks later. However, Wayne's mother's claims that the twenty-six-year-old drama student was good company and would help them cope better with the family breakdown had been entirely plausible, so could Wayne, at such a tender age, ever have imagined or suspected that she was going to be anything other than just 'a lodger'?

Over time, Monique lived up to Wayne's mother's expectations, becoming a huge comfort to Wayne when he became the target of bullying at school, yet the irony, tragic as it was, was that he was only drawing comfort from the root cause of his suffering. The schoolyard seemed to know the reality of Wayne's homelife, when those who claimed to love him the most, including the father he adored, only kept it from him.

Wayne could not have known that the solace he was finding with Monique would eventually lead to the loss of his innocence and worse. His and Monique's 'Little Secret' was all Wayne had to treasure in his abusive world, and in this latest torturous recollection of his eventual heartbreak, the *real* truth, the one that had been so callously hidden from him, was about to cruelly reveal itself once more. Through Wayne's mental portal of the slowly opening bedroom door, Monique was turning her head, her beautiful green eyes were about to see him standing in the doorway, and she was going to laugh at him.

Wayne could feel the anger and revulsion rising inside him, but this time the laughter never came. Instead, confused and muzzy-headed, he came to his

senses on a park bench in a green, open space near a large pond. A rather heavy-set man acknowledged him with a brief nod as he jogged past, but Wayne didn't respond. The fingers of his right hand were wrapped tightly around a rolled-up magazine that he couldn't remember buying, and his body was barely protected against the chill of the early morning by a polo shirt and jogging shorts in which he had no recollection of dressing.

Having liberated the magazine from his grasp, Wayne ruffled his unkempt brown hair and pressed his fingertips against his temples. As his mind began to clear, he realised that he was on Hampstead Heath and not that far from home, but the comfort drawn from those familiar surroundings was tempered by the knowledge that this latest episode was just one of a number he'd been experiencing lately. None of the others, however, had been anywhere near as intense; the occasional bouts of depression Wayne suffered from he could easily to cope with, but the personality disorders he'd once endured were altogether different.

Please God, it wasn't a return to that!

Wayne glanced down at the magazine he'd discovered in his possession, intent on trying to relax. The glossy publication was face down, but when he turned it over, he was dismayed to find that it was pornographic and certainly not a subject matter he would consciously have selected. Feverishly, he began to thumb through the pages, turning them faster and faster, tearing some of them as his anxiety and desperation grew. Page after page of filth and degradation presented themselves to him. But where had he bought this? And *when*? Despairingly, Wayne slammed the magazine back down on the bench.

With no memory of anything he'd done or anywhere he'd been, it felt like somebody else had got out of bed that morning instead of *him*. Wayne leaned forwards and gazed at the surface of the pond, seeing the flickering chaos of the wavelets before him as a fair reflection of his life. He'd been certain his mental issues were a thing of the past, but maybe he'd just been in denial. Recent occurrences, the duration of that morning's episode, and the magazine were irrefutable evidence that he was really slipping. Maybe the shock of receiving a letter from his mother, and the realisation that she'd finally managed to track him down after so many years could well have set him back.

She was the last person Wayne wanted to have anything to do with. It was all *her* fault he was like this, her and that manipulative girlfriend of hers. If he had the courage, he would go and see the Wet Hole that dared to call itself his 'mother' and let her into his and Monique's 'Little Secret' just to see the devastation it would cause. Yet all he really wanted was to have nothing to do with either of them, for the demons to leave him alone, or better, to forget that he had ever existed.

It seemed that despite all Wayne's best efforts to cover his tracks, including living and working under an alias, his hiding place had been discovered, but he was determined to never again cower in the shadow of their hellish wings. Wayne had lived in fear of them finding him for too long, and he would go where they could never follow. The waters of the pond had become as dark as the depths of his sudden and abject despair, yet in that darkness, there shone an unexpected beacon of hope, of salvation. Wayne began to wonder how deep the water might be, and if it could be deep enough and cold enough to free him from his torture should he offer himself to the mercy of its curiously inviting blackness. The weight of his personal hell would surely be enough to send him straight to the bottom.

*

Joanne Middleton was finding her morning run on Hampstead Heath with her daughter, Samantha, and their dog, Harley, a bit of a struggle.

'Can't we slow down a bit?' she asked.

'No chance, Mum,' Samantha replied. 'We're in a hurry! Push yourself!'

'But I've got a bloody stitch, Sammy!'

'Well, it serves you right for sneaking breakfast before we came out. You've been doing this long enough and you should have known better.'

Joanne put her hands on her hips and slowed to walking pace.

'Well, it wasn't my fault that the milk had gone off and that I had to go out and get a fresh carton,' she said. 'And besides, you little cow, I always eat breakfast, it's just that I had to eat it later than usual. Now stop being so full of your damned self!'

Joanne tried a few deep breaths to ease her discomfort, but the little daggers in her side merely twisted themselves with even more venom. A nearby bench suddenly became very inviting, and she flopped down onto it.

'Wimp,' Samantha muttered.

'Oh, *do* shut up …'

Totally unmoved by her mother's hostility, Samantha unclipped Harley's lead. 'Okay then, Boudicca,' she goaded. 'You rest those old bones of yours. Me and Harley will just have to amuse ourselves for a while. Come on then, boy!'

Boudicca thought Joanne, removing her hair band to adjust her unruly locks. *I'll give her bloody Boudicca.*

Regardless of Joanne's objections, Samantha's nickname for her mother was rather apt. Not only was Joanne a redhead, who, just like the notorious queen of the Iceni stood the best part of six feet tall, she also had ambition and an occasional fierceness. An oval face and smooth jawline were framed by a mane of thick, auburn hair, and a naturally alluring expression made her a photographer's dream. But the majority of those who encountered Joanne

were drawn by her strikingly beautiful, clear blue eyes.

With the exception of being a brunette and standing a fraction shorter than her mother, Samantha was otherwise her mother's clone, but the similarities didn't stop there. Although only nineteen, she was already a vibrant, confident young woman who oozed spirit and determination, a doughty blend of get-up-and-go underpinned by a razor-sharp wit. Joanne was immensely proud at not having raised a shrinking violet, but Samantha had grown up so quickly and become so independent, it was surely only a matter of time before she would be looking to make a life of her own.

Joanne smiled as she watched Samantha charging around with Harley, a beautiful black, long-coated German Shepherd, but slowly her smile began to fade. For the past five years, it had been just the two of them, and those years had simply flown by. What would she do when Samantha finally flew the nest? Life for Joanne revolved around being a driving force for her business *and* being a mother, and the thought of one day playing second fiddle to Samantha's independence and having to come home to an empty house was extremely unsettling.

Samantha had a tendency to be rather outspoken when it came to her mother's work load because although Joanne was effectively married to her company, it was also true that she hadn't always been quite so driven. Heartbreak had created the monster she'd allowed herself to become, for if *The Bastard* (Joanne's pet name for her ex-husband, James) had kept his tool in his trousers and hadn't thrust it so firmly into his secretary, she might never have become such a hard-nosed businesswoman.

Around the time of the affair, Joanne had been planning to fulfil a dream to own her own fashion and design label, but the consequential break-up of her marriage and *The Bastard's* insistence that she could never be successful on her own, made her even more determined to make that dream a reality. At first it had been solely to prove *The Bastard* wrong because a far as *The Bastard* had been concerned, Joanne was only ever going to be 'an ex-fashion model.' Using the cruel jibes as a motivational springboard, Joanne, with grit and purpose, garnered a great team, and it wasn't long before the business was providing security for her and her daughter. The problem was that it had become almost impossible for Joanne to see beyond anything else.

'HARLEY, NO!'

Samantha's sudden and sharp tone abruptly shook Joanne from her thoughts.

'HARLEY! Come back here, NOW!'

But Harley wasn't listening. He was far more interested in a seemingly unsuspecting grey squirrel, which promptly vaulted straight up the nearest tree

at the sight of his full-tilt approach. Unable to stop on the twigs and loose soil under his paws, Harley careered unceremoniously into the trunk in a cloud of dust. It was all too much for Joanne and Samantha, who both exploded into giggling fits.

'Oh my God!' said Samantha. 'Did you see that? He looked so stupid!'

*

The sound of laughter swept across the pond to a brooding Wayne Terry. Inside his head, Monique was laughing again, too.

'*He looked so stupid* …'

Wayne stared, hate-filled, in the direction of the commotion.

*

Head down in canine embarrassment, Harley padded back to his owners, and Samantha noticed that there was some blood on his snout.

'Oh Harley! Look at your nose!' she said, bending over to take a closer look. 'Ah, no probs, Baby Boy, it's only a little scratch.' She kissed Harley's head and then reattached his lead before turning her attention back to her mother.

'Come on, Boudicca, we need to get you back home. You've got stuff to do today, remember?'

Joanne groaned inwardly. It was a beautiful morning: birdsong filled the air, the sun's rays sparkled upon the surface of the pond in front of her, and on a deserted bench just across the water, the pages of a discarded magazine were flapping lazily in the breeze. It was going to take a supreme effort for Joanne to tear herself away from such a tranquil scene, but as Samantha had reminded, there was other business to attend to.

*

'*He looked so stupid* …'

Wayne peered out at the two women from the security of a small group of trees, having stealthily moved away from the edge of the pond. He was going to have to show these two bitches his need. They wouldn't think he was so fucking stupid then, would they?

*

At a more sedate pace than the day had begun, Joanne and Samantha made their way home via a familiar pathway that led to the boundary of the Heath. Most of it was in open space, but a narrow section wound its way through some fairly dense woodland. An odd silence had descended upon matters as they strolled through the trees, but that was due to Joanne being totally wrapped up in her thoughts about her new venture into sports fashion and swimwear. She was so preoccupied about that morning's promotional photo shoot that she walked right into Harley, stumbling as he stopped abruptly in

front of her. A muttered expletive was cut short when she realised he was growling and staring straight ahead.

*

A scowl was slowly making its way across Wayne Terry's face as he waited in the scrub. *Why had they stopped?* He had something to show them. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. *He* was the one in control here. Having stalked the two women all the way from the pond, he didn't want to have to wait any longer than he had to. They'd been in his head and seen his past. That's why they'd been laughing back there, wasn't it? They'd seen him sitting on that bench and they knew everything. That's why they'd come out in all that tight jogging shit; it was obviously just to prance about and toy with him.

Fucking little slappers!

If it hadn't had been him, no doubt they'd have been parading around in front of somebody else. Well, he had to show them who he was, who they'd messed with, and that they shouldn't be messing around with his need.

But *why* had they *stopped*? They were so close!

Wayne couldn't tell if they were mother and daughter, or sisters, but he'd suddenly become completely taken with the younger-looking one, and now it was as if nothing, and nobody else, existed. Despite all her bitch-faults, he considered she was worthy of him. Her body was toned and athletic, her dark brown hair caressed her shoulders, and her pert, beautifully formed breasts were crying out for attention from inside her fitted tank-top. She would be pleasured by him first.

Wayne slipped off his polo shirt, put his hand inside his shorts, and began to masturbate. The chill of the air on his exposed flesh served to heighten his arousal, and imagining himself entering the warm, lubricated softness of the young woman's innermost sanctum hardened him further. He was going to show her his need and she would undoubtedly succumb. Yeah, that's what he was going to do … show her his need and then take her with every last inch of its throbbing magnificence. Knowing that the supreme hunter was almost ready to strike, Wayne edged himself forwards. He was so hard it was painful, his need so strong, it felt like he was about to explode.

*

The low rumble in Harley's throat had given way to a full-blown snarl.

'What the bloody hell is up with this dog?' asked Joanne, trying unsuccessfully to push him forwards.

Samantha gave Harley's lead a slight tug but his gaze remained set dead ahead. 'God knows,' she replied. 'He won't budge. He seems …'

Joanne shrieked as a topless man suddenly leapt out from among the bushes almost right in front of them, a pair of dark blue shorts pulled down to

his knees. He was lean and slightly built, his almost feminine facial features contorted with anger beneath a mop of messy brown hair. He was holding his erect penis, Samantha the sole focus of his alarmingly empty blue eyes.

'Look what I've got for you, you bitch!' he crowed. 'I bet you'd love to have a piece of this fucker!' He took a step towards her, and Samantha found herself being dragged forwards by Harley as he reared up on his hind legs, straining upon his lead. Joanne could see every tooth in Harley's slavering mouth as his savage barking reverberated among the trees. Instinctively, she grabbed his collar, and, despite her panic, looked directly at their attacker.

'GET AWAY FROM US, YOU DISGUSTING BASTARD!' she shouted. 'GET AWAY FROM US BEFORE I SET THE BLOODY DOG ON YOU!'

God above! What was all that noise? Wayne came to, polo shirt in one hand, penis in the other, confronted by two women and eye-to-eye with a huge and enraged hairy black dog. Horrified and disoriented, Wayne instantly recoiled.

'Oh Christ…!' he gasped, struggling in vain to pull up his shorts. 'I'm so … so sorry … I don't … I don't know … I'm not like this … I'M NOT LIKE THIS!'

All that came out was nonsensical drivel. Wayne gave up trying to explain himself, and fled as best he could with his shorts still halfway down his thighs.

The whole incident had lasted only a few seconds, yet once their assailant had bolted and Harley's barking had subsided, the silence that followed seemed interminable. Joanne felt sure Samantha would have been very upset by the experience, only to find her daughter laughing uncontrollably instead.

'It was his bum!' Samantha said. 'His little white bum, flying through the trees and … and he was still trying to pull his shorts up when he legged it! Oh my God, *what* a prat!'

Samantha started giggling again.

Was it shock? Surely, she didn't really think it was funny, did she? Joanne was as equally bemused by her daughter's attitude as she was disgusted by the flasher. But this was no time for discussion. All Joanne wanted to do was to get off the Heath.

*

Wayne carried on running until his legs felt like they were going to give way beneath him. Sweating, breathless and terrified, he did his best to hide himself, peering fearfully through the flimsy branches of a clump of bushes. He felt sure that the two women must have released the dog, and that at any moment the huge animal would come crashing through the undergrowth and start tearing into him.

But as the seconds and then minutes ticked by, Wayne's fear of being run down began to subside. His mind was a complete blank as he put his top back on, but that was probably a blessing in disguise considering what he'd found himself doing when he'd come to. The shame, the fear, the desperation, knowing that he really wasn't in control of himself any longer suddenly became too much. A failed, pathetic shadow of the man he wanted to be, Wayne curled himself up in a ball, and wept.