THE SECOND WIFE

ALEX KANE

hera

Penguin Random House

First published in the United Kingdom in 2025 by

Hera Books, an imprint of
Canelo Digital Publishing Limited,
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London SW1V 2SA
United Kingdom

A Penguin Random House Company
The authorised representative in the EEA is Dorling Kindersley Verlag GmbH. Arnulfstr. 124, 80636 Munich, Germany

Copyright © Alex Kane 2025

The moral right of Alex Kane to be identified as the creator of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.
No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. In accordance with Article 4(3) of the DSM Directive 2019/790, Canelo expressly reserves this work from the text and data mining exception.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Print ISBN 978 1 83598 162 7
Ebook ISBN 978 1 80436 794 0

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places and events are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

Look for more great books at
www.herabooks.com | www.dk.com

For my Dad, Alex. Cheers.

For my Gran, Margaret.

Prologue

Of *all* the ways she thought she'd die, of all the scenarios she had pictured, this definitely wasn't one of them.

She watched in horror as he raised his hand to her amid the chaos unfolding around them and without thinking, she threw herself between them. She *had* to stop him.

The full force of his arm slamming into her chest and the back of his hand against her face made her fall back suddenly. The sharp, poker-hot pain in the back of her skull felt like a firework going off inside her head.

Everything went numb. She couldn't feel anything, and yet she could still hear and see the chaos descending into mayhem. A physical fight broke out in front of her. She wanted to shout at them all to stop. She wanted someone to see what was happening. It wouldn't be long before her time ran out. Her clock was ticking faster with every blink of her eye.

Then all eyes were on her as she began to drift out. None of it mattered now. Not the lies, the deceit.

Her eyes closed slowly. The pain began to ease and oddly, a reassuring warmth spread through her until the pain wasn't there anymore.

Until *she* wasn't there anymore.

PART ONE

1997

Chapter One

As Jordan Burns stood by the canal, the only sliver of light other than the moon above him came from the glowing embers at the end of his cigarette.

After receiving a short, handwritten letter from his best friend, Elle, to meet him by the gate at the canal, Jordan knew that it had to be about her husband. Maybe she'd finally decided to get away from him and was going to ask for his help. But she was late and now he was starting to get worried. Maybe she'd changed her mind? Or maybe Ricky had found out and beat her – again.

Sighing, Jordan dropped his cigarette into the murky water and the orange ember died. Turning, he headed along the gravel path, the lights of the bridge twinkling far away in the distance.

'It's rude to turn your back on someone.' A familiar voice floated on the night breeze.

Jordan froze as he realised who was there with him. He turned slowly and their eyes met.

'How did you know I was here?' Jordan asked, thinking back to the handwritten note that had come through his door.

'My wife's handwriting is pretty basic, very easy to copy,' Ricky replied coolly.

Jordan felt his eyes widen at the sheer bluntness of it all. Ricky wasn't even trying to hide what he'd done. He was bloody proud of it.

Frowning, Jordan scolded himself for not questioning the note. Why would Elle put it through the door and not just chap to speak to him?

'Not so fucking cocky now, Burns,' Ricky said, as if seeing the realisation on his face. Ricky's brother, Chris, was stood next to him in silence.

'I've got nothing to be cocky about, Ricky,' Jordan replied. He knew that treating Ricky with respect was the only way to get around his anger and aggression, although it didn't always work.

'You're right about that,' Ricky said. 'You know she'll never let you anywhere near the baby.'

Jordan frowned. 'Eh?' he said, genuinely baffled.

'She's *my* wife and that's *my* daughter. And if you think for one *minute* I'm going to let you walk around after you've been shagging my wife and got her pregnant, then you're wrong.'

Jordan glared at Ricky through narrowed eyes and then turned his attention to Chris Fyfe, who wasn't even looking in Jordan's direction. He was staring out at the canal, as though he'd gone to another place in his head.

'Not this again,' Jordan sighed. 'I've already told you this, Ricky – there has never been an affair with Elle, and there never will. I can't stress that enough.'

'I've seen the way you two are around each other. You don't even try to hide what's going on between you.'

Jordan had to be careful here; he knew how dangerous Ricky was. But he also didn't want to come across as a pushover. Something he most definitely was not. But this accusation had been thrown at him a few times now, and he was getting sick of it.

'Elle is my best friend and has been since we were kids. There's nothing more to it than that and I'm not going to let you tarnish our friendship with your fucked-up ideas of what you *think* you have witnessed between us.'

Jordan felt a fury build inside him. An emotion that Ricky had evoked in him many times before. Today was different. He'd accused Elle of something awful, tarnishing her character. It didn't matter that Jordan was on the receiving end of the accusation, he just couldn't keep his mouth shut even though he knew better of it. 'But I will tell you this; I've been trying to get her to leave you from the minute you first laid your hands on her. She doesn't deserve to be battered every single day just because you're a power-hungry bastard, Ricky.'

The words were out of his mouth and he watched as Ricky processed them. *Shit*, he thought. It was too late to take them back.

No one else in their right mind would cross him. Maybe Jordan wasn't in his right mind? He'd been going crazy trying to get Elle to leave. There was plenty more he could have said but chose not to. Now, he was stood here, with the wildest accusation being thrown at him by

a man who was highly unpredictable. Even his brother had a wary look on his face.

'That's exactly what a guilty man would say,' Ricky said, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. He looked relaxed, with one hand in his trouser pocket and the other hanging by his side.

'If you *really* think I'm the type of guy who would cheat on my wife, then you've got several more screws loose than I gave you credit for. I'm not like you, Ricky. Because that's exactly the kind of shitty stunt you'd pull, isn't it? And your wife fucking knows it. But she keeps her mouth shut because you're a fucking nutcase.'

Ricky tipped his head back just a little, clicked his jaw and then pulled a gun from inside his jacket pocket. 'Say that again. Go on. I *dare* you.'

Jordan stared down at the end of the gun, glancing at Chris, who still hadn't met his eye, and then back at Ricky. His stomach rolled so quickly he felt sick. But he couldn't show fear. That was the kind of thing people like Ricky Fyfe craved – fear.

'You're not going to shoot me. You wouldn't get your hands dirty like that. Now, I'm going back to my family. From now on, I'm going to stay the fuck away from you and your family and we can forget this ever happened.'

Jordan turned to walk away and hoped that his abject terror of being killed didn't show. The sound of gravel underfoot made him stop. The little click of the safety catch made him turn to his left and a bright flash was followed by a sharp pain in his abdomen.

'*Fuck!*' he cried out as he clutched at his stomach before collapsing to the ground. Already he could feel the wet warmth of his own blood on his fingertips.

'You won't get away with this,' Jordan said but the words were followed by a splutter of blood and panic set in. He was dying and there was nothing he could do to stop it. He was in the middle of the canal path, in the dead of night. No one was coming to help. No one was coming to save him.

'Oh, don't you worry yourself about that. I have everything under control. Your family won't be subjected to your body being found,' Ricky grinned, and Jordan saw that evil glint in his eye. 'I mean, *I* wouldn't want *my* wife to find me, bled dry and face down in that canal. So, I won't subject *your* wife to that.'

Jordan thought of Georgia. His wife. And his beautiful, newborn baby. They'd have to carry on without him, never knowing what happened to him unless Ricky made a mistake. But he wasn't the type to make mistakes.

Looking up at the dark sky, two sets of eyes stared down at him. Ricky and Chris. It was Chris who was holding the gun. He'd been right. Ricky was never going to get his hands dirty.

He saw Ricky raise his arm. There was something in his hand. Something soft, like a scarf or a t-shirt; he couldn't make it out as his vision began to blur. Ricky let the piece of material fall onto Jordan's body and it landed on his hands where he clutched at his abdomen. Ricky picked it up again, allowing it to fall for a second time.

Jordan raised his head, trying to plead for his life. Whatever Ricky was thinking, Jordan had a small window of time to convince him that he didn't deserve to die because of it. But before he could, he began to choke. The iron-stench of blood in his nostrils and mouth made him feel sick.

Then another shot went off.