
SCANDAL

Also by the Authors

Rumoured

SCANDAL

KELLY AND KRISTINA
MANCARUSO



An Aries Book

First published in the UK in 2026 by Head of Zeus,
part of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Copyright © Kelly and Kristina Mancaruso, 2026

The moral right of the authors to be identified
as the authors of this work has been asserted in accordance with
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be: i) reproduced or transmitted in any form, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by means of any information storage or retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the publishers; or ii) used or reproduced in any way for the training, development or operation of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, including generative AI technologies. The rights holders expressly reserve this publication from the text and data mining exception as per Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive (EU) 2019/790.

This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events portrayed
in this novel are either products of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously.

9 7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

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

ISBN (PB): 9781035912599
ISBN (E): 9781035912575

Cover design: Simon Michele | Head of Zeus

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



Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland Limited,
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

HEAD OF ZEUS LTD
5–8 Hardwick Street
London, EC1R 4RG

To find out more about our authors and books
visit www.headofzeus.com
For product safety related questions contact productsafety@bloomsbury.com

For Mark & Chris,
whose support made this all possible

Charlie

Nottingham, UK

Friday 28 February 2025

The pub is heaving, as it usually is when the football is on. Everyone sipping beer, laughing, caught up in the excitement of the weekend's opening FA Cup match. They're too caught up, it seems, to notice the girl who's just stumbled through the swinging staff door, covered in blood.

Perhaps, like me, they assume she's a hallucination. I haven't screamed yet, haven't dropped my pint. Although my jaw's gone slack.

I blink, trying to convince myself the girl is a figment of my imagination. But she's still there when I open my eyes. My gaze shifts to her hand, to the broken bottle. *Red wine, not blood*, I tell myself.

But the thick droplet that falls like syrup from the shard of green glass tells me otherwise.

The jovial atmosphere at Oak & Arrow starts to shift to one of confusion and panic as others notice her. Chatter

dies down. Laughter is replaced by whispers and gasps of horror. Glass shatters to the floor.

I fixate on the girl, my analytical brain taking everything in more carefully this time, assessing her like one of my patients. I try to guess how old she is, but it's difficult to tell. She could be fifteen, could be thirty. The feral, wild look in her eyes makes me wonder if she's suffering some sort of psychotic break or is on a drug-induced rampage. But then I take in her cut-up feet. Her greasy hair. Her frail body. The way her hand trembles as she clutches the glass like a weapon. Defensively, not offensively.

She is a victim. This is a crime scene.

I exhale, ready to intervene. As a psychologist, I'm trained to deal with people under severe stress. But it's usually in a safe place like my office or a hospital. Not at the scene of the crime, the epicentre of the trauma. I understand how crucial this moment is. How right now, the girl's body and mind will be in overdrive, desperately trying to figure out how best to protect herself. It's not as simple as fight or flight. It's an incredibly complex system of electrical currents computing how to safeguard its host. It could be deleting files, rewiring itself, shutting down…

I approach her, slowly, hands up to let her know I'm not a threat.

"It's alright," I say softly.

The words seem to comfort her, but she's still on edge. The tangy stench of copper and urine stings my nostrils as I inch towards her.

"It's alright," I repeat.

But before I can reach her, boisterous cheers erupt from the other side of the bar. The girl recoils in fear, stumbling

backwards into a table. A hot fury courses through me at the oblivious men celebrating the goal, unable to avert their attention from the match for even a moment. I try to get the girl to focus on me again.

"It's alright," I say for the third time, desperate to keep her calm.

She opens her mouth as if to scream, or to say something, but then her eyes roll back and she collapses to the floor.

"Someone call an ambulance," I shout, dropping down next to her. "Now!"

I press my cold fingers to her neck, then her wrist, both splattered with what I deduce is someone else's warm blood. My eyes flit to the door behind her, dread pooling in my stomach wondering what horror lies behind it. But my uneasiness quickly turns into something much more disconcerting as I study the girl and notice the three small butterflies tattooed on her wrist.

It's her.

January 2020

NIGHTMARE IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE: FOOTBALLERS' GIRLFRIENDS MISSING AFTER SHERWOOD FOREST ATTACK

The girlfriends of Theo Abara and Harry Turner are missing following a violent break-in at their holiday cottage; Kaleigh Creedy, friend of the victims who escaped the assault, "working closely with police"

June 2023

ENGLAND STRIKER HARRY TURNER MARRIES "NIGHTMARE IN NOTTS" SURVIVOR KALEIGH CREEDY IN LAVISH CEREMONY

The Nottingham footballer and former Miss Teen USA tied the knot in Capri one year after welcoming their son

March 2025

FIVE YEARS ON FROM THE HORRIFIC ORDEAL THAT LEFT HER TWO BEST FRIENDS DEAD, KALEIGH CREEDY-TURNER IS GIVING BACK

"I'll never take for granted how lucky I am to be here, and I hope I can make a small difference," Kaleigh says of her fashionable charity endeavour

1

Kaleigh

Saturday 1 March 2025

Wonder-WAG Kaleigh Creedy-Turner is on top of the world. While her husband, AFC Nottingham captain and England striker Harry Turner, sets his sights on World Cup glory, the former American beauty queen continues to build a name for herself in the UK – most recently with the launch of her maternity clothing line, of which ten percent of proceeds will go to a charity close to her heart. Kaleigh is the sole survivor of the "Nightmare in Notts" ordeal, which tragically…

I close the glossy magazine, not bothering to read the rest of my interview. I'm happy with it for the most part, albeit it would've been nice to have "entrepreneur" or "philanthropist" precede my name rather than "wonder-WAG", whatever that means. But I've grown used to the three-letter acronym that attaches me to my husband – I'm proud of it, as much as I'm proud of him – so I don't let the detail spoil my first cover story.

Still, I don't need to read the rest. I don't want to. I know what it'll say.

How, five years ago, my two best friends and I were attacked at our rented cabin in Sherwood Forest. How I managed to miraculously escape, while the other two vanished. How Leila's bloated body was found in the River Trent the following week, throat slit, and Emma was presumed to have suffered the same tragic fate.

Two bodies.

The words rush to my mind, like they always do when I'm reminded of that night.

I run my fingers over the smooth cover, wondering why I'm here and not them. I imagine Leila's reaction to my feature piece; she'd be envious and proud of me at the same time.

My flawless, five-carat diamond catches the light, emitting a beautiful sparkle across the white walls. I think of what Emma would say next and shudder, imagining her rolling over in her grave.

They were supposed to be celebrating Emma's birthday. But the celebrations soon turned to tragedy.

The press loved that line.

I shake my head, forcing myself back to the present. To the black marble breakfast bar in my kitchen, where I'm savouring my morning half-cup of coffee. I cradle my protruding belly, which feels more like a giant watermelon than my usually toned stomach.

As if I manifested it, my phone buzzes with a text from my publicist, Sarah, congratulating me on the "fantastic coverage". It's followed by an email alert from my maternity line's manager about "huge order numbers coming in".

I send Sarah a few party face emojis in response before Alfie's high-pitched shriek detracts my attention from my phone. It's a gleeful sound, but my heart rate spikes nonetheless. I relax when I see the source of his enthusiasm through the glass bifold doors. My husband, dressed in nothing but his boxer briefs, carries a giggling Alfie as they both pump their fists in the air in some sort of celebration.

I wish the rest of the world could see this side of Harry, instead of just the red-faced footballer on TV.

I smile as they continue across the backyard, our "garden" as Harry calls it. Bordered by ten-foot-high hedges for privacy, the one-acre plot is the perfect size.

Harry keeps trying to convince me to move somewhere bigger, with even more land, but we don't need it. Nor do I want it. Especially if we're *here*, in Nottinghamshire. The place that will forever haunt me, and the last place I'd want to live in a secluded, remote property.

It's ironic, really. How other footballers' wives complain about being transferred. They envy that Harry has been with the same club for the entirety of our relationship, while they've had to relocate to new cities or new countries, sometimes multiple times a year. But I'm the one who envies them. I'd kill for London or Liverpool, would happily move to Munich or Madrid.

But Nottingham is Harry's home. It's the club he's always dreamed of playing for, winning championships for. And as long as he keeps scoring for them, I know a transfer is highly unlikely. So, I try to focus on the positives. The other wives who have become my closest friends. The fact that Alfie has his grandparents nearby. And our secure, gated property, nestled tightly inside a beautiful, bustling village.

I don't know how some of my friends live on their isolated, grand estates, miles from their closest neighbour. Too remote for anyone to hear them scream.

"Kay, come here, watch this," Harry shouts, saving me from a downward spiral.

I carefully manoeuvre off the bar stool, ignoring my throbbing ankles, and waddle over to the French doors. I pause when I reach it, catching my breath as if I've walked a mile rather than a few feet. I'd forgotten how difficult the final month of pregnancy can be.

A chill runs through me before I even step outside and I pull my cardigan tight across my chest. It's cold, yet my heart pools with warmth as I watch Harry gently kick the football to Alfie. I laugh to myself, wondering when I started calling it a football. I think of how my son will grow up calling it that and will spell things differently, too. He'll be taught to write some words with an "s" instead of "z", which he'll pronounce "zed" like his father. He'll add a "u" to words like colour and rumoured, the latter of which he'll hopefully never become as familiar with as Harry and me, thanks to the tabloids.

I recall the stories from when we first started dating. How difficult things were. The judgement. The assumptions. As if I didn't feel bad enough about it all at the time. How I fought against the feelings I had for him. Because Harry was Emma's boyfriend.

And you can't just start dating your dead best friend's boyfriend.

I instinctively run my finger across the cluster of three small butterflies on my wrist, the matching tattoo I got with Emma and Leila after graduation. It once symbolized our friendship, but now it serves as a painful reminder that they're gone.

I swallow hard, remembering how I didn't want a tattoo. It was something that had been ingrained in me since I started on the pageant circuit as a child. Right after Gretchan McCarthy, an eleven-year-old girl with a mop of blonde hair, called my family trash. She was saying it to her friend, but looking from me to my mother, who was crouched next to me collecting our things. The bending had pulled her jeans down just enough to expose her lower back tattoo, coiling like black ivy across her milky-white skin.

I clenched my fists and took a step toward the girls, but Mama stopped me, hand clasping around my wrist, pulling me back. "*Kaleigh Anne,*" she whispered. "*Beauty queens don't fight with their hands, understand?*"

I understood. And five years later, I used my wits to beat that same girl to the crown for Miss Teen Alabama. The ultimate revenge.

"Mummy, watch!" Alfie yells. *Mummy, not Mama, not Mommy.*

"I'm watching!" I call out, my breath visible in the cold air.

"Alright, Alf, show Mummy your big, strong kick!" Harry winks at me as he crouches into a defensive stance. Alfie boots the ball as hard as he can, giggling with joy as it drifts past Harry into the goal.

"Oh, well done, baby!" I say to Alfie before smirking at my husband. "Good thing you're not a goalie."

"Good thing I'm not a *keeper*, yeah," he corrects me.

I roll my eyes playfully, just as my phone alarm goes off. Time to get ready. It's a big match day for Harry – round five of the FA Cup – so he needs to get to the stadium for warm-up while I run errands and finish prepping for my baby shower tomorrow afternoon.

Harry doesn't love that I'll be running errands in town by myself nearly eight months pregnant, but a girl has to do what she has to do. I remember my own mother working the county fair when she was nine months pregnant; it's in my blue-collar blood.

"Alright, time to come inside and get ready," I call out to my boys.

"I want to keep playing," Alfie whines.

"You can play with Granddad before Daddy's game later," I say.

He pouts and kicks at the ground. Harry places his hand on the back of Alfie's head. I can't hear what he says to him, but Alfie perks up.

"Daddy said I can have chocolate!"

"Oh, did he now?" I glare at Harry. He beams at me cheekily, knowing what he's done. But I can't be mad, especially looking the way he does, like last year's Georgio Armani ad – sweat shining off his washboard abs in the sunlight, despite the low temperature.

Get Alfie ready. Get hair and nails done. Film content before Harry's game...

I start listing all the things I have to do today to distract myself and keep my hormones at bay. *We don't have the time*, I reason as Alfie sprints toward me.

Alfie trips and I automatically lurch forward. But Harry is already there, swooping him into his arms and brushing away the tiny wisps of hair that fell into his eyes. Alfie lets out a laugh as Harry begins to tickle him and I burst with joy, like I'm watching my heart run around outside of my body. It's a love I never knew existed and one that still takes me by surprise, even three years later.

"I can't believe how much I love him," I remember Harry saying to me one night when Alfie was only a couple months old, and the relief knowing he felt the same about our son, whose conception came as a huge shock to both of us – and the rest of the world.

The internet wasn't kind to us at first, people assuming Harry and I must've gotten together when Emma was still… around. But the more I talked about our story and finding love after loss, explaining the timeline and how we were just two people grieving who found solace in each other, people started to root for us.

I think back to when it started, during the UK's second lockdown in November 2020, almost ten months after the attack. The entire year still feels like a fever dream, a traumatic nightmare I never thought I'd wake up from, wondering why God spared me that night to just endure a worldwide pandemic. Mama told me it was because He must have other plans for me. So, from my small, city apartment, I began posting on social media, opening up about my grief and my daily struggles. And people started connecting with me, telling me how my videos made them feel less alone. I continued to post, documenting everything from my allotted daily walks to hair and make-up tutorials to cooking videos. It was the one of me making my Granny's Thanksgiving stuffing that caught Harry's attention.

I'll never forget that stuffing, he messaged, referencing the few "Friendsgivings" I'd organized when I lived with Emma.

We kept in touch after that, but at a distance. It wasn't until the anniversary of the attack two months later when he asked if he could visit, sensing I didn't want to be alone.

We didn't kiss that night, despite the butterflies in my stomach willing me to. We talked and listened to country music, which I was surprised to learn was his guilty pleasure, and simply enjoyed each other's company. It'd been so long since I laughed that much.

Every day after that I fought my growing feelings for Harry, tried to keep him at arms' length. *Just a friend*, I'd tell myself. But we were never meant to be just friends. Alfie is proof of that. He was conceived the very first time Harry and I slept together a few months later. I'd taken it as a sign from God that it was okay, that we were meant to be.

I wish I could go back in time and tell my younger self that I had nothing to worry about. That the worst period of my life would be followed by the best. That Alfie would only bring us closer.

My Harry. Our son. Our perfect little family.

I close the glass doors before I head upstairs to get ready, but as I turn the lock, a lone magpie perched on the hedge catches my eye. *One for sorrow.*

"*You have to salute it, Kay.*" I recall Emma referencing the British superstition. "*Salute it and say 'ello to your brother!' or you'll be cursed. It's what my gran taught me.*"

I laughed at her, thinking she was being as nutty as a squirrel.

It is nuts, I tell myself, turning away. *A stupid superstition.*

I ignore the fact that the last time I didn't salute a lone magpie, my two best friends died.