



DEAD(ish)
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The Boring Stuff

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Chapter 1

Prelude

“LOOK,” he said, cutting across yet another plea, “You're dead. You need to accept that.”

“But -”

“No. Stop pretending to be alive. It's stupid. It's creepy. Now GO. THE. HELL. AWAY.”

She crossed her arms and stared at him.

“Never.”

He rolled his eyes and stomped away.

Women! Can't live with 'em, can't escape even by killing 'em.

Chapter 2

Mike

(Mike)

“You're like a priest, right? You aren't allowed to testify against me and shit? Not quite? Oh, fuck it. I don't care anymore. Help me out, I pay you, and then if you want you can dob me in. I'm too tired to give a shit, I just wanna get rid of the bitch.

“So, I killed my girlfriend. Weirdly, it was accidental. I say weirdly, because - but that's a whole 'nother cricket game. Let's not go there, eh?

“We were arguing because I saw her fucking the next door neighbours – gay guys, go figure! - on their back veranda. Both of them. High noon, bright daylight, but then the backyard is only visible from one place – ours. And we were never that interested in watching the naked, oil-slicked adventures that went on there. Well I weren't. Wasn't. Obviously Linda was a bit more interested than I'd thought. Guess they did make me look bloody boring. Kama Sutra and oil and moans of ecstasy. Linda and I went for good old missionary position and I came every time and she never complained. That seemed good enough. Well, fuck me. I was wrong.

“Damn, I've lost track. Right. I killed Linda. But like I say, it was accidental. I know all murderers say that, except the freakazoids who eat people's faces while they're alive and tied up, then fry their fingers and make haggis – shit. Off topic again.

“It was accidental. Just believe me. We were arguing, she told me I fuck like a jellyfish (what the fuck?), and I slapped her. One of those girly i'm-so-pissed-off-you-arsehole slaps. I'd be embarrassed about that if there was anyone still alive who saw it. Except me. But it knocked her off

her stilettos -the only things she was wearing except for a coating of oil – stinking like a whorehouse in summer – and a smug smirk. It was the smirk that did for me, but it was the high heels what did for Linda. She went sideways and lost her balance on those tall, stupid spiky things and went down, smacking her head on the 'occasional table' with a nasty-sounding thump.

“She died 12 or so hours later. In her sleep. We'd called a truce and gone to bed and fucked (yeah, missionary position) and slept. I woke up clutching a dead-cold cadaver that wouldn't move so I could take a pulse.

“Fuck. Reliving that has me crying like a little girl. I'm off to get a beer. See you later.”

“Oh, fuck. You're back? How much did I drink last night? And what the *fuck* is playing on my sound system? Oh fuck, girly stalker music, just what I fucking need right now. “

*The tide is high but I'm holding on
I'm gonna be your number one*

“Fuck. My head is pounding in time to the island beat, like someone's ramming a red-hot poker through it each time. And I need to chuck. Fuck off for a bit while I surf the porcelain bus. And turn off that bloody music on your way out. If she'll let you.”

“So, I was sounding like a utter psycho last time you were here. But you've gotta understand, mate – I'm living in a little piece of hell. In fact, I reckon demons sticking pitchforks in my arse while I stand on hot coals sounds easy-peasy right now. Because this silly bitch has more imagination than any demon. Anyone'd think she'd been studying up on interrogation techniques – minoring in Breaking The Bastard Down.

“So far I've had feminist crap music being played full-bore in the early morning (like, 3am), my TV switching channels every time I relax, the

fridge and freezer being unplugged, my BBQ's exploded... I'm a man on the edge. Coffee doesn't help anymore. Besides, I have to go to the cafe to get one because she'll switch the sugar with salt just for a laugh. And you don't wanna drink coffee with salt in it. Ever tried? It's the nastiest thing I've ever tasted, and I've tasted some nasty shit. Including Linda.

“Lemme give you an idea of one of my days, OK? Yesterday. I woke up, and there was no music playing. Thank God, I think, she's gotten the hint and buggered off. So I sit up, and my foot lands in a slime of cat vomit. Don't wanna know where the hell she got *that* from. So I swear and wipe off my foot and she pinches me on the bum while I'm doing it and I fall on my arse and set off my sciatica, like she knew it would. I hobble to the bathroom to piss, and then take a look in the mirror. My hair's blue, and my eyebrows are green, and my skin's orange. I look like a smurf, a munchkin and an oompa loompa had an orgy and I was their love-child. Shit. I get into the shower and scrub and scrub. I get out and check the mirror, and discover that it's changed... not a bit. Fuck fuck fuck. So I give up, and I go to the cafe anyway. Everyone's staring and laughing the whole way there, and then the staff are goggling and trying not to be rude.

“Psycho ex,” I explain and grin disarmingly, and shit if it doesn't work – they all smile sympathetically and the bloke at the coffee machine makes me a free extra-large iced coffee thing with extra cream. Then, because he's a smart-arse, puts green, blue and orange sprinkles on top. Whatever. Caffeine. Cholesterol. Sugar. Heaven. Temporarily, of course. Cos then Linda turns up, right in public. She sits opposite me and one of the staff come over to take her order. She asks for a double espresso, black, hot. I frown at her but can hardly say, “Bugger off, you're a ghost!” in front of everyone, can I? So I sweat it out, and her double espresso arrives. She throws it in my face and disappears.

“The staff are all gaping. Well hell, they did just see a woman disappear into thin air. I count my options and quickly look as confused as anybody else. To help matters, I squeeze out a tear or two. Not too hard considering I just had scalding liquid all over my face.

“So there you have it. You're the exorcist – how the hell do we get rid of this chick?”

(Trent)

I sit in the chair, listening to this pale shadow of a man pour out his crappy black heart to me, and I do my best to look sympathetic. MUSTN'T smirk! We don't want to put the wind up him. Professional pride aside, Linda would kill me if I stuff this up.

Chapter 3

Trent

(Trent)

My name's Trent. I'm a private detective, hired by the late Linda Stevens. Obviously, I believe in ghosts. I never used to, but Linda is a pretty determined bird with some very convincing tricks. Cripes, I don't want to start thinking about it. She'll drive *me* mad if I dwell on it. Let me just say this – don't ever let a ghost like Linda near your pants.

She told me about herself, and insisted that I write it down. Why? I asked. I knew I'd remember every detail – it's my job. Besides, she could always be on hand to remind me of anything that slipped my prodigious memory.

“For posterity,” she said. Well, can't argue with that. Besides, arguing with a ghost is one of those exercises in futility, like chasing rainbows or trying to ride the wind. At least it is if the ghost's Linda. I'd never tried arguing with a ghost before.

My name's Linda. I'm dead. It sucks, OK? Especially because I'm dead for no good reason. I'm dead because my dumbarse boyfriend smacked me one and then something else smacked me one and it hurt like hell and that's all I remember, to be honest. Until I woke up without a body. Now I know from books and movies that that's not the way it's supposed to happen. Well, in a way it is, right. But the ghost is always anchored by their bod, and they can't move too far away from it. Which implies that they know WHERE THE HELL IT IS. Whereas, me? I don't know where my body is, and I'm not limited to any location. And for some reason, this is really important to me. I need to find my body. Maybe I need closure, or some shit. I don't know. I just need to. So I hired Trent. He'll

find my body for me. I hope. If he doesn't, I'll fire his arse and haunt him in between haunting my ex-beloved and hiring someone with a clue.

I think that last bit's a threat.

I wander around the outside of the house, 'feeling the vibes'. Mike walks beside me, and I can almost feel him shaking. This guy is seriously on the edge. I pause in about every location I can think of, watching him out of the corner of my eye. I can't feel 'cold spots' for shit, but I can read people. They tense up when you're close to something they desperately don't want you to find. Although this guy is so stressed I'm not sure he'd tense up if I held a knife to his throat and threatened to rape him.

I keep wandering, over the obvious bits – shed, garage, vegie garden – nothing.

“Did Linda have anything – a treasure of some sort, like a journal – buried out here?” I ask, spreading my hands above the vegie garden in what I hope is a cold spot sensing kinda way.

He shrugs, looking puzzled and vaguely irritated.

“No bloody idea, mate – can we go back inside now? I need to sit down.”

He really does look wrecked. His skin's still orange, although he's managed to bleach the colour out of his hair and eyebrows. But Linda's been having fun with nail polish, and his fingernails and toenails are a very pretty bright pink. So now he just looks like the victim of a de-ranged beautician. He scratches at his skull absent-mindedly.

“How'd you get the colour out of your hair?”

“I just used the stuff in the cupboard,” he says and shrugs, still scratching.

Bleached his hair with household bleach? No wonder he's scratching. His head must be one big blister.

“You do know there are different kinds of bleach?”

He looks at me blankly.

Stuff it, I think. Let the neckless wonder suffer.

“Never mind.”

Chapter 4

The Cops

(Mike)

*I shot the sheriff
But I did not shoot the deputy*

Music is blaring. I wake up and groan. I'd been dreaming about fucking Anna Kornikova. I wake up to the same old nightmare. Except different, because she's an imaginative bitch. New Rule #1 – Don't date women who paint. Arty-farty doesn't just equal freaky in the sack, it also equals nasty genius revenge. I don't like genius when it's happening to me.

I shamle out of bed and don't fall over. Huh. She's slipping, if Bob Marley's all she can do to me. I get to the sound system and turn it way down so I can hear myself think. I hear a loud banging on the front door. Fuck. Some of the neighbours have finally gotten sick of the noise. Fine. I paste a shit-eating grin on my face, thread my way through the plant pots to the front door, and open it.

Cops.

Fuck.

They're looking shocked, which scares me a little.

I look down. Fly's unbuttoned, for a start. My dick's waving hello in the breeze.

"God, sorry!" I say, putting him away and straightening myself up. "Rough night. Umm... can I help you?"

One of them tears his eyes away from my pants and looks at my face, trying not to look fascinated by the fact that I'm bright orange still, I guess. My fingernails are still bright pink, so I must look like a freak-show even with my clothes in order.

"We're responding to a noise pollution complaint, sir – may we come in?"

The other guy's still looking shell-shocked, but he's staring at my lounge room. I motion them in, and turn to look at whatever's got the bastard enthralled.

IT WAS NO ACCIDENT

is written all over the walls The-Shining-style in red paint. Fuck.

At least the plants are hiding some of it.

Wait – plants in my lounge room?

A few dozen mature cannabis plants. In pots. Oh, FUCK.

The cops booked me, of course. Best thing to happen to them all month, I'd say, since it's generally the cops in disgrace who pull 'noise pollution' duty. So we went down to the station and I docilely gave my details to a fat balding cop who looked like he hadn't stirred from behind his desk for a few years. But I stayed polite and obedient, even when Linda appeared behind the fat guy and stuck her tongue out at me. Even though I desperately wanted to be childish too and stick my tongue out at her. That's about the only revenge I can get on the stupid bitch right now.

Chapter 5

Misery

(Trent)

I'm starting to wonder if an all-expenses-paid long-term hire is really worth it. Certainly, I'm eating consistently for the first time in years. My rent is paid up for months, my clothes are new, and I have a NICE car. But I also have a sad, whiny female hanging around me a lot, and she's a bit of a downer – what with the “I'm so miserable” thing 24/7. Can't even take her to bed to give her a hormone fix. Can't kick her out, because this woman is half pathos, half stalker queen incarnate. And believe it or not, I'm a sucker for a woman in trouble. That's part of the reason I'm usually broke.

Here's Linda's take on things, scribed by yours truly. I really must teach her to use a bloody keyboard.

You know what sucks most about being dead? Hunger. Sleep. They're all controlled by your body, right? But the cravings didn't just go because I'm dead. They're just vague and weird. Like, I find myself drifting off to sleep and the world just fades away and I could be out for days, or only minutes. I panic almost every time I drift off, because it feels like I'm just floating away to another place. If I was alive, my body'd wake me and it'd bring me back. But I can't find the bloody thing, and I don't think it'd help me anyhow. Not with this. Cos it's dead. So I get kinda hungry, and I can't do a fucking thing about it. No steak for me. I tried to eat. What a joke. I could pick it up. I've gotten damn good at that. But I couldn't find my mouth. It should be there in my head, right? So I headed over to a mirror for some help, and I get a shock. I don't have a reflection. I looked down at myself, and I was looking just fine. Trent could see me. The bastard was hiding snickers behind his hand as he watched me try to eat. Nothing in the mirror, though. It's like I don't have a soul. And then I realised that even

if I got the stupid burger in my mouth, I didn't have teeth. Or anything. Fuck, what a doofus. So I'm stuck wandering around playing halloween tricks and looking for my body, tired and hungry and more and more grumpy.

See what I mean? Whiny. If I had any sense I'd get the hell out of this deal and find me some sunny beach where she couldn't find me. The moon, maybe.

I'm not completely heartless. I do feel for her, in the midst of wishing she'd take herself off to the afterlife. I even took her out clubbing in an attempt to cheer her up. I was expecting drunk idiots to crack onto her, and then suffer some Linda-esque revenge, which always seems to cheer her up. But nope – her aura of misery kept them away in droves, while the women flocked to me.

In case you didn't realise, I'm NOT a looker. But that 'I want you but I can't have you' look is magnetic. Apparently. By the end of the night I had a pocketful of phone numbers, and Linda was droopier and more miserable than ever.

Chapter 6

Jailbird

"LINDA!"

"What?"

"What the FUCK do you want?"

"My body, asshole!"

"I don't have it!"

"Tell me where it is, shit-for-brains, and I'll leave you alone."

"You're gonna get me killed, you crazy bitch!"

"Self-inflicted, arsewipe - where's my body?"

"LINDA!"

He stands in a solitary jail cell, pants around his ankles, yelling at a besser-brick wall. The warden watching the television screen shakes his head sadly.

"Geez, they reckon that shit's harmless, eh? Look at the poor fucker!"

He doesn't see the KISS ME written in beautiful cursive in red-rose lip-stick on Mike's arse that Mike's just spotted in the mirror – and which has sparked this latest screaming match.

"Linda, for God's sake... "

She disappears.

He slumps to his knees and starts to cry, as she reappears behind him and crumbles a biscuit into his bed.

(Mike)

Ten times round the hot concrete exercise yard. What a crock. The shittiest thing is, that was the highlight of my fucking day, after Linda's visit last night. Even with the other cons staring at me and whispering to each other and the resident arsehole who had to come over and grab my shoulder *right on the nerve* and 'welcome' me to his fucking dump.

Back inside I go, and I sit in the jail cell, butt cheeks freshly scrubbed, and try to work out what the fuck I'm going to do. With Linda dead, there's no one who gives a shit about me. I'm broke, in the eyes of the law, and I'd have to be out of here to get hold of some of the real cash. I can't post bail for myself, no one else will, so I'm fucked. Stuck in prison again with a bunch of arsehole losers and a ghost writing come-on messages on my arse.

Fuck.

Fuck.

FUCK!

There's no way out of this shit. If I tell Linda the truth, the shit'll just hit the fan. Fuck. She thinks she can just find her fucking body and float off to happyland. If she finds out what I've done with it, there's gonna be no happyland for nobody. She's gonna kill me.

Chapter 7

Dead End

Dear God. I'm starting to think that maybe Linda's been going about this whole vengeance thing all wrong. All she has to do is hang around Mike whining about how unhappy she is. It would drive him nuts, surely. It's driving me nuts. Yeah, I'm an asshole, Linda. But when there's nothing I can do to cheer you up, it's just a little bit frustrating. Like bombs exploding make a house a little bit hot.

The keyboard clicks in front of me, without my help.

Find my body, asshole. That'd cheer me up.

Mental note – never work for ghosts.

I know you've heard Mike's side of the story. Let me guess – I cheated on him, and he was outraged, and we argued, and he slapped me, and I hit my head on something and died, right?

Fucking liar.

(Trent)

I sit at my computer, trying to work out where to go next in this investigation. Linda, thank God, has wandered off to torment Mike.

Irritatingly, Linda can access Mike just fine. Me? Limited contact only. And it's not like he's going to be too helpful right now, is it?

Out of sheer boredom and lack of ideas, I open a browser window and type 'find body of murdered girlfriend' into Google. Lots of results describing gory murders of women by jealous boyfriends. Meh.

Just wait.

Jealous boyfriend.

Maybe the gay neighbours know something?

(Trent)

I knock on the front door of the house next door. It opens a crack almost immediately, and a wary bronzed face peers over the chain.

"Hi!" I say brightly, "I'm a mate of Mike's, I'm helping him with a little problem?"

The face disappears with a scream, the door slams closed, and heavy footsteps recede fast.

That was *not* the reaction I expected.

Chapter 8

Neighbours

(Lazarus)

“Laz, baby, we've got *trouble!*”

Geordie stands in the doorway and pants. He looks terrified.

“Oh Gods, Geordie, you didn't freak out on the cops?”

He puts his hands on his hips and looks indignant.

“Of course not! They've been absolute *pets!* I freaked out on a weird bloke claiming to be Mike's 'mate' and helping him out with a 'little problem'! He's sent a hired *killer* after us, Laz! Now do you still think I'm over-reacting??”

I sigh.

“Geordie, I never said you were over-reacting.”

“You did too! All over your face!”

I sigh. Again. I don't want to have this argument. I'm sick of it. Then the rest of his words sink in.

“Just wait – he's sent someone after us? You sure?”

Geordie nods, bottom lip all a-quiver in a way that's distractingly sexy.

“Sit down. Tell me *exactly* what he said.”

Geordie sits down in the spare office chair and starts swinging it round and round, side to side.

"He said, 'I'm a mate of Mike's – I'm here to help him with a little problem?' And then he smiled, like he wasn't about to shoot the crap out me!"

Fuck. Sounds as though the bastard's changed his mind about the split-up.

(Linda)

Right. I think I've gotten the hang of this keyboard now. Stupid qwerty layout – did a man come up with that? Mike visiting the neighbours has me bloody worried. The guy's going to get himself killed. Geordie's not the stable type, you know? He'd pull the trigger then he'd throw the gun across the room and collapse on the body, weeping – but Trent would still be dead. And yeah, he's a PI and he knows the risks in this sort of case, but I'd still feel bad. Mostly because if he knew what had gone on, there's no way he'd have just wandered over, friendly, unarmed. Fuck! If anything happens to him, it's definitely my fault.

(Linda)

I suppose you're wondering what the hell happened that Trent won't know about, right? I bet Mike's told him some dumbarse story about catching me in bed with them, and losing the plot, and accidentally killing me. Funny, but I just can't get that information out of Trent. Not sure whether it's customer confidentiality keeping his mouth shut – what a bloody weird parody of customer care that is! - or whether he has old-fashioned notions about not telling a lady about rumours besmirching her reputation. No good telling him I'm no lady. Although if Geordie loses the plot and tells all, even some, that fact's going to be bloody obvious to him.

OK. Bean-spilling time. I slept with Geordie and Lazarus. Not for the sex itself, although God, the sex was fantastic. Those two have their major faults, but in the bedroom – together or individually – those boys are perfect. Both muscled,

strong and incredibly gentle. And surprisingly aware of female anatomy for avowed gay guys. But anyway, I didn't sleep with them for the sex, at least at first. I slept with them because Mike asked me to. He wanted in on the action, but he needed a hook. Me.

(Trent)

I stand at the front door, which has just been slammed in my face with a scream. That reaction was truly odd – unless, of course, they *did* know something. Had they seen Mike burying Linda? That would be enough to panic almost anyone. Especially with my dumb reference to being a mate of Mike's. Huh.

I shrug and knock on the door again.

(Lazarus)

Geordie comes running in again, shaking.

“He's knocking on the door again!” he whispers.

I shrug.

“Let him knock!” I say, “Just don't let the bastard in, whatever you do. OK? I really need to get some work done, honey.”

(Trent)

My hand hurts.

“MIKE. NEEDS. HELP!” I yell at the blank door. “I. WON'T. HURT. YOU! LOOK!” I hold up empty hands, “UN. ARMED!”

The door re-opens a crack.

“Promise?”

“Promise!” I say, exasperated.

“Well... OK. But the first sign of misbehaviour, I smack you over the head with a frypan, comprende?”

Sure enough, he's wielding a mean-looking iron skillet.

(Lazarus)

I traipse down the hall to refill my coffee cup. Voices? Geordie's talking to someone, and I hear 'Mike' clear as day. That's not good. I hurry down to the kitchen, and lo and behold! Geordie's chatting away to the person who scared the crap out of him and who I specifically told him not to let in.

“Geordie! Darling! Who's your little friend?” I ask, oozing charm.

“Lazarus, meet Trent! He's not a hired gun after all! Poor little Mikey! He's an exorcist, Mikey hired him to get rid of Linda's ghost! He's trying to find out where she's buried, so he can do a proper exorcism, but of course he can't ask Mikey, because Mikey's in prison now, but I was about to tell him that that's not going to help, because -”

“GEORDIE!” I interrupt the flow of chatter, “Can I talk to you in the study for a second?”

I grab his arm and frog-march him to the study.

“Darling,” I say, “did it ever occur to you that he might be a cop?”

Geordie turns white.

I leave him standing in the study and head back to the kitchen.

“I'm so sorry to be rude,” I say, oozing charm again, “but Geordie's a fervent Mormon, and he was about to launch into a lecture about souls and being earthbound and – well, you don't want to hear all that rubbish, do you? So I thought I'd do the hospitable thing and ask him to shut the hell up. He's in the study praying for us right now, I suspect! So – can I get you another coffee?”

(Trent)

Another excellent cup of coffee, and a whole new basket full of questions. These guys didn't blink an eye at the news that Linda's dead, although it isn't common knowledge. And while they panicked when they thought I was a hit man, they calmed straight down when they'd decided I wasn't. So it's not Mike himself that scares them...

These guys are in it up to their necks.

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(Linda)

"Well duh!" I told Trent when he explained his little theory to me.

"You knew they were involved?"

"Of course! I was there, remember? But that's not important, I'm not hiring you to find out who killed me, doofus! I'm hiring you to find my body. Those twits aren't going to help you with that, are they?"

"Linda," he asked pathetically, "Why didn't you tell me this before? What else aren't you telling me?"

"Nothing important," I said, "Just find my body, OK?"

"But I need all the facts to..."

Blah blah blah. I faded out before he could bore me into a second death.

Chapter 9

Jail

"Hi, Mikey-baby!"

"Not now, Linda."

"What's the matter, lover? Haven't you missed me?"

"Umm, lemme think... NO!"

Linda tries her hardest to look hurt. Her bottom lip starts to quiver.

"Awww, Mikey, have you found someone else?"

"LINDA!"

A slender form opens the door a crack, slips through, and closes the door.

"Mikey, you yelling at the walls again? Am I driving you crazy?"

"Fucker!" Linda whispers as she fades from view, "You **have** found someone else, you slut!"

"Just brushing up on the mad bastard routine, Fly," Mike says with an easy grin, turning around, "did you get it?"

"Well that depends, Mikey – am *I* gonna get it?"

Mike fishes around under his bunk, and hands over a few cigarettes.

“Mikey baby – ya know you don't have to *pay* me, right? Any time you're up for -”

Mike pushes Fly firmly out the door.

“Awww, Mikey!”

Mike sighs. Prison's a bitch some days.

Mike wakes, and stumbles to the sink. He throws water on his face and drinks a handful. Bleary-eyed still, he stares at the mirror. Linda's done a beautiful job this time – green eyeshadow, heavy eyeliner and mascara, bright red lips, pale pink cheeks.

“Fuck, I look like a clown at the fucking whorehouse!” he mutters, and sets about washing it off. Everything but the eyeliner and mascara budge with a minimum of effort. Those stay put, no matter what.

“FUCK!” he yells, frustrated, and gives up, leaving his cell in answer to the breakfast summons. Unsurprisingly, the boys stare and cheer.

“Mikey baby, settin' up a little money-earner, are ya?” Hatchett leers, “Damn iffen ya don' look jus' a lil attractive, boy – ya might get more business than ya know what ta do with!”

“Arsehole!” mutters Mike, grabbing his breakfast.

Chapter 10

Betrayed

What the hell made me think that someone would tell me the whole truth just because they were dead? Geez, shame reaches beyond the grave? More to the point... Linda has a sense of shame?

Weirdly enough, I feel betrayed. Not because she slept with the neighbour boys – I already knew about that. Not because of anything she might have done in that odd foursome. Because she lied to me. What a sap. I get up, grab my wallet, and slam my front door on the way out to the pub.

I'm sitting at the bar, deep in irrational but nasty misery. I've just finished ordering another shot of Sambucca, when Linda materialises on the stool beside me.

"HOLY SHIT!" The man who'd been about to sit back down on the stool jumps back. "Oh, sorry, luv, I just didn't see ya come in, ya scared the crap – sorry – outta me!"

Linda smiles sweetly and tells him that's OK. "Would you like your chair back?" she purrs, leaning forward to ensure that he has a good view down her top. He shakes his head slowly as the woman with him looks daggers at her. Linda winks at me, then leans over to the irate woman and whispers to her. Suddenly the snarl on the woman's face disappears, and she grins.

"What'd you tell her?" I whisper to Linda.

"It's all fake", she whispers back.

I laugh. More true than the woman's ever likely to know.

(Linda)

I'm back from another Mike-raid. I materialised in Mike's cell in the middle of the night. He was fast asleep, and I watched him twitch and mutter while I pondered what I'd do to him next. But I couldn't concentrate. I just felt sad. This schmuck used to be the love of my life. He was strong, manly, uncomplicated. He wanted to protect me, and to fuck, and to eat his bizarre high-protein microwave meals, and that was it. Then Laz and Geordie pranced into our lives, and everything went pear-shaped. Well, honestly? It was probably pear-shaped already. It'd felt good, though, before them. So I did nothing, just came back here. What the hell is the point?

(Trent)

Linda reappears in the flat, and immediately melts into a major mope. Right – that's my cue. I'm off to do some investigating.

Five drinks and a couple of black coffees later, I'm at the prison in time for morning visitations. Mike, obviously tense when he walks in, relaxes a little when he sees that it's me.

“Thank God!” he says, and collapses into his plastic moulded chair.

“Who'd you think I might be?”

He shrugs.

“Just about anyone, including a friend of anyone in there.” he points behind him with a thumb.

“So,” I say, “What do you want me to do? How am I supposed to help you?”

Another visitor is escorted into the room, and sits at a free table at the other side of the room.

“I haven't made many friends here,” he says heavily. “In fact, I think I've pissed someone off a lot...”

The other visitor, alone still, removes something from his pocket and points it at Mike.

“Get down!” I yell, every reaction just a bit slow from the alcohol. I shove Mike backwards with the table, his chair overturns, and something smacks into my left shoulder, spinning me around. I smack my head on the table and my shoulder turns into a ball of white-hot pain and everything fades out.

(Linda)

Love is never easy.

That's what I kept telling myself every time Mike and I had one of our 'discussions'. You've gotta work at it, make compromises, smooth things down.

Of course, Mike's idea of 'working at it' was to fuck more, and to bring me flowers. Sweet, but kinda missing the point when the main problem was that he spent money like a millionaire, but his house was always on the point of being repossessed because he 'forgot' to make the repayments. Moron. Yeah, I could've made them for him, I know. But why the hell should I finance his bad habits? Hard work and sensible spending got me where I am today. Where I was, I mean.

Things were OK, though, you know? Then one moonlit night we were sitting on the little balcony outside Mike's bedroom, watching our neighbours' regular Kama Sutra show and quietly giving each effort a score, and arguing in whispers about when each particular 'performance' ended and began. Mike turned to me and he said, very casually, “Baby, do you think they'd let us join in?”

That was the beginning of the end – to quote Shakespeare or some other dead writing guy.

Oh, fuck. Gotta go – something's happening.

(Trent)

“OI!!!!”

The black fades away. Linda has me by the shoulders, and she's shaking me and screaming in my face.

"Wha..?"

"Don't you DARE fucking die, asshole! I need you! DON'T fucking die! Get BACK!"

There's no more black, no more pain, just Linda and a light that's getting brighter and brighter.

"GET! BACK! NOW!"

She's stopped shaking me, she's shoving me backwards, and I'm so tired, and the light starts to dim into blackness again.

God. The light's getting brighter again, and a male voice is calling my name. Can't people leave me the fuck alone? I open my eyes and raise my hands to shove away the annoying git shining a light into my eyes, and scream with pain. My left shoulder is white-hot with pain again, and pokers of pain are stabbing into my neck and down my arm.

"FUCK!" I yell.

"DON'T. MOVE!" the man shouts at me, and I'm happy to do what I'm told.

I blink, and breathe, and calm down a bit. The room's bright white everywhere – walls, ceiling, sheets. I'm in a bed. Hospital?

"You had an accident at the jail, Mr French," the man says.

I shake my head, very carefully.

"I was shot," I say, remembering the stranger with the gun.

The man nods.

“In the shoulder. We've operated and removed the bullet, but you'll need to be careful of it while it's healing,” he says.

Yeah. I'd noticed that bit.

Chapter 1

Aftermath

(Mike)

Well, fucking great.

Here I am, stuck in prison, and someone's trying to kill me. And it's not Linda, for once. And they shot my exorcist, the arseholes. Now how the hell am I gonna get rid of her?

And like thinking her name brought her here, she pops in. Fucking wonderful.

"Hi, Linda."

"Mike – what the FUCK happened to Trent?"

"Whadda you care?"

She rolls her eyes at me.

"Fine," I say, beyond caring, "He got shot. Someone was aiming for me. Thanks to you nicking everyone's stuff and stashing it in my cell, everybody hates me. And someone really hates me. Happy? Finished trying to get me killed? They're gonna try again, you know."

The bitch turns white as a ghost, and disappears. Lucky, I was having trouble keeping a straight face.

(Linda)

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. I can't believe I got Trent shot. This has all gone too far. None of this is his fault. I should never have gotten anyone else involved in my problems.

(Trent)

I wake up, and Linda's sitting by my bed sobbing. Huh, no tears. If anyone ever asks me if ghosts can cry, I'll know the answer.

"I'm so sorry, Trent!" she gulps.

"Salright," I say.

"Someone shot you because of something I did. I'm so sorry!"

Is she repeating herself? Or am I just really drugged up? I frown, and try to clear my brain through sheer willpowerish stuff.

"Linda?"

"Trent... you got shot because I did something to make people hate Mike. I'm so sorry!"

She *is* repeating herself.

"Mike doesn't need any help, Linda, he's an arsehole on legs."

She looks shocked.

"He is?"

Fuck. Bloody blind women. She didn't notice even after he killed her?

(Mike)

“Fuck-knuckle!”

I turn around. Hatchett. Great start to the fucking morning.

“Whaddya want, Hatch?”

“Lola wants her money, fuck-knuckle!”

“Then Lola shouldn't try to get me killed, should she?”

He shrugs.

“Lola's an impatient girl.”

I roll my eyes. Fuck, mafia movie with a drug-fucked psycho chick playing Godfather.

“Hatch, why the fuck are you doing a chick's bidding? You tied to her apron strings? She promised to tie you up and whip you when you get out, if you're a good boy?”

He sneers at me.

“Just get Lola's money, fuck-knuckle – you got lucky this time. Next time, that accident might just hit you *right* in the chest!”

He pokes me in the chest to make his point, and I slap it away. Hard.

“She'll get her money faster if she gets me the hell outta here, Hatch. Tell her that – and she might use the special studded whip, ya?”

His jaw tightens, and I know I've crossed the line. He hauls off and smacks me right in the jaw. Down I go, and all I remember is my head hitting the concrete and a sky full of stars.

(Linda)

Stuff it. I don't care if I caused all this. It's not my fault. It's Mike's. HE'S the asshole, not me. I'm sitting in front of the computer, repeating this mantra – 'Mike's the asshole, not me!'

You know, I think I'm starting to believe it!

Chapter 12

Obligatory Shower Scene

(Trent)

Have you ever tried to get undressed without moving one arm and its shoulder? To put it simply – it's bloody near impossible. I finish up struggling out of my PJs with a minimum of screaming and ditching the sling. My bottom lip hurts like hell from me biting it, and I concentrate on that pain to distract myself from the stabbing fire moving through my shoulder and neck. By the time I'm into a shower and enjoying the feeling of being in less pain *and* slightly clean, I have company.

"Hey, gorgeous!" purrs Linda.

I close my eyes and sigh. She's stark naked and substantial enough for me to feel her moving slightly against the front of my body, from my chest right down to the tops of my feet. She raises herself up on tiptoe and whispers a kiss over my lips.

"Hi Linda," I say, for lack of anything intelligent to say. "Umm... "

"Don't worry," she whispers in my ear, "I won't hurt ya, honey. I'm just here to offer a hand. See you when you get out, lover."

She giggles and disappears.

God. I couldn't help but be turned on, the wench, and any attempt to masturbate would hurt like hell.

"Wench!" I mutter, as I turn off the water.

"I heard that!" she calls from outside the cubicle.

I try not to laugh, it hurts too much. I eventually settle for a snort.

"I'll be good!" she says, "Now come out of there, I had a brilliant idea!"

I groan, because Linda's brilliant ideas are usually painful for someone, but carefully get out onto the bathmat. Linda's holding the hugest hairdrier I've ever seen.

"Just relax!" she says, and grins.

She aims the hairdrier at me and turns it on. And hell, it actually works. Slowly but surely, I get toasty warm and dry.

"Spread em!" she demands.

"I'm fine!"

"You can't stay wet down there, Trent, your balls'll go moldy!"

"You're not going to let this rest, are you?"

"Fuck, no!" she says, with a huge grin on her face.

I shrug, and bite back a scream of pain.

"I've really got to stop doing that!" I squeeze out.

"Awww, poor Trenty-baby... now spread em!"

That girl's got a one-track mind.

Chapter 13

Dreaming

(Mike)

I'm sitting in a spa bath with three other people, all of us naked, all of us downing shots of vodka and bourbon. We're all getting drunker and drunker, and friendlier and friendlier. Linda rests her head on Geordie's shoulder and slides her hand over his chest.

"Geordie baby, are you completely gay, or do you swing a little?"

"OH you naughty girl!" he squeals, "I'm all Laz's, darlin'!"

She looks over to Laz and grins, raising an eyebrow.

"Mind if I give him a test?"

Lazarus looks at Geordie, who shrugs a little and smiles.

"Only if I get to test out *your* hunk, honey!"

She blows me a kiss.

"Oh, Mike's all mine... but I'm happy to lend him out... you need his leash on?"

Lazarus whistles and Geordie giggles and I blush.

"I think I can handle him, honey... what do you think, sexy-legs?" he purrs, turning to me and slipping a hand further up my leg.

I shrug and wonder what I should be doing to stay in character. Probably keep acting shy, I think, but fuck it – I've been wanting this piece of arse for months. I draw back a little only to pounce, tangling his legs with mine to dunk him underwater, with me on top of him. I pull him up against my chest, and he spits out water and laughs.

“Linda, I think I should've asked for his leash!”

Linda's not listening, though. She's in mid-snog with Geordie.

A few minutes later I'm in a world of bliss until Linda calls my name and Lazarus punches me in the groin, straight up into my prostrate. It hurts like fucking hell and I scream and curl into a ball, wondering why Lazarus is so suddenly pissed with me. Then I wake up and I'm in jail again, and Linda is standing by my bed, smirking.

“What's the matter, lover? Did I wake you from a nice dream?”

Bitch.

Chapter 14

The Body

(Linda)

Trent's decided to go all noble and chivalrous on me. Hell, why do men have to DO that at the worst possible time?

He's out of hospital, and he's barely looking after himself, and he's determined to continue with the case. My case. The one that nearly turned him into dead. I tried yelling at him, I tried arguing, I tried telling him he's a bloody idiot. But he just shrugged and said he was going to keep investigating. Stubborn little shit.

(Trent)

Thank God, I'm out of the house. And better yet, Linda is off tormenting Mike, or something. She's a nice chick in some ways, Linda – and a pain-in-the-arse psycho chick in others. I think maybe I liked her better when she was moping. Now she's bustling around 'helping' me and she's got sex on the mind despite a distinct lack of hormones, and ... god. Remember what I said about not letting her near your trousers? Well, it's hard to run away with a broken shoulder. You know?

I haven't yet worked up the courage to go back to the jail – too many nasty memories. So I decide on following up the other loose end. Lazarus and Geordie. I'm about to grab my car keys from their nail when the reach makes my shoulder stab painfully and it occurs to me that driving was probably on the list of things that I shouldn't be doing that I didn't listen to. I call a cab, grab a beer, and wait.

I clamber carefully out of the cab, chucking a \$20 note back to the driver.

"Thanks for being gentle, mate," I say, and shut the door.

I glance over at Mike's place. A second-storey window's broken. Kids, probably. I've never understood the fascination with breaking stuff – stealing I get, but random destruction's beyond me. I think about going to check it out, but I couldn't be bothered right now. My shoulder's starting to ache, and I just want a cup of coffee to wash down a painkiller or two.

The front door of Lazarus and Geordie's place opens, and Geordie trots out toward the mailbox. He's dressed in a short bathrobe and, as far as I can tell, nothing else.

"GEORDIE!" I yell, waving gingerly.

He looks up and peers at me carefully, then grins.

"Trent, baby!" he yells, "what *are* you doing in that ridiculous sling? It makes you look pale, dearie – positively *wan*!"

I walk across the road to him and get air-kissed.

"Oh, my god, what *have* they done to you?" he asks, taking in the bandages. "Come on, you need a nice cup of coffee – you head in, I'll just grab the mail and follow. And make yourself *comfy*, you hear?" he bellows the last bit after me.

God, can you imagine Geordie doing *anything* covert? Ever?

I head for the lounge chairs, pausing to take a couple of huge pills out of their foil. Horse-pills, my father used to call them when they were this size. I sit down, and despite my best intentions, start to relax as Geordie comes in, dumps the mail on the counter and starts to fuss around me. He brings me a pillow, asks me ten times if I'm comfortable enough, and finally decides that what I really need is coffee.

"Here you are, dearie!" he grins as he hands me the mug, "I put in lots of milk to cool it down and," he winks, "I irished it up a little for you! Best medicine in the world!"

I take a cautious sip to wet my throat, and nearly choke anyway. Cripes, Geordie wasn't joking about irishing it up – there's enough bourbon in here to kill *any* pain. I swallow the pills and wash them down with the alcoholic coffee, and then remember the warnings about codeine and alcohol consumption. Ah well, it's not like I was planning to drive home anyhow.

"Mike is going *nuts*," I explain to Geordie, "Poor man is stuck in a cell with only his guilt and a vengeful ghost haunting his arse. Oh, and getting shot at when he ventures out, of course. Geordie, if there's *anything* you know that might help Mike out – or might help me help Linda leave this world for the next – would you tell me? Please?"

"Oh, poor little Mikey!" Geordie says and downs another whiskey. He's onto his fifth, now, and starting to look a little shaky. "Poor little Mikey deserves everything he gets! Killing Linda like that – and he hasn't even ponied up our share of the cash, has he? Poor little Linda, I liked that girl... ha, if she was really poor she'd still be alive, wouldn't she, Mikey-baby would never have barbecued her arse... oh, such a nice arse, too!"

Luckily, I can't say a thing, I'm frozen with horror.

"Such a juicy arse – all tender, and beautiful with a plum sauce!" Geordie croons, looking off into the distance. "I miss her!"

He covers his face and starts to sob.

The arseholes ate Linda!

Chapter 15

Fallout

(Trent)

“They ATE me? They ATE my body? That's why I can't find my body, because it's... it's *sewerage!*”

Linda's not impressed.

“Those DICKHEADS!”

She punches my wall, and her hand goes through without breaking anything – then she clenches her jaw and rips electrical wiring and insulation out through a large hole when she pulls it back out. Something fizzes, and the lights dim and go out.

I sigh. Somehow I get the idea that telling her to calm down wouldn't be a brilliant move.

“I'm sorry, Linda,” I say helplessly.

She collapses into a little heap on the floor, and heaves with sobs.

I kneel down next to her, and put my hand on her shoulder in a weak attempt to comfort her, but my hand goes straight through – she's completely insubstantial.

“Linda... ”

I have *no* idea how to comfort a woman who I can't hug, or kiss, or even touch. So I hover uselessly, a couple of tears of my own welling out of my eyes. No one deserves this kind of crap, but especially not Linda.

“Fuuuuuuck!” she wails.

Eventually she gets up, and she's got her bottom jaw juttled out in a way that tells me I'd better only get in her way if it's a matter of life and death – and probably not then, either.

“I want to see them.” she says.

“Laz and Geordie?”

She nods, and her bottom lip quivers a little as she thrusts out that lower jaw just a little more.

“You want me there?” I guess, since she hasn't popped out of view.

She nods.

I sigh, and call another cab.

“Why?”

Linda's standing in their lounge room, looking lost. Looking betrayed. Geordie and Lazarus are speechless in front of her, pole-axed by shock and guilt. It's like they knew Linda was around, but never thought she'd find out what they'd done to her, and never thought about what they should do if she did.

“WHY?” she demands, and starts to cry. Big, ghostly tears well up in her eyes and roll down her cheeks.

Geordie, never one to be out-dramaed, starts to sob.

“I'm so sorry, Lindy-love!” he chokes, “We never meant – we didn't know – it was -”

God. All the emotion in this room makes me want to blubber myself, or down a couple of stiff drinks. Except I don't think that doing something as trivial as making a drink would be a brilliant idea right now. And besides, it seems disrespectful.

"It was *what?*"

"It was Mike," Lazarus says, looking straight at her for the first time, "He told us what he'd done, that it was too late, you were dead... and that you wouldn't want him to go to prison. *We* didn't want him to go to prison. He said it was an accident... we didn't realise til his mates came round that it might not have been. But – we'd already... "

He falls silent, and stares at the carpet.

"You *ate* me, you arseholes!" Linda yells.

They nod meekly. Geordie snuffles, and digs in his pocket for a hankie.

"We didn't know," says Lazarus, and sighs, "I know that's not much comfort, but... we didn't know, it was just a barbecue Mike invited us to. He told us as if it was a big joke, that we just ate his ex-girlfr-"

He breaks off and buries his head in his hands.

Linda is starting to look more angry than teary.

"Do you want to make this up to me?" she demands.

They nod slowly.

"Go to the police. Tell them everything." she says.

"But -" starts Geordie.

"No, she's right," says Lazarus, smiling sadly, "If we go to jail for this, we deserve it – but we owe Linda closure, darling."

"Too fucking right!" says Linda.

“My last, grand gesture!” Geordie says in a small voice, and stands up. He wobbles a bit as he searches his pockets for another hankie. “We'll go, Linda – we'll tell them everything!”

“Everything?” I query him and Linda, wondering if she really wants the whole story to get out – wondering if he would ever stick to it.

She nods, decisively.

“Everything!” she says, and disappears.

I call yet another cab, and shepherd the boys into it.

“Police station, thanks.”

“You *ate* her?” the police officer looks shocked, appalled. The murder part of the story she listened to without losing a smidgeon of the 'nothing you say can shock me' look. Her look met its match, I guess.

“Yes! We ate her!” says Geordie loudly, and bursts into tears. Again.

The police officer sighs and motions her junior to go get more tissues. This has been a damp interview.

“Do you need a break?” she asks.

Geordie shakes his head and looks brave.

“I just want to get this over with,” he whispers, and sobs.

The junior gets back and thrusts a tissue box at Geordie. He grabs a handful and honks loudly.

“I'm so sorry,” he says, “it's just... ”

The police officer nods understandingly, her professional persona back on. The junior is looking as though he may just run back out of the room to vomit, given an opening.

“Mr Smith – you were at the same barbecue? You... umm... ingested the victim's body too?”

“Yes, I was – I did,” Lazarus answers calmly. His mouth is quivering, but he's refusing to cry.

“Right. And Mr French – this man, Michael Reynolds, told you that he killed Ms Stevens?”

“Yes, he did,” I say, “although he claimed it was an accident.”
She writes a bit more, then tells the recorder that the interview is finished.

“Would you mind staying around, gentlemen? We'll need to get individual statements, now that we have the bare bones.” she says.

We all nod, and the junior goes out to get us each a crappy instant coffee in a foam cup.

Chapter 16

Court

Mike appears in court wearing a bright pink, very tight tshirt with 'WANNABE LESBIAN' spelled out with rhinestones. It's appalling. The addition of tight black jeans – too tight, I suspect, as I see Mike wince and try to surreptitiously pull them away from his groin – makes him look like a slightly psychotic 80s reject. His hair is even puffy.

When he sees me approaching the witness stand, his eyes widen.

“FUCKER!” I see him mouth, clear as day. Oh well, he was going to work out the truth sooner or later.

I manage to get through my testimony without distorting too many facts, but without mentioning paranormal activity, either. Linda would be a bit much for these folk to handle.

As I walk toward the door, Mike turns and scowls at me – so I see his face when they call the next witness, Lazarus. He pales, and for the first time he looks *scared*. I think he's just realised that he's going down.

Linda fades in beside me and sniggers.

“Clothes your doing?” I ask quietly.

“Who else cares enough to help him get ready?” she asks, and sniggers again. “You shoulda seen his face when he realised that was all he had to wear!”

I smirk.

“You should've seen his face when they called Lazarus!”

The jury come back, and declare a decision.

Not guilty of murder.

Guilty of manslaughter.

Linda, sitting next to me, sighs.

"He murdered me in cold blood," she says quietly.

I nod.

"He's getting punished for part of it, at least," I offer.

She smiles a little.

"I paid off his debt to the mafia-wannabe," she says.

"Why?" I ask, shocked.

"Her hitman might not've missed next time... and I want Mike to be thoroughly miserable," she says, looking sideways at me and smirking, "the bastard'd probably repent on his deathbed and go straight to heaven, otherwise – it'd be just like him."

I snort. She's right, it would.

"What's happening to the rest of your money?" I ask, remembering the whole reason Mike killed her in the first place.

"I willed it all to a cat shelter, years ago," she said, finally cracking out a proper Linda-ish grin. "I told Mike I'd left it to him, then changed my will to leave it to the cats – he'd only have lost it on the pokies or something dumb, you know?" She snickers. "So he killed his golden goose, the moron!"

I heave a sigh. She's a tough one, but this whole thing must've hurt her like hell.

"Yeah, it did," she says quietly, looking at me.

(Linda)

So that's it. Mike's in jail, and he's scared shitless. Out here, he can pretend to be a decent member of society. In there, everyone knows him for an asshole, you see. They won't kill him, though. They'll just make his life hell for a few years, and that'll do for payback. Unless, of course, wherever I'm going will let me come back once a year and tattoo come-on lines on his back. That'd be fun.

You've been sweet. You've sat there and listened to this whole sordid story, and you've never once told me I'm a bloody idiot. Thanks for that.

Bye.

The End

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