

Monique

Fox Emerson

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Foreword

Although this book took a year to write and edit, it took a lifetime to create.

I've been asked many times by friends and reviewers whether the story is real, and whether the central character exists, because some of the content is quite hard to believe. My answer is a resounding yes. She is quite real, and this is the resulting story. As much as all the other characters are real and all the events are also quite real, some of the names and places have been changed to protect the identities of the people involved for a number of reasons.

The young woman depicted in this book was the victim of many men and women who abused an innocent teenage girl, and for the most part, ruined her adolescent life.

The woman who recounts the story today is quite proud of her daughter and has a very different and happy life. This is a testament to the strength within herself to come away from her past with optimism and courage to brave the future by realising that her life could change for the better.

“Monique” is the story of one woman’s life, but it represents many women around the world who live an alternate and distorted reality that many of us know little or nothing about.

I warn the reader that some of the content in this book is graphic, vile and perverted, and to remember that these events remain integral to Monique and her story because they actually happened.

The raid

1995

Cookie slept on the settee while Cherie slept soundlessly in her bedroom. If I hadn't had so much weed and coke, I highly likely would've been more aware of the silence in the flat. I'd already spent two hours cutting up brown, which is heroin, in the kitchen. I looked at the clock and realised the time — 1am. Surely several hours hadn't passed since Cookie had laid down to take a nap at 8.

Exhaustion overwhelmed me as I realised that I hadn't slept for over 40 hours. Considering whether I should try to wake up Cookie, hoping that he might take over, I continued regardless. "Sleep would be good now," I said aloud and even briefly considered sneaking in some zzz's myself, but rejected the idea after glancing at the clock again. I looked over at where he lay softly snoring and decided that I'd continue for a while longer. There would still be many more batches to cut before morning, so I quickened my pace and returned to my daydream about my would-be life.

Visions of all the money coming my way entered my thoughts as I cut, weighed, then bagged up quality heroin. Thousands of pounds awaited us after this last batch would be finished and distributed. In my mind, I'd pretty much already spent the money. I'd been daydreaming about the next few days many times. I visualised myself paying off my debts and loans, paying out the balance on my car, and buying a few necessary items I desperately needed, such as a new cooker.

Cherie popped into my mind, and I smiled. She is the most important person in my life. My darling would soon enough turn 8. No longer a baby, she really needed a new bed for her quickly growing body. She would be tall; the signs were already showing, like how she outgrew her clothes far too fast. Like me, her mum, she should reach at least 5'10.

That day I'd been dreaming a fair bit about Cookie and me possibly buying a house together. Cherie would have a larger room... she would even have a dog, maybe a Golden Retriever. We'd have dinner parties filled with laughter and fine wine. Cookie and I would sit on our veranda late at night and talk about having a baby together. I'd hold my head high as I walked Cherie to school, pregnant again with Cookie's child. We'd be expecting a boy perhaps, a chocolate-coloured beauty just like Cherie. Cookie would legally adopt Cherie, and she might start calling him 'Dad'.

I continued cutting and weighing and daydreaming. Occasionally, I'd gaze at the sleeping figure on my couch and a familiar warmth would envelope me. To say that I loved that man a great deal would be an understatement. Every time I either thought about him or heard his name, I reminded myself how much I loved him. In his presence, I felt loved—away from him, I was missed. When he slept, I would watch him and envision a picture-postcard life; one that, to me, had only ever existed on television.

He was such a handsome man, kind, considerate and thoughtful. When I looked into his dark eyes, they went from hazel to dark brown, depending on his mood. I liked that about him, they reflected so much of his personality. His skin was soft and dark and clear of any imperfections, like most of the Cypriot men I've met. It was easy to get distracted and stare at him while he snoozed on the lounge, his tall form just slightly longer than the length of it—so his feet were over the edge. This made me smile to myself.

From the corner of my eye, lights outside the window showed cars driving by, which was not unusual for this part of London. All sorts went on and at all hours of the day and night, so I kept my mind on the current task. Even with little sleep, I expertly weighed the bags and measured the exact quantities. I did this while I continued to daydream and plan my life and wondered if Cookie did the same... and if his daydreams included me. Cookie's phone rang and woke him, but I could tell by his tone that someone was coming to pick up the drugs. I frantically weighed and sealed up the last couple of bags, I realised he was close, probably outside the door. Cookie got up and stretched, which I watched out of the corner of my eye, he then wiped sleep from his eyes as he looked at me with a blank expression. It filled me with love.

Moments later, a knock on the door startled us, Cookie opened it and a man I'd seen a few times before came inside.

"Hi, Kelly-Anne, you ok?"

“Hey, Red, I’m good thank you. How are you?”

Because I understood that Cookie’s mate, Red, would have such little time, I quickly packed up all the bags in a container for him. We weren’t close enough for us to hug; he was a business associate of Cookie’s. There was something about him that Cookie didn’t know, but that could come later. It was a small thing.

After Red left, Cookie gave me a kiss, patted my behind and said he was going back to sleep. Before he did, I grabbed him and gave him a long kiss. He looked surprised as though this was out of character for me. His eyes changed colour again; warm brown. This tiny little scar on the side of his left eye always drew my attention.

“You’ve got that naughty smile Bebe,” and his characteristic cheeky smile appeared, the sides of his mouth lifting slightly and making him appear even more handsome than ever.

“Well I am cutting up a whole heap of drugs, so yes I’m being naughty.”

“I’m a lucky man to have the woman doing the work while I sleep. The envy of all my friends.”

“You are lucky and don’t you forget it.”

He kissed me again, slightly longer this time and for a few moments, we both got lost in each other’s love. He opened his eyes and moved back as though he was appraising me one more time. With a smile, he finally turned and went back to the couch.

I thought I’d join him on the couch for a snooze myself, so I went back into the kitchen and slowly began the process of cleaning up. I eyed off the last bag of coke— that one destined to be for us. It would wait.

Call it instinct, call it the smell of bacon, something in my gut made me stop, and suddenly my ears tuned in to sounds outside the apartment. Something didn’t seem right, so I turned off the kitchen light and walked through the now-dark front room. It didn’t take long for my eyes to adjust so that I was able to move over to peek out the window. Interior lights in a car parked across the street made it easy to spot the two guys in the front and what looked like a third in the back. The sensation that they were monitoring me made me uneasy. Fear became reality when he moved slightly. I realised that both the men within view were looking up at me.

I stepped back and caught my breath. What the... Am I imagining this? I looked again. There was no mistake, they were looking up at me.

My coordination was non-existent as I tried to decide what to do, I was about to call out to Cookie when a car suddenly appeared from the left and screeched to a stop out the front of the house, shattering the silence. Another car quickly followed. Suddenly, another appeared from the right, parking nose to nose with the first.

Everything happened so quickly that recalling the exact events and in the right order would be difficult. All at once, the men in the original unmarked car, along with several cops in the new cars, got out and ran across the street to where Cookie’s car sat in shadow. Some of them were looking up at me, and I instinctively knew this was it.

“Cookie!” I screamed, as my legs quickly raced me to the kitchen as fast as I could make them. As if on auto-pilot, I wiped the counters clean and took the only bag of coke I had left and flushed it down the sink. I cried. My heart broke to view this as though from a distance, almost like an ‘out of body’ experience. “Cookie!” I yelled again.

“What!?” he grumbled sleepily from the couch. I wasn’t sure if he’d rolled over and gone back to sleep so I was about to call out again but stopped when I realised he’d got up.

I looked towards him and made sure he was wide awake and yelled, “The cops are out front and they’ll be here any minute!”

He materialised in the kitchen beside me, flustered, and glaring at me while I sponged the leftover Charlie off the counter. He was confused and still half-asleep. “What the fuck are you doing, Kelly-Anne?!” he shouted, and moved to stop me.

My reflexes pushed him away, and then I turned to stare at him. I could see his dark eyes wide, now freaked out. “I’m not going to fucking jail for this baby!”

I could see the enormity of our situation hit him and his face registered that this was it. We’d feared this moment but never thought it would actually happen. It had lain beneath our optimism,

always threatening it. As much as I knew I'd regret yelling at him, I had needed to shock him awake. Right then I needed him alert and thinking straight because I couldn't do this without him.

I was wiping the scales clean where just minutes earlier I'd carefully weighed the brown when Cookie, who was now wide awake and rushing around yelled, "The fucking cutting agent! Where did you put it?"

I continued brushing the leftover Charlie we'd snorted earlier onto the floor and shouted back, "In the laundry basket!" Then added, "Fuck, don't forget the cash is under the bed."

"Which bed?" he called, as he raced out of the kitchen to which I yelled back "mine!" as he disappeared around the corner. The door opened, and I realised he'd rushed out of the flat.

My mind was all over the place at this point, and I could no longer focus or form coherent thoughts. What else needed to be dealt with?

I ran to the window again and saw Cookie was heading right to the cops. They suddenly lunged at him and put his hands behind his back and began to walk him towards the apartment. Without knowing what I was going to do with it, I bolted the door closed and then went to retrieve the cutting agent from the laundry basket.

It was too late as all hell burst through my door with unbelievable force.

First the front door smashed open, with wooden splinters flying and a portion of the main lock landing near the television. I stood there, frozen. Then a torrent of men, both uniformed and plain-clothed came racing in. Whatever peace I'd sensed minutes earlier, along with any dreams of being debt-free, disintegrated along with my front door. Someone yelled "Police! Don't move!" I couldn't move anyway; fear gripped me and ensured I'd become an unwilling participant in this surreal movie.

A heavysset cop raced towards me and shoved me hard against the fridge while another appeared alongside him and pinned me up by the shoulders. Instantly, pain screamed through my body as yet another cop muscled in, his face mere inches away from mine as he yelled questions at me. His breath was rancid and smelled of garlic as he competed with the other cops, all asking me a lot of questions and all of them at the same time. I had no chance as I couldn't make out what they said. Deep down I understood what they were asking me.

Across the room, I saw Cookie being dragged with arms handcuffed behind him. He fell once, and a cop roughly picked him up, yanking his arms up high behind him. I winced as I could see the pain in his face and could see that it would hurt, even if Cookie would try not to show it. Cookie would rather die than show these pigs they'd hurt him, I appreciated that. The cops wouldn't though. They dragged him backwards, and I heard them yelling at him with deep, strong and authoritative voices.

I was walked across the flat by five of the cops to my bedroom, and one of them kept firing questions at me. They couldn't comprehend that I'd been through a lot worse than this. Give me your best shot, I thought.

I heard Cookie calling out in a gruff voice filled with pain, "Leave her alone! She hasn't got anything to do with this, you bastards, leave her alone. She knows nothing! She's just my girlfriend, she's innocent!"

They closed the door and interrogated me. The same questions, over and over again. I tried to listen to what had happened to Cookie in the other room, but they kept on talking and asking their questions. They became just noises to me, so I tuned them out and tried to focus on what was happening in the other room.

One of the cops, a serious-looking woman said, "This will go a lot easier on you if you cooperate with us. We don't want you, we just want your boyfriend. We know your involvement and if you help us, we'll help you."

It became all too much for me. I had this moment, this clarity whereby the predicament I was in overpowered me and I felt terror. Realisation that I might go to jail hit me, and it hit me hard. My mind had been all over the place before then, and I had been vaguely aware that I couldn't focus on a single thought for too long. Until that moment, as I sat on the end of my bed surrounded by police, I hadn't understood. Reality can be brutal, which would explain why being high, drunk, or zoning out is so alluring. At this moment I was no longer any of those; I was alert, and my heart beat faster— like a cold hammer desperate to escape from my chest in any way that it could.

Whether it was an equally combined mix of exhaustion or a lack of drugs, I wasn't sure. Maybe it was the realisation that my life had quickly ended because halfway through the interrogation my body shut down and I zoned out. I could still hear them, but I simply stopped caring. They continued to ask me things, and I retreated further and further into myself.

They eventually left me sitting and staring at the wall. The last thing they'd told me before carting Cookie away was that I shouldn't go anywhere, and they were going to come back with more questions. I didn't doubt that they'd been watching us but decided I'd worry about that later. In the back of my mind, I was aware that I had a lot to worry about.

I walked through the suddenly eerie house and went to Cherie's room. She was asleep, but I needed her then. I lifted the cover, and she sleepily rolled over onto her side. Her dark form beside me providing some comfort as I lay down next to her and held her close to me and wondered how I'd ever be able to sleep. But somehow, I did.

An Innocent Girl

1968 – 1980

I was born with a cord around my neck in 1968, which my mother often joked should've been a warning to her that this was a glimpse into our future.

My mum and dad split up around 1975 when I was 7 years old, when my dad announced he was fucking his secretary, Melissa. He must've liked it a lot because he decided that a life with her would be better than a life with my mother, my older brother Mark, and me. I was too young to remember the conversation, but mum told me that's pretty much how it went. One day I had a semi-functional father to come home to, the next I didn't.

My dad, however, had a different view. My mum didn't give him sex, and he told me he was forced to go have sex with his secretary. At that time, I was distraught. No child should see their father pack his things and leave their home. When you're a child, your parents are your world. The first few years of your life, your parents are all that you care about. Nothing in life compares to the pain of watching someone you idolised just pack up and leave you.

It doesn't matter now; what's more important is that he later married Melissa and had a daughter with her. I like my dad and I get on ok with Melissa, but I blocked their princess bitch daughter on Facebook a few years ago, because she is an incredibly spoiled, two-faced, mouthy, condescending twat. My feelings towards her might stem from the fact that my father left me for her. Either way, she's still a pathetic, childish cunt. I'm not sure how else to convey my feelings towards her, really.

I have these great memories of when my mum and dad were together, of going to faraway places such as Spain, France, Ireland and Scotland. We also did the typical English vacations through a company called Pontins, who organised holidays for families in various parts of England.

These memories are mixed with horrid ones of my mum crying a lot after Dad left, to other memories of Mum dating again. She dated some right losers that made me wonder what she was thinking. My dad wasn't a model father by any means, but he proved that Mum had definitely stepped down several notches.

In 1975 I began horse riding in a place called Banstead, outside of London. There was an arena there with a riding school which I went to as often as I could. I started volunteering to ride people's horses anywhere just so I could be with them. This went on for a few years and was my first real passion in life. Thanks to Mum and Dad, I was able to buy my own grooming kit and other riding accessories. It also meant I had a lot less to do with my brother Mark, who treated me like crap. I also didn't have to deal with Mum's emotional problems all the time and her on-and-off relationships with strange men.

One of the few advantages of being the child whose parents had split was that they both spent extra money on us trying to win our vote. Mark got more presents after Mum and Dad split as did I. The other advantage was their new partners started buying us presents to impress our parent. So we ended up with four sets of presents and four sets of adults trying to win our affection.

In 1978, when I was 10 years old, Mum met this big bear of a guy called Duncan. He was a giant as wide as he was tall, with a long beard and a good contender for the rock band ZZ Top. I'm not sure if he started beating the shit out of my mum before or after they got married, but I do realise that I didn't like him one bit from day dot. What Mum saw in him, I'll never appreciate. It's hard to look at your mother and say she's beautiful, especially when she dates complete losers. They make her look stunning, next to them, she looks ravishing. I do look at my mum and often remark how stunning she is. She's blonde, blue eyed, fair skinned and 5'10 which is pretty much how I ended up looking. She always styled her hair in those days with curls, they hung at the bottom of her long hair, around her neckline and wore a bit of make-up. She liked her blues, which was the fashion of the 80's and it worked well at showing off her light blue eyes. And her teeth, my mum's teeth stood out and they were real, perfectly even and white.

My brother is a 'brown-noser', so he got on with everyone, and acted like he and Duncan were mates. Even when Duncan was beating the shit out of him too. I think I was the first person to realise

my brother Mark was gay, but I never said anything. I assumed everyone else could tell but kept it to themselves. It wasn't that Mark looked like a male version of me that made me realise he was gay, nor that he had an almost feminine physique, it was his personality; bitter and a little narcissistic. We did in fact look like twins and in later years, when he jokingly dressed as a woman for dress-up parties, we looked like twin sisters.

Late one night I couldn't sleep. I'd heard Duncan having sex with Mum, which was enough to make sure I'd never sleep. After they eventually became quiet, I heard sounds coming from my brother's room, so I tiptoed out and listened at Mark's door. I could hear whispers. It sounded like two men, but I couldn't be too sure. Then some other sounds I couldn't make out. I quietly opened the door just a little so I could peek through while I half-expected to hear a shout from my brother or whoever he was with.

No shouts, but what I saw shocked me. My brother and what looked like Edmond from down the street were naked and kissing. Shocked and repulsed, I did my best to close the door as quietly as I'd opened it and raced back to my room. I put that incident out of my mind and have never told my brother what I saw. Unfortunately, that's the thumbnail I get when I think of Mark in those days. That vision of my brother, same height as me, pretty for a boy, kissing his friend passionately; it's still there.

My mum was a bit too strict about certain things, such as allowing me to go out with friends at night. Even being that young, I realised that I'd rather do what I wanted to do than have a mother rule over me who couldn't even keep her own boyfriends from beating her up. Duncan was no exception and was forever telling her what to do, with or without his fists. There was a lot more fun to be had outside of my house, so I started sneaking out to go to the fair and hang out with my school friends.

Around the year 1980, after sneaking out to a local fair in Croydon, I came back late at night hoping to slip into the back of the house unnoticed. I remember it had rained, and the lawn was sodden wet and my sneakers were drenched as I tried to carefully cross silently to our house. Suddenly and from out of nowhere, a man jumped out and pushed me to the ground. He started pulling at my clothes and tried to kiss me forcibly. For a few minutes I was too scared to do anything, and he almost had me fully undressed on my front lawn. When I finally realised that his dick was hard, and he was about to pull my underwear down and fuck me with it, I screamed at the top of my voice. He quickly put his hand over my mouth and started threatening me that if I made another sound he would tell my parents that I'd been sneaking out at night. He told me he'd been watching me for a long time and he tried to scare me by saying that my parents would punish me severely if they found out.

I was lucky that night, extremely fucking lucky. Because I was starting to believe him and went into shock, which would've meant that he would've stuck his horrid dick inside me. That sensation you get when your body goes cold and your mind starts to calm you to protect you. It was ready to protect me from whatever was about to happen, because I was strangely calm, almost as though it was happening to someone else.

I lay there trapped but able to study him. Even though it was dark, I could see he was a good looking guy, maybe of Greek or Italian origin. Balding and slightly wrinkled, I'd guess his age at around 40 something. His intense stare and clear excitement no longer scared me. Within me, something became aware of what was about to happen and it was like an internal Valium release which calmed me.

But fate was on my side as it turned out. My parents had heard the first scream after all, and just as the lights came on, the front of the house was suddenly illuminated. Within seconds, Duncan and Mum were sprinting towards me as the pervert jumped up and started running away with his trousers still around his ankles.

It's hard to forget the sight of my stepfather in his pyjamas, running across the lawn after a man who was bent over trying to pull up his trousers, while he shuffled towards his escape. He eventually managed to get his pants on just as he reached the road and suddenly disappeared. Duncan was too fat and out of shape to have done more than intimidate the guy from a distance. Realistically, it was the lights that scared the pervert off.

The hiding I got that night from Duncan was painful and one that made it hard to sit down for a few days. The worst part was that I couldn't ride horses until the bruises healed. I'm not sure why, but Mum and Mark also got a hiding that night from Duncan. Must've been Christmas or something.

Either way, Mark was extra nasty after that towards me, and Mum had such little patience with me. If Duncan's game was to make my entire family hate me, it worked perfectly.

Mark is an ok guy; he has his faults, just as I think most brothers do. But in those days, I suspected that he intentionally added to my misery.

One day I had some friends from school over, talking about horses and girl stuff, and my brother kept popping his head into my room and yelling "boo!" for no reason. It was pretty obvious then that if he wasn't getting any attention, he'd come looking for it.

Kelly-Anne

1980-1985

Hackbridge Girl's School was your average senior school where you had every opportunity to either be good or be bad, or somewhere in between. I started off as being a really good girl. I had fairly good grades, I was that pretty girl in the front who the other girls copied off. Up until a certain age, I'd paid attention and tried to do my best.

Being good also meant I blended in, which was no fun, as nobody really noticed me—not my parents, nor the teachers. Becoming naughty brought a whole bunch of attention your way which worked better for me, so that's the road I took. I'm fairly certain it was an overnight switch from bright, young, promising student to downright, nasty bitch in a heartbeat.

Getting caught smoking in the toilets was child's play, so I soon discovered I could make everyone laugh by making the teachers run frantically by setting the toilet rolls on fire. I'm not sure if my intention was to be a clown, but making people like me definitely made me feel better.

I'd sit in the back of the class and make the teachers cry by abusing them when they tried telling me off. "Shut up, you old bag," I'd say. Poor Mrs Weeble would still remember me for calling her "feeble weeble". At first, my taunts were simple and harsh, but after I improved, sharpened my skills, they became downright nasty.

"What are you doing, Kelly-Anne?" I would get asked.

"Oh shut up, you old bag. What's it to you?" would be a typical retort.

I would get moved to the front if I was in the back, then to the back again when they realised that having me at the front was much worse. Full frontal assault wasn't what they got paid to put up with and not what most of them had the stomach for.

What made me really good at being really bad was that I was a very pretty girl with blonde hair, typical English fair skin and blue eyes, and I looked really innocent. You expected me to ask for a glass of lemonade, not call you a fucking cow.

My mum did nothing wrong; she loved me, she fed me, she clothed me and made sure I always had enough money to buy extra snacks at school. What I didn't understand was that mum was struggling financially as it was and she was working two jobs to keep my brother and I safe and fed. I became crafty... I'd steal the snacks by creating a diversion at the canteen and save the money to buy cigarettes. Sometimes I'd sell the cigarettes individually to the cool kids who pretended to smoke, and I'd make extra money to keep buying more cigarettes—rinse and repeat.

I became bored with assignments and teachers, and as life at home got more complicated after Mum and Dad split, I became really restless. Pretty soon and I stopped going to school when I discovered having sex with boys was a lot more fun. My mum was working two jobs, so she was too tired or just not able to see what was going on in my life.

People watching at shopping malls became so much more interesting than algebra or chemistry. I was working my own chemistry out while my mum thought I was being educated in the proper way. Friends and I would skip school and get stoned instead.

When I was 16, I finally got myself expelled from school. I guess the teachers reached a decision that keeping me in school was detrimental to their health. After an argument with Mum which was probably, and indirectly, Duncan's fault, I left home to live with my 22-year-old boyfriend.

I'd met Jake through a friend. He said he loved me and offered to share his bedroom where he lived with his dad. Jake was really easy to live with for a few weeks, but he soon got tired of feeding me and only getting blowjobs and sex for his trouble. He decided that I should work too, so he helped me find a decent job.

It didn't take long; after just a few days of job hunting, I was offered an apprenticeship as a hairdresser. I liked that job a great deal and I would have stayed there, but we found out over the course of a few months that the chemicals didn't agree with my skin. I had no choice but to leave.

Shortly after leaving the hair salon, I somehow found a job working with the Prince's Trust as a junior secretary. It was mostly administrative, in that I did a bit of typing, filing and answered phones. Occasionally, I'd make cups of tea, though I was crap at that.

Around this time, I was going out a lot and meeting many like-minded people who also weren't at school and wanted to have fun instead. There seemed to be a large number of people around me who didn't think education was all that important.

One night, one of the many friends I'd made through my boyfriend invited me to a party. It was somewhere near Croydon, South London and in a fairly decent-sized flat. I arrived and was surprised by how many older people there were. Luck had gotten me an invitation, so I grabbed a drink and joined in on the fun. My boyfriend had to work early the next day and couldn't go with me. We agreed that I'd get the bus there, and I'd get a night bus home with my friend.

Halfway through the night, I was in the kitchen talking to my friend, when we heard some commotion somewhere out by the front door. There were a lot of noises coming from that direction, so naturally everyone rushed towards it. There was a crowd of boys shouting something which I couldn't make out. I didn't find this out until later, but apparently, some dodgy boys were trying to crash the party.

Because we couldn't see anything, my friend and I went back to the kitchen and continued talking, while occasionally looking towards the front to see what was going on. The occasional party-goer who came in for a drink couldn't tell us anything, so we were oblivious to what was happening. Then suddenly, the guy whose house and party it was, came into the kitchen drenched in blood. He was screaming and holding his neck.

Horrified, I dropped my drink and just stood looking at him in shock for a minute or so. I didn't know what to do, and because I was probably a little drunk, I was really slow to react. As soon as I realised what happened, I rushed over and tried to help him. He then fell to the floor, and I noticed that his arm was sliced so badly at around the elbow joint, that it was literally hanging off.

I started to panic; there was a lot of blood everywhere, so I yelled out to my friend for help. I didn't look towards her, but I could tell she was as shocked as I was and couldn't move. Then I saw that he had a massive hole in his throat and that a lot of blood was bubbling out of it when he tried to talk. He tried to say "help me" which was hard for him with that big hole, so it came out in a quiet whisper. Loud music continued from the other room which didn't help with trying to understand what he was trying to say. I screamed for someone, anyone, to grab a cloth for me because I was looking at this guy's face and it was beginning to scare me. He'd gone an alarming white. He was a black guy, baby-faced and good looking. If his face hadn't lost all its colour, he would still have been a handsome boy. His dark eyes stared up at me, imploring me to help him. Sticky blood ran along his face and his short beard was soon thick with it.

Within moments he stopped trying to talk, and he looked like he was confused about where he was. A cloth suddenly appeared, so I quickly tried to apply pressure to the throat wound. The guy didn't comprehend what was happening; he just kept staring at me with that disoriented gaze on his face, like he'd completely forgotten where he was or what'd happened to him. I heard someone shout that an ambulance was coming. I told the guy whose name I couldn't remember that he should stay calm and that help was on the way, but he stared at me with that strange, unblinking face I'll never forget. Then he went limp, and I looked away for a moment, to take stock. When I looked back, his eyes were motionless, and he stared past me unblinking. He'd died. While I lay there holding him, not quite sure what to do and suddenly sad that I didn't even know his name, I thought about his parents. I wondered who they were and how they were going to react.

When the paramedics finally came, they took over while the police took me to another room where I'd previously been dancing. The paramedics tried to revive the guy in the kitchen which I could see would be useless although deep down I'd hoped they could do something. The house had quietened considerably by this time as most people had fled with the flashing lights of the ambulance. I'm positive that when the police showed up, any stragglers would've quickly disappeared.

This constant banging against a wall from the kitchen kept distracting me as voices repeated the same thing, but I couldn't work out what it was. I eventually peeked into the kitchen where I could see

the paramedics still trying to jumpstart this guy's heart. The source of the banging became clear, and it chilled me further—each time they tried to revive him, his feet would hit the wall.

It's easy to forget what someone looks like; time seems to distort details. That sound of the foot hitting the wall as the paramedics tried to revive this guy, I could hear that now, crystal clear.

That incident repeated on the news for days and there was a public outcry and even an inquiry into why it had happened. The parents were understandably upset and wanted answers, but I had none to give and I was one of very few people who had stayed around for questioning. That's a mistake I haven't made since.

The police interrogated my friend and I during the days after, but I couldn't tell them much, and I found myself repeating the same responses over and over again... "I don't know." I do know that I'd repeated my story several times, and I'd told them that I only saw the boy from the moment he'd entered the kitchen. He wasn't associated with anyone I hung out with, not that I'd call any of those people friends either. The police asked me several times the same questions. Each time, I'd give the same answers. I didn't even know the guy's name, which they found hard to believe, given that I was at his party. Perhaps the problem was that it was an open party which seems to attract anyone who's up for fun.

Murder on the Dancefloor

1986

Because I was young, and I had a lot of energy, I continued to go to a lot of festivals, parties and nightclubs. At some point I broke up with my boyfriend and moved back home with Mum and my brother. I think this only lasted a few weeks because Mum and I were drifting further and further apart. She'd finally left Duncan, for which I was grateful. Perhaps she finally saw him for the brute that he was.

On the few occasions my brother was around, we'd have heated arguments which would usually end with me storming out of the house. If Mark told Mum what happened when she got home, it was automatically assumed I had started it.

About the only thing I remember that my brother did in those days that was worthwhile was to cook. Whether he was doing it because he was staying in Mum's good books, or because he enjoyed it, I don't understand. Either way, Mark was and still is, an amazing cook.

During that summer, I went to a 'Reggae Sun Splash'-a festival that was on in a place called Crystal Palace. It was overcrowded and loud—perfect ingredients for a fun night out. I danced with several people, drank a lot of alcohol and smoked even more weed.

Being single, pretty and blonde got me a heap of free drinks. People told me their names, I'd smile, thank them for the drink, and carry on dancing. I naively thought that people were buying me drinks because they were nice and wanted me to keep having a good time. The dance floor is where I spent most of my time, and it seemed like where most people had their conversations.

As the DJ blended in a popular song of the time, I spotted a group of people who rushed to join us on the dance-floor. It almost sounded like there were "whoops" and "wahoos" which accompanied the newcomers, so I continued dancing, a big smile on my face.

One of the guys I knew by the name of Oliver was also dancing near me. I'd met him only recently and thought that he was a fun guy to hang out with. He might've been Jamaican, but I wasn't too sure. He was exotic and sexy and a fun guy. He'd gone out with a girl I went to school with that I barely remember. What I understood about him was that he lived to party, liked his women, and loved his drugs most of all.

On a night out before this night, Oliver and some people I knew at that time had been told there was a rave somewhere in the city. It was one of those viral things that happens really quickly. It was a Saturday night, and we were going to some new club when Oliver found out that a pop-up rave had suddenly been organised. Not that I was into pills or any of that stuff, which is a big deal at raves, but I went along because it sounded like a heap of fun.

I ended up getting so stoned with Oliver in the back of one of his mate's cars half-way through the rave and we had one of those great conversations where you think you're putting the world to right. I'd connected with Oliver in a way that wasn't sexually motivated, even though I was pretty sure he liked me as much as I liked him. We left each other that morning probably both thinking that we'd become good friends.

The Reggae Sun Splash was turning out to be one of those great nights where you don't get to talk to anyone, but you still connect with them just the same.

As we danced, Oliver suddenly lurched forward with his hands out. I thought he was getting really into the music and introducing some new radical move. The girl I was dancing with jumped forward and I thought she was going to copy his moves. But then he fell onto his knees. Then I noticed the blood. The back of his shirt was soaked in blood and I realised there was a knife protruding from the centre of his back.

Horrified and stunned, I stood for a few seconds, unable to believe what I was seeing.

Apparently, everyone else around me noticed this around the same time because we all started moving away, creating a quickly widening circle around him.

Then bouncers stepped in and I was pushed right out of the way. No matter how hard I tried to keep him in sight, the growing crowd made it impossible.

I later discovered that a guy who'd been dancing near us, who I didn't know, had stabbed Oliver. As young people do, we spread the updates quickly, and I managed to piece together the story. The murderer had meant to stab someone else, and for some reason, he'd gotten the wrong guy. Apparently it had something to do with not paying money for some drugs.

Oliver died within minutes, surrounded by a group of partygoers, most of whom didn't even know his name.

Oliver's death was on the news for a couple of days, another accidental and pointless tragedy.

Welcome to London. Not that it's any different to most other big cities, but murder is hard to take, especially when you're young.

I thought about Oliver for quite some time after the incident and realised that this had affected me a great deal more than the guy at the party who'd died not long before. Perhaps because I'd actually had a meaningful conversation with him and thought he was such a great guy with big dreams and an even bigger heart.

At home, Mum started to lose her patience with me. Sixteen years old and acting like I understood more about life than she did, what's not to like. She didn't trust me and would often lock the phone up before going out.

One night I waited for a call, and because the phone was locked behind Mum's door, I knew there was no easy way to get to it. I kicked down the door when it eventually rang, and I even managed to break the phone lock. Unfortunately, the call turned out to be for Mark anyway. Mum was furious at me for kicking her door in and once again threatened to throw me out.

The Prince's Trust proved to be a good job which had its perks. I liked this job even though the role didn't pay too well. One of the highlights for me was being asked to deliver a letter to Buckingham Palace in a black cab one day. I was invited to Kensington Palace and was surprised that the invite included tea. I was even more surprised to meet Prince Charles and both Prince Harry and William, who were quite young. I don't know where Princess Diana was at this time. The tea was actually awful, and I felt intimidated, but I realised how lucky I was to be there, how lucky I was to have my new job, and how important I was.

After tea, two young Princes came in wearing pyjamas and asked Dad to read them 'Thomas the Tank Engine' for bedtime. It was a sign for me to leave, but a touching memory to remember.

When I left the Palace I saw a group of tourists standing outside the gate, their faces expecting royalty. Feeling cheeky, I rolled the window down a little and gave them a wave. Somewhere in the world there are pictures of my hand doing the 'Queen's wave' from the back of a black London cab.

Even with some of the perks of being at the Prince's Trust, I was unhappy because the money was terrible. I had even secured part-time jobs to help supplement my income, because general London living costs were so high.

I knew that I could probably curb my spending a little more and in some ways, I became crafty at how I did it. If there was a way to save money, I'd find it. In one instance, I needed a new coat, so I exchanged the price label for a much cheaper item and paid the lower price. On a grocery shop to a supermarket, it took me double the amount of time to shop, because I was continually finding cheaper items to exchange price-tags so I could buy more food.

As a part-time bar-person, the wages were terrible. Because it was my second job, I got taxed so much more. It probably wasn't even worth doing the job in the end. I left after a few months to pursue something that paid more, but I didn't find it.

Unfortunately, that's when things went really bad.

The Sisters

1987

Mum had gone through a string of bad relationships before she finally met a great guy named Anthony. Both Mark and I were pleased that things with Duncan had ended because we both thought she was much better than him. Each guy after Duncan had turned out to be worse. Each of them made her look better and better. Anthony was a really nice man, probably the first one Mum met who treated her like a lady. Anthony was from Yorkshire and had two sons from a previous marriage. For the first time since my father, she'd met someone who I thought was good looking. His jet black hair was so thick, and he had a moustache which Mum was always playing with. Anthony's dark-green eyes sparked intelligence, they had a bit of a twinkle which sometimes suggested he was always scheming.

Mark and I would joke that it was disgusting to see such displays of affection, especially from your own mother. Deep down, the reality was that we loved to see her so happy. Both Anthony's sons had already moved out of his former home, so Anthony moved in with Mum. I was becoming a stone in my mother's shoe by this point, and she finally kicked me out. She'd had enough of my attitude and disrespectful behaviour. I know Mum loved me, but she had every reason to tell me to fuck off. Apparently I'd pushed her over the edge. She told me not to come back and that she'd had enough. Mark had already moved out to Soho and apparently, worked in a pub. The distance between Mark and I was strange but welcome. I loved him, he's my brother, but he's also a pain in the ass.

Eventually, Mum and Anthony moved into a bigger house in Croydon, outside of London, just the two of them. About this time, Mum mentioned that Mark had finally come out of the closet, and she was a little shocked and disappointed with her blue-eyed boy.

Mum confiding this to me made me feel as though we had a semblance of a connection though in reality she just needed someone to talk to and Anthony had probably already heard the story a few dozen times. Deep down, I wanted to make a comment about Mark being gay, not that it bothered me, but I felt I had the upper hand because I'd known for so long. As much as I wanted to, I didn't say a word and let Mum get it out of her system. She didn't want me in the house, but at that stage, she still wanted me in her life.

I discovered that couch surfing wasn't too bad, staying with one friend or another where I could, was a lot more fun than living at home anyway. I couldn't find another job so I started stealing anything and everything I could. Even stealing from Mum on the few occasions I visited her. I mostly stole food and everyday essentials – things I needed. Being 19 and filled with a unique sense of logic got me by.

Then I started stealing and selling some of what I stole to those who allowed me to stay on the couch as a sort of payment. I became so brazen at stealing that I simply walked into Littlewoods Department store and took a whole rail of underwear. Without a care in the world, I somehow managed to take large boxes of quilts and simply walk out with them. No matter how many times I did this, I never got caught. I'd give these to whom ever I was crashing with as payment for my couch stays.

Clear as day, I remember walking into Marks & Spencer's, taking the first rack of underpants I could see, and walking out with it. A few hours later, after dumping the goods at a friend's house, I went back to the same department store and picked up the most expensive iron I could find. As I started walking out, one of the staff was watching me. Thinking quickly, I walked up to her and asked her where the returns counter was and that I needed to return the iron I had. She told me she could help me and asked me for a receipt. After lying that the receipt had been lost, I was promptly given a full refund for the iron. To say I was bewildered at the stupidity of the staff would be a big understatement.

This lasted only so long as people I stayed with wanted more from me. A few discounted items to supplement my visits wasn't cutting it for too long and I knew there were only so many times I'd get away with stealing and refunding things, my luck thus far, had been great.

My new circle of friends were making a living by doing even more creative things. Some of these involved stealing mail from people's letter-boxes in the hopes that there would be cheques inside. They showed me the ropes, so for a time, I added this to my routine.

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