

**WANT YOU DEAD**

**PETER JAMES**

**MACMILLAN**

# 1

**Wednesday, 23 October**

Karl Murphy was a decent and kind man, a family doctor with two small children whom he was bringing up on his own. He worked long hours, and did his very best for his growing list of patients. The last two years had been tough since his beloved wife, Ingrid, had died, and there were some aspects of his work he found really hard, particularly having to break news to patients who were terminally ill. But it never occurred to him that he might have made enemies – and certainly not that there might be someone who hated him so much he wanted him dead.

And was planning to kill him tonight.

Sure, okay, however hard you tried, you couldn't please everyone, and boy, did he see that at work some days. Most of his patients were pleasant, but a few of them tested him and the staff in his medical practice to the limit. But he still tried to treat them all equally.

As he stood at the clubhouse bar on this late October evening, showered and changed out of his golfing clothes, politely drinking his second pint of lime and lemonade with his partners in the tournament and glancing discreetly at his watch, anxious to make his escape, he realized for the first time in a long, long while he was feeling happy – and excited. There was a new lady in his life. They hadn't been dating for long, but already he had grown extremely fond of her. To the point that he had thought today, out on the golf course, that he was falling in love with her. But being a very private man, he said nothing of this to his companions.

Shortly after 6 p.m. he downed the remains of his drink, anxious about the time, quite unaware that there was a man waiting outside in the blustery darkness.

His sister, Stefanie, had picked the kids up from school today and

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would be staying with them at his home until he arrived with the babysitter. But she had to leave by 6.45 p.m. latest, to go to a business dinner with her husband, and Karl could not make her late for that. He thanked his host for the charity golf day, and his fellow teammates in turn congratulated him for playing so well, then he slipped eagerly away from the nineteenth-hole drinking session that looked set to go on late into the night. He had something that he wanted to do very much more than get smashed with a bunch of fellow golfers, however pleasant they were. He had a date. A very hot date, and the prospect of seeing her, after three days apart, was giving him the kind of butterflies he'd not had since his teens.

He hurried across the car park, through the wind and rain, to the far end where he had parked his car, popped open the boot, and slung his golf bag inside it. Then he zipped the small silver trophy he had won into a side pocket of the bag, totally preoccupied with thoughts of the evening ahead. God, what a ray of sunshine she had brought into his life! These past two years since Ingrid had died had been hell and now, finally, he was coming through it. In the long, bleak period since her death, he had not thought that would ever be possible.

He didn't notice the motionless figure, all in black, who lay beneath the tartan dog rug on the rear seat, nor did he think it odd that the interior lights failed to come on when he opened the driver's door. It seemed that almost every day another bit of the ageing Audi ceased working, or, like the fuel gauge, only functioned intermittently. He had a new A6 on order, and would be taking delivery in a few weeks' time.

He settled behind the wheel, pulled on his seat belt, started the engine and switched on the headlights. Then he switched the radio from Classic FM to Radio 4, to catch the second half of the news, drove out of the car park, and along the narrow road beside the eighteenth fairway of Haywards Heath Golf Club. Headlights were coming the other way, and he pulled over to the side to let the car pass. As he was about to accelerate forward he heard a sudden movement behind him, then something damp and acrid was clamped over his mouth and nose.

Chloroform, he recognized from his medical training, in the fleeting instant that he tried to resist, before his brain went muzzy and his feet came off the pedals, and his hands lost their grip on the wheel.

# 2

**Wednesday night, 23 October**

He held his binoculars to his eyes, in the darkness, focused tight on the woman he loved so much. The night-sight for his crossbow, which he used to keep watch on her when she turned out the lights, lay on the table beside him.

She was drinking a glass of white wine – her fourth tonight – and dialling a number on her phone, again, looking anxious and edgy. With a brief toss of her head, she flicked her red hair away from her pretty face. It was something she always did when she was uptight or nervous about something.

*He won't answer, my love, my sweet, really he won't.*

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## Wednesday night, 23 October

God, men! What was wrong? Was it her? Them?

There are some things you do in life, Red thought, that are really, really dumb. They don't seem that way at the time; it is only when they go wrong, you realize. It had taken her two years – two years of ignoring the advice of her family, her friends, and ultimately the police. Two years before she had realized just how dangerous Bryce Laurent, the man she had met and fallen in love with from her lonely hearts advert, was.

If she could only wind the clock back two years, with the knowledge she now had.

*Please, God.*

She would never have joined that online dating agency, and certainly would not have placed that stupid message on it.

*Single girl, 29, redhead and smouldering, love life that's crashed and burned. Seeks new flame to rekindle her fire. Fun, friendship and – who knows – maybe more?*

Most of the replies had been complete dross. But then she had been warned by her girlfriends that a lot of the men who replied to these things were liars – married guys after a quick shag and not much else.

Well, she had replied to those friends, she wasn't interested in a *quick* shag but she could do with a *long* shag! That wasn't something she'd had for most of the years she had wasted on that introspective dickhead Dominic, who was normally back to checking his emails thirty seconds after a thirty-second bonk.

Besides, Red had reckoned she was smart enough to tell the difference between the shysters and someone decent.

Wrong.

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Very badly wrong.

Even more wrong, at this moment, than she knew.

She was unaware that she was being watched, as she took another sip of Sauvignon Blanc and listened to the phone, counting each ring. Three. Four. Five. Six. Then voicemail. It was 8.30 p.m. He was an hour and a half late for their date. Where the hell was he?

She hung up without leaving a message this time, feeling angry and hurt.

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Van was *the man!* Oh yes. Oh yes, indeed! Van Morrison's 'Queen of the Slipstream' was blasting from his big black Jawbone speaker, flooding his tiny apartment with all those beautiful words he had once felt about Red.

The grumpy old shithead above him banged on the ceiling with his walking stick, as usual when he played his music late at night. But he didn't care.

She had been the Queen of the Slipstream. His queen.

Queen of Hearts.

Red.

The colour of the Queen of Hearts.

And she had rejected him.

And humiliated him.

Did it hurt? Oh yes, it hurt. Every minute of every day and night. Every second.

He had been lucky to get this apartment, with the view it had. Some things were meant to be. Like he and Red had been meant to be. Taking the binoculars from his eyes, he rocked his head from side to side, fury twisting inside him. Okay, so some bad stuff had got in the way of their relationship, but that was all history now – it was too far gone.

He watched her cute lips as she took another sip of her wine. Lips he had kissed so tenderly, so passionately. Lips he had drawn in the cartoon sketches he had made of her, one of which – of her lips pouted in a provocative smile – was framed on the wall. It was captioned, *I'm a five-a-day gal!*

Lips that had kissed every part of his body. The thought of these lips kissing another man was too much to bear. They were his lips.

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He possessed them. The thought of another man touching the soft skin of her body, holding her naked, entering her, was like an endless bolus of cold water surging through him. The thought of her eyes meeting another man's just as she climaxed made him shake with helpless rage.

But not so helpless any more. Now he had a plan.

*If I can't have you, no one will.*

He closed the curtains and turned the lights back on. Then he continued to watch her for some moments on one of the screens on the bank of monitors on the wall. She was redialling. Bugging her phone had been simple, with a piece of software, SpyBubble, that he had bought over the internet and secretly installed on her mobile phone. It enabled him to listen to all her conversations, wherever she might be, and whether she was using the phone or not, as well as receive automatically all texts to and from her, the numbers of every call she made or received, all the websites she looked at, all her photographs, and, very importantly, through GPS, know her exact location all the time.

He stared around at the framed photographs of himself covering the walls. There he was in a pink Leander jacket wearing a straw boater at the Henley Regatta, looking pretty much like a young George Clooney, with Red on his arm in a floaty dress and a huge hat. There was another of him in a leather flying helmet in the cockpit of a Tiger Moth. A studious one of him in the Air Traffic Control Centre at Gatwick Airport. Another of him looking rather fetching in a mortar board and gown at his graduation from the Sorbonne in Paris. Another, also in a mortar board and gown, of him being awarded his doctorate from the School of Aviation in Sydney. There was one he particularly liked of himself in his fire-fighter uniform. Next to it was one of him shaking hands with Prince Charles. Another shaking hands with Sir Paul McCartney. Impressive? Impressive enough for a queen?

And she had rejected him.

Poisoned against him by the lies of her family. Poisoned by her friends. How could she have listened to them and believed them? She had destroyed everything through her own stupidity.

He turned the music up, drowning out the thoughts raging in his



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head, and ignored another *blam, blam, blam* on the ceiling from Mr Grumpy.

Then he picked up his binoculars again, switched off the lights, made his way over to the window, and opened the curtains a fraction. It was much nicer to watch her in the flesh, rather than on the screens showing images with sound from every room in her place. He could feel her pain better that way. He looked out and down towards the second-floor window across the alley. Her living-room light was on and he could see her clearly. She was holding her phone to her ear and looking very worried.

*So you should be.*

# 5

## Wednesday night, 23 October

'Don't do this to me, please,' Red said, as the mobile phone again went to voicemail after six rings.

*'Hi, this is Karl. I can't answer just now, so leave a message and I'll call you right back.'*

She'd left three messages, and still he had not called *right back*. The first one had been at 7.30 p.m. – half an hour after the time he'd said he would pick her up. They'd planned to have dinner at the China Garden. She'd left a second message at 8 p.m., and a third, trying not to sound angry – which had been hard – shortly before 9 p.m. It was now 10.30 p.m. She'd even checked her Twitter messages and Facebook page, although Karl had never before used them to communicate with her.

*Terrific*, she thought. *Stood up. How great is that?*

Splitting up with Bryce had been a nightmare that still stayed with her. In those first few weeks after she had thrown him out, with the help of the police, she would often come home to find his Aston Martin parked right outside her old flat. He would be nowhere around, but the sight of the car was enough to give her the creeps. He'd stopped doing it after the time she had got really pissed off at him and let all four of the tyres down. But even after that, sometimes during her solitary training runs for the Brighton Marathon, in aid of the Samaritans, she would spot him watching her, always from a distance, either on foot or in a moving car. For a while it had put her off, particularly the evening runs she used to love across the Downs in the falling darkness.

On the advice of the people she had talked to at the Sanctuary Scheme, she had moved out of her flat into this temporary accommodation, rented under an assumed name they had given to her.

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The second-floor flat, chosen for its position, had no windows that were visible from the main road, and a reinforced front door. It was in a gloomy, tired converted Victorian mansion block that had once been a grand private residence, close to Hove seafront. Her view from all the main windows was out onto the fire escape of an ugly 1950s apartment block, across a courtyard and an alleyway that led to the car park and lock-up garages behind her building.

Although she was meant to feel safe here, the place depressed her. It had a narrow hallway, dingily lit, that led through into a small open-plan living/dining area, with an old-fashioned kitchen that was little more than a galley separated by a breakfast bar. There was a small bedroom off the hallway that she had made into her den, and a larger bedroom, with a window that looked down onto the lock-up garages and wheelie-bin store at the rear.

She'd given the whole place a lick of white paint which had brightened it a little, and hung some pictures and family photographs, but it did not feel like home – and never would. Hopefully, she would be out of here soon and moving into her dream flat, thanks to the sale of her old place going through, and some financial help from her parents with the deposit. It was airy and spacious, on the top floor of the Royal Regent, a Regency house conversion on Marine Parade in Kemp Town, with a huge suntrap of a balcony facing the English Channel, and fabulous views of the marina to the east and Brighton Pier to the west.

She had been advised by the police not to drive her beloved 1973 convertible Volkswagen Beetle, as it was too conspicuous. So it now sat, forlornly, in a lock-up garage she had rented nearby, and she took it out only very occasionally to keep the battery charged and everything turning over.

She poured the last of the bottle of Sauvignon Blanc she had opened earlier, when it was obvious she wasn't going anywhere tonight with Karl. *Men*, she thought angrily. *Sodding, bloody men.*

But this was so out of character.

After the nightmare of these past years that she had been through, Karl Murphy had seemed a total breath of fresh air. She'd been introduced to him by her best friend, Raquel Evans, a dentist. He was a doctor in the same medical centre as Raquel, and a recent widower.

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His wife had died from cancer two years back, leaving him with two small boys. According to Raquel, he was now ready to move on and start a new relationship. Raquel had had a feeling the two of them might hit it off, and she'd been right.

Early days, but they'd had dinner a few times, and then last Saturday, with his sons staying overnight with his late wife's parents, they'd slept together for the first time, and spent much of Sunday together. Karl had told her, with a big grin, that he must be quite sweet on her to have sacrificed his regular Sunday-morning golf game.

It was a little bit early in their relationship to be a golf widow, Red had replied, with an equally big – but pointed – grin. They'd spent Sunday morning in bed, then they'd gone to the Brighton Shellfish & Oyster Bar, under the Kings Road Arches, for a seafood brunch of oysters and smoked salmon, followed by a blissful long walk along the esplanade. In the late afternoon, Karl had left to go and collect his boys, and they'd arranged their next date for tonight, Wednesday. He had planned to take the day off to play in a golf tournament and would be over straight after, he had said, to pick her up at 7 p.m.

So where was he? Had he had an accident? Was he in hospital? He hadn't told her which golf course he was playing at, so she had no idea where to begin phoning. She suddenly realized how little she actually knew about him, despite having checked him out. And probably how little about her he had told anyone.

She toyed with phoning the police, asking if there had been any accidents, but dismissed that. They'd heard enough from her over the past few years, with her frequent 999 calls after yet another of Bryce's violent attacks. The hospitals? *Excuse me, I'm calling to see if by chance Dr Karl Murphy has been admitted.*

She realized, though, from her past experience with men, that she was probably being too charitable. He was more than likely pissed, propping up the bar at the nineteenth hole of some clubhouse, and had forgotten all about her.

*Sodding men.*

She drained her glass.

Her fifth, counted the man watching her.

# 6

## Wednesday night, 23 October

He continued to sit in the darkness, his binoculars to his eyes; she was still wearing a wristwatch that looked like it had come out of a Christmas cracker. What kind of a cheapskate was Karl, her wonderful new lover, not to have bought her a more expensive one? She'd returned the Cartier Tank watch he'd given her, along with all the other jewellery, when she'd dumped his bags out on the street and changed the locks on him.

Everything except the thin silver band on her right wrist.

He drew the curtains shut and switched the lights on again, then sat at the small round table and picked up a deck of cards. He fanned them out with just one hand, snapped them shut, then fanned them out once more. Practise. He needed to practise for several hours a day, every day, on his existing repertoire of tricks. Tomorrow he had an important gig, performing his close magic, table to table, at the Brighton estate agents' dinner.

Maybe Red would be there. He could give her a nice surprise.

*Now you see the queen, now you don't!*

*Once my queen.*

*Still wearing the bracelet I gave you!*

He knew what that meant. It was very Freudian. She needed to hang on to something he had given her. Because, even though she might refuse to admit it, she still loved him.

*I bet you're going to want me back, aren't you? Won't be long until you come begging, will it? You really do find me irresistible, but you just don't realize it. All women find me totally irresistible! Just don't leave it too long, because I won't wait for you for ever.*

*Just kidding!*

*I wouldn't take you back if you came crawling and begging. You*

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*and your hideous family and your ghastly friends. I hate the whole shitty little world you inhabit. I could have freed you from all that.*

*That's your big mistake, not to recognize that.*

He looked at his watch. 11.10 p.m. Time to rock 'n' roll. He placed his mobile phone on the sitting-room table and picked up the keys of the rented Vauxhall Astra. He had parked it in his lock-up garage two streets away, and fitted it earlier with the false number plates copied from an identical car he had found in the long-stay car park of Gatwick Airport. Then he donned his black anorak, checking the pockets to ensure he had everything he needed, pulled on his black leather gloves, tugged a black baseball cap low over his face, and slipped out into the night.

# 7

## Wednesday night, 23 October

Karl rolled around inside the pitch-dark carpeted boot of his car. He had a blinding headache, and he was shaking with fear, and with anger. He was determined not to panic, breathing steady calming breaths through his nostrils, doing his best to think clearly, to work his way out of the situation.

He was trying to figure out where he was and how long he had been here – and why the hell this had happened to him. Mistaken identity? Or had his assailant taken his keys and was now robbing his house? Or worse, going after his beloved children, Dane and Ben?

Jesus, what the hell must Red be thinking? She was at home waiting for him to pick her up. If he could only phone her . . . But his phone was in his trouser pocket and he was unable to move his hands to get to it.

He occasionally heard a vehicle passing, and guessed he had to be somewhere near a country road. They were becoming less and less frequent, which indicated it was getting later. Whoever had done this to him knew about bindings; he was unable to move his legs or his arms, nor spit the gag out of his mouth, and he was suffering painful cramps. Nor did he know – and this frightened him a lot – how airtight the boot was. He was just aware that the faster he breathed, the more oxygen he would use up. He had to stay calm. Sooner or later someone would rescue him. He had to make sure his air lasted.

His mouth was parched and he had long since given up trying to cry for help, which made him choke on the gag, held tightly in place by some kind of tape which felt as if it was wound all the way around his head.

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For Chrissake, there had to be a sharp object in here somewhere, surely? Something he could rub against and use to saw through his bindings? He nudged closer to his golf bag, heard the clubs rattle, and slid his arm bindings up against the edge of one of the irons. But each time he tried, the club just spun around without traction.

*Help me, please, someone.*

He heard the roar of a car, and the swish of tyres on the wet road. Hope rose in him. Then the sound receding into the distance.

*Someone stop, please!*

He heard the roar of another engine. The swish of passing tyres, then the squeal of brakes. *Yes! Oh God, yes, thank you!*

Moments later he felt a blast of cold air as the boot lid raised. A blinding light in his eyes. And his joy was short-lived.

‘Nice to see you again, my friend,’ said a suave male voice from behind the light. ‘Sorry to have kept you, I’ve been a bit tied up. But not as much as you, eh?’

Karl heard the sound of something metal striking the ground, then a liquid sloshing around. He could suddenly smell petrol.

Terror swirled through him.

‘You’re a doctor, aren’t you?’ the suave voice asked.

Karl grunted.

‘Do you have any painkillers on you?’

Karl shook his head.

‘Are you sure? None anywhere in your car? You’re a doctor, surely you must have some?’

Karl was silent, trembling. Trying to figure out what the hell this was all about.

‘You see, doctor, they’re for you, not for me. You’d be better off taking some. With what’s about to happen to you. Please understand this is not your fault, and I’m not a sadist – I don’t want to see you in agony, that’s why the painkillers.’

Karl felt himself being lifted, clumsily, out of the boot, carried a short distance, then dumped down on wet grass. Then he heard the slam of his boot lid closing. ‘I’m going to need you to write a note, Karl, if that’s okay with you?’

He said nothing, squinting against the bright light of the torch.



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'It's a goodbye note. I'll free your right arm so you can write it – are you right-handed?'

The doctor continued to stare, blinking, into the beam. He was close to throwing up. The next moment, there was a searing pain on his face as the tape was ripped away. Then the gag was tugged out of his mouth.

'That better?' his captor asked.

'Who the hell are you? I think you've got the wrong person. I'm Dr Karl Murphy,' he pleaded.

'I know who you are. If you promise not to do anything silly, I'll free your writing arm. Left or right?'

'Right.'

'Now we're making progress!'

Karl Murphy saw the glint of a knife blade, and moments later his right arm came free. A pen was thrust into his hand, then a sheet of lined notepaper was held in front of him. It was from a pad he recognized, that he kept in his medical bag in the car, clamped to a clipboard. He caught a glimpse of his captor, all dressed in black, with a baseball cap pulled low over his face.

The next moment he felt himself being dragged across the grass and propped up against something hard and unyielding. A tree trunk. The clipboard, with the torch shining on it, was placed in front of him.

'Write a goodbye note, Karl.'

'A goodbye note? To who?'

'To *who*? Tut tut, Dr Murphy. Didn't they teach you grammar at school? To *whom*!'

'I'm not writing any damned note to anyone,' he said defiantly.

His captor walked away. Karl struggled, tugging desperately at his bindings with his free hand. Moments later his captor returned, holding a large, dark object. He heard the sloshing of liquid. The next instant he felt liquid being poured all over his body, and smelled the unmistakable reek of petrol again. He squirmed, trying to roll away. More petrol was tipped over his head and face, stinging his eyes. Then he saw, in the beam of the torch, a small plastic cigarette lighter, held in a gloved hand.

'Are you going to be a good boy, or do you want me to use this?'

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A tidal wave of terror surged through him. 'Look, please, I don't know who you are or what you want. Surely we can discuss this? Just tell me what you want!'

'I want you to write a goodbye note. Do that and I'll go away. If you don't, I'm going to flick this and see what happens.'

'Please! Please don't! Listen – this is a terrible mistake. I'm not who you think I am. My name's Karl Murphy, I'm a GP in Brighton. I lost my wife to cancer; I have two small children who depend on me. Please don't do this.'

'I know exactly who you are. I won't do anything if you write the note. I'm going to give you exactly ten seconds. Write the note and that will be the end of it, you'll never see me again. Okay, the count-down starts. Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . . seven . . .'

'Okay!' Karl Murphy screamed. 'I'll do it!'

His captor smiled. 'I knew you would. You're not a fool.'

He straightened the clipboard and stood over him. A car was approaching. Karl stared, desperately hoping it might stop. A thicket of trees and shrubs and the man's handsome face were fleetingly illuminated. Then he could hear the sound receding into the distance. Thinking hard, Karl began to write.

When he had finished, the clipboard was snatched away. He saw the torch beam jiggling through the trees, and again, alone in the darkness, tried desperately to free himself. He felt a twinge of hope as he picked at the plastic tape and a small amount came free, then tore away. He dug with his fingernails, frantically trying to find the join again. Then the torch beam reappeared through the trees.

Moments later, he found himself being hoisted into the air, slung over his captor's shoulder in a fireman's lift, and carried away, unsteadily, into increasing darkness.

'Put me down!' he said. 'I did what you asked.'

His captor said nothing.

'Look, please, I need to phone someone, she's going to be worried about me.'

Silence.

The journey seemed like an eternity, occasionally lit up by stabs of the torch beam into the wooded undergrowth ahead.

'Please, whoever you are, I wrote the note. I did what you asked.'

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Silence.

Then his captor said, 'Shit, you're a heavy bastard.'

'Please put me down.'

'All in good time.'

A short while later Karl suddenly felt himself being dumped into long, wet, prickly undergrowth.

'Arrivé!'

Hope rose in him as he felt his captor begin to loosen and remove his remaining bindings.

'Thank you,' he gasped.

'You're very welcome.'

As his legs finally became free, although numb, he gave a sigh of relief. But it was short-lived. He saw his captor step out of his overalls and discard them on the floor. An instant later he felt himself being shoved hard over onto his side, then shoved again, and he was rolling, over and over, down a steep slope, for just a few moments, before he felt himself squelch on his back into mud.

Then a waterfall of liquid was tumbling onto his face and all over his body. Petrol again, he realized, in almost paralysing terror. He tried to sit up, to haul himself to his feet, but the petrol continued to pour down. Then in the darkness above him he saw the tiny flame of a cigarette lighter.

'Please!' Karl screamed, his voice yammering in fear. 'Please no! You promised if I wrote the note, you promised! Please no, please no! You promised!'

'I lied.'

Suddenly, Karl saw a sheet of burning paper. For an instant it floated like a Chinese lantern high above him, then sank, fluttering from side to side, the flame increasing as it fell.

Bryce Laurent stood well back. An instant later, a ball of flame erupted, rising above him into the darkness. It was accompanied by a dreadful howl of agony from the doctor. Followed by screams for help that faded within seconds into choking gasps.

Then silence.

It was all over so fast.

Bryce felt a tad disappointed. Cheated, almost. He would have liked Karl Murphy to have suffered much more.

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But hey, shit happened.

He bent down and picked up his overalls, which reeked of petrol, and walked back to his car.

# 8

## Thursday morning, 24 October

Although it had been over three months now, Anthony Mascolo's sense of pride had still not worn off as he reversed his Porsche into the parking bay marked RESERVED FOR CAPTAIN.

Haywards Heath Golf Club, a few miles north of Brighton, was one of the county's most prestigious courses; becoming Captain had been his dream, and he felt a real sense of achievement at having accomplished one of his life's ambitions. Plus, as a bonus now that he had retired from running a hairdressing empire, he was able to devote all the time this demanding role required. It was such a joy to be able to play on a Thursday morning, like today, or indeed any other day of the week, without the guilty feeling that he was skiving off work.

He savoured the scent of freshly mown grass as he removed his golf bag and trolley from the boot of the car. It was just after 8 a.m. on a glorious, late-autumn morning, the fairways sparkling with dew, and the sun climbing low through a steely blue sky. There was a chill in the air and a sense of anticipation in his heart. If he could play again today the way he had been playing for the past two weeks, he had a real chance of his handicap dropping, for the first time ever, into single figures.

That would be such a damned good feeling!

Twenty minutes later, fortified by coffee and a bacon roll, he stood with three friends and fellow members beside the white tee of the first hole, practising his swing with his driver. *Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!* Oh yes, the lessons he'd been having with the club pro throughout the summer had improved his game no end, especially getting rid of his tendency to hook the ball left. He felt confident this morning, sublimely confident.

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'Four-ball better ball, tenner a head?' his partner, Bob Sansom, suggested.

The other three nodded. Then Anthony Mascolo teed off first. A cracker, straight off the sweet spot; he raised his head and watched the dead straight flight of the Titleist 4. The ball rolled to a halt in the wet, shorn grass, a good two hundred and fifty yards ahead, smack in the centre of the fairway.

'Nice shot, Anthony!' all three of his companions said, with genuine warmth. That was something he loved about this game: it might be competitive, but it was always friendly.

His second shot took him to the edge of the green, and he sank it in two putts for a very satisfying par on the first hole.

As he knelt to retrieve the ball, he smelled, very faintly, the aroma of barbecued meat. Probably coming from one of the houses surrounding the wooded course, he thought, although it was a tad early for someone to be cooking a roast. But, despite his recent bacon roll, the smell was making him feel hungry. He patted his stomach inside his jumper, aware that he had put on weight since his retirement, then concentrated on filling in the score card.

As they reached the end of the second hole, which the Captain won again, the aroma of cooked meat was even stronger. 'Smells like someone's having a barbecue,' Bob Sansom said. 'Pork chops – there's nothing like barbecued pork chops!'

'No, you want a rib of beef on the bone,' Anthony Mascolo said. 'The pink bits and the charred bits, they're the best!'

Terry Haines, a retired stock-market analyst, frowned and looked at his watch. 'It's a bit bloody early! Who's having a barbecue at 8.30 a.m.? I didn't think the halfway hut was open this early.'

There was a catering shack at the start of the tenth hole, which was open on most fine days, selling hot dogs, bacon sarnies and drinks.

'It's not,' Anthony Mascolo said.

'Hope it's not bloody campers again!' said Gerry Marsh, a retired solicitor.

They'd had problems on a couple of occasions during the summer with young holidaymakers camping illegally within the grounds of the club, but they had been politely moved on.

## PETER JAMES

Anthony Mascolo teed off first; but, distracted by the smell, he sliced the ball, sending it way over to the right into a dense clump of trees and shrubbery, where there was only a slender chance of ever finding one's ball, let alone playing out of it.

He waited until the others had teed off, then played a provisional, again slicing it, but not so badly this time. It rolled to a halt a few yards short of the hedgerow and trees.

'Fuck it!' he murmured to himself, then strode off, his electric cart propelling itself along in front of him. His companions, all of whom had played decent shots landing on the fairway, strode over to help him look for his ball.

Taking an 8-iron from his bag, Mascolo stepped into the thicket, probing his way through a cluster of dying nettles, peering hopefully for the glint of white dimples that might be his ball. The smell of barbecued pork was even stronger here, and that made no sense to him. He lifted some brambles out of the way with his club head, trying to calculate from the path of the ball just how far it might have gone in – and what it might have struck and bounced off. Then, to his gloom, he saw the deep ditch on the far side.

It would be just his rotten luck that the ball had rolled into that. Then there really would be no recovery, and he'd have to play his provisional, which meant his next shot would be his fourth. No chance of a par on this hole.

'This smell is making me really hungry!' Bob Sansom said. 'I didn't have any breakfast because I'm trying to lose weight – now I'm bloody ravenous! I'm hallucinating roast pork and crackling!'

'Lucky for you I've got a jar of apple sauce in my bag!' joked Gerry Marsh.

'And I've got gravy and potatoes!' said Terry Haines.

Anthony Mascolo hacked his way through dense brambles to the edge of the ditch and looked down into it, gloomily expecting to see his ball lying at the bottom, probably half submerged in muddy water.

Instead, he saw something else.

'Oh my God!' he said.

Gerry Marsh joined him and peered down also. When he saw what his companion was looking at, he turned away, his complexion

## WANT YOU DEAD

draining to sheet white, and moments later he threw his breakfast up over his two-tone golf shoes.

'Oh Jesus,' Terry Haines said, backing away shaking, his face drained of colour. 'Oh God.'

In the perverse way the human brain sometimes works, as Anthony Mascolo pulled his mobile phone out of his golf bag and dialled 999, he was thinking, *Hey, we're going to have to abandon our game here today, so I don't have to worry about screwing up this hole!* As the full horror of what he was looking at struck home, and the reek of Gerry Marsh's vomit hit him, he continued to stare, mesmerized, shaken to the core, then backed away, unable to look further.

A disembodied voice said, 'Emergency, which service please?'

It was coming from his phone.

He didn't know which service. He really didn't. 'Fire,' he said. 'Ambulance. Police.'

His phone slipped from his hands into the undergrowth, and he turned away. His head was spinning. He felt giddy. He clutched a thin tree trunk for support.