



He's her son but  
he's no good.  
How far will she  
go for him?

**Born Evil**  
**Kimberley**  
**CHAMBERS**

NO.1 *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLER

Kimberley Chambers

**Born Evil**

«HarperCollins»

## **Chambers K.**

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Not all sons make their mother proud...June Dawson has come a long way from her rough East End background. She now lives in a nice little cul-de-sac in Rainham with her ultra-respectable husband and a lovely social life. But her world collapses when daughter Debbie announces that she is pregnant by her low-life drug addict boyfriend, Billy McDaid. June feels as though she is being sucked back into the world of villains and thugs she thought she had escaped forever. But worse is yet to come. The baby – doted on by his violent and feckless dad – grows into the child from hell. He is mean, sadistic and out of control. Suddenly, the family is not just in crisis. It is in meltdown.

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# **BORN EVIL**

**KIMBERLEY  
CHAMBERS**

**HARPER**

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## **Dedication**

*In memory of my wonderful grandparents Daisy and Charlie Chambers.*

## Epigraph

A life is created  
A child is born  
A beautiful gift  
Not one to mourn  
A son for keeps  
A love to gel  
Unless that child  
Belongs in hell  
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## ONE *October 1990*

‘LOOK, MUM, THERE’S no easy way for me to say this. You’re gonna go mental, so I’m just gonna give it to you straight. I’m pregnant.’

June Dawson felt bile rise from her stomach and reach the back of her throat. Dropping the dishcloth she’d been washing up with, she clung on to the worktop for physical support.

For a moment, she thought she was going to pass out. Breathing in deeply and blowing out slowly, she somehow managed to steady herself. As she turned around to face her daughter, she felt every hope and dream she’d ever nurtured for her fly straight out of the window.

Trying to speak, June found that her voice sounded anything but normal. She usually spoke loudly, but her words came out in no more than a whisper.

‘Is Billy the father?’

Debbie stood, hands on hips, staring defiantly into her mother’s eyes.

‘Of course he is. I love him, Mum.’

June fished around in the kitchen cupboards and found the bottle of brandy she kept there for cooking and medicinal purposes. She and her husband only ever drank socially.

June poured herself a large glass and downed it in one, then immediately knocked back another. She was in that much shock, she could quite easily have swallowed the whole bloody bottle. With the drink going straight to her head, her voice suddenly came back and she decided to say her piece.

‘You’re gonna have to get rid of it, Debbie. You’re eighteen years old, with your whole life ahead of you. Don’t sell yourself short and end up with a no-good arsehole like Billy McDaid. He’s a wrong ’un love, everybody says so, and far too old for you. He’ll run a mile once he knows you’re pregnant. You mark my words, he’ll be off like a shot. Blokes like him are all the same.’

Blinded by love and obstinate by nature, Debbie glared defiantly at her mother.

‘Well, that’s where you’re wrong, Mum. Billy already knows about the baby and he’s over the moon. He’s dying for it to be born and can’t wait to become a father. I love him so much and I’m keeping the baby whatever you say. You’re just gonna have to accept it, or you’ll end up losing me *and* your unborn grandchild. As for calling Billy a wrong ’un ... you’d know all about that, Mother, wouldn’t you?’

June looked at her daughter with a mixture of pity and disgust. She needed to talk to her Peter. He would know how to handle the situation.

‘Get out of my sight, Debbie. You wait till Peter gets home from work. I’m gonna tell him what you said to me and he won’t be very happy.’

‘As if I bloody well care! He’s hardly me father now, is he?’ Debbie screamed, and slammed the kitchen door.

June sat down at the table, put her head in her hands and sobbed. Both her children had now fucked their lives up, and she wondered where she’d gone so bloody wrong.

She’d disowned Mickey, her son, a while back, when he’d got caught hijacking a lorry load of cigarettes with a gang of well-known villains he’d been knocking about with.

Her Peter had gone totally apeshit and demanded she wash her hands of the lad. It hadn’t helped that the story was front-page news in the local paper. She and Peter had had to endure the shame, stares and gossip for weeks.

Unbeknown to her husband, though, June still discreetly enquired after Mickey. She’d heard through the grapevine that he was due out of prison in the next few weeks. He’d served his sentence in Wormwood Scrubs and had written to her from here a couple of times, pleading with her to visit him. June had tearfully read the letters that her first-born had sent and felt nothing but love and compassion

for the son she still adored. But, after careful consideration, she'd torn them up and severed all contact with him.

It had been the hardest decision she'd ever had to make, but in her eyes it was the only one left to her. She'd had to choose her husband over her son.

Now the same thing was going to happen with Debbie, Peter was gonna go mad when he heard she was pregnant. Unless Debs agreed to get rid of the baby, June knew that he would make her daughter move out of the house.

Peter wasn't an ogre, just a strict, highly regimented man of integrity, with a high opinion of himself and his family. He was also preparing to stand as a Tory councillor in the forthcoming local election and certainly wouldn't welcome any bad press.

June poured herself another brandy, dreading what was to come. Without Peter she was nothing, a nobody. In many ways he'd been the making of her. He'd turned her from a rough East End girl into a respectable member of the community. He'd moved her from a shit-hole house in Poplar to a nice little cul-de-sac in Rainham. He'd taken on her kids as his own and given her a purpose in life, a chance to better herself, and she'd grasped that opportunity with both hands. She couldn't throw it all back in his face by siding with Debbie, she just couldn't. Not when her daughter was making the biggest mistake of her life.

Debbie lay on her bed. She felt like crying with frustration. She bit her trembling lip as hard as she could and drew blood. The pain stopped the tears from coming. She knew there was going to be a showdown when Perfect Peter walked through the door.

Well, he wasn't her dad and she was sick of jumping to his bloody tune. This baby was hers, and she wasn't taking shit off no one. He'd been good to her, had Peter, but his attitude really wound her up. Both he and her mother were shoved so far up their own arses, it was as though reality didn't exist for them. In their world, dinner parties, Masonic events, local politics and golf club meetings were much more important than what was going on in the real world.

Debbie had never had the pleasure of meeting her real father. She'd been only eighteen months old when he'd kicked the living daylights out of her mum and brother and left the house for the last time. Her brother Mickey, who was seven years older than she was, remembered him well and said he'd been an out and out cunt, a total scumbag.

Johnny Fuller was his name and part of Debbie wished she'd had the chance to meet him. Just the once would have done the trick. It would have satisfied her burning curiosity to know exactly where she came from.

She had no chance of that now, though. Six months ago her father had been found dead outside a betting shop in Whitechapel. He'd died of a single stab wound, a homeless alcoholic.

As Debbie heard the front door bang downstairs, she forgot about her real dad. Pulling the quilt over her head, she prepared herself for one of her stepfather's lectures.

Twenty minutes later, there was a tap-tap on her bedroom door, and a surprisingly calm Peter entered her room. Perching himself on the end of her bed, he came straight to the point.

'If you decide to have an abortion, Debbie, your mother and I will give you our one hundred per cent support. I'll pay, send you to the best private clinic available, and your mum and I will accompany you, so you won't have to go through this alone. However, if you are adamant about keeping the baby, then I'm afraid you'll be on your own. Your mum and I will have no option other than to wash our hands of you.'

Debbie took a deep breath as she pulled down the quilt and prepared to stand her ground.

'Look, Peter, I know I'm only young, and I appreciate your concern and Mum's, but I want this baby. I love Billy and he loves me. What can be so wrong about two people in love having a baby together?'

Looking at her disdainfully, Peter spoke slowly, clearly, in his most patronising voice.

‘Debbie, Debbie, Debbie ... you are so young and naive, my dear child. What am I going to do with you? Billy McDaid is not a very nice person, my love. He has a terrible track record with convictions for violence as well as drink- and drug-related offences. Eight years ago he was locked up in Pentonville for a vicious assault on an ex-girlfriend.’

Debbie’s eyes were burning with fury as she leaped off the bed.

‘I don’t believe you – you’re making it up! You’re only saying all this so I’ll get rid of the baby. I bet my mother’s put you up to this, hasn’t she?’

Peter slowly shook his head from side to side and looked sadly into the eyes of this strong-willed girl bent on defying him.

‘Everything I’ve told you is for your own good, Debbie. Your mother was so worried when you started courting this lad that I decided to have him checked out. I have well-connected friends, as you know, so getting the low-down on him wasn’t that difficult. I can assure you, everything I’ve told you tonight is the absolute truth. He’s also lied to you about his age. He’s not twenty-nine, he’s thirty-five years old. The ball is in your court now, and the decision is entirely yours. Get rid of the baby and Mummy and I will help you as much as we can. But, I have to be brutal about this, Debbie, if you decide to keep it, I want you out of this house by next weekend. Your mother and I have our reputations and also my standing in the community to consider.’

As he quietly shut the bedroom door, Peter said a silent prayer for the girl he’d brought up as his own and grown so very fond of. He was satisfied he’d done his utmost, his very best. Composing himself, he went downstairs to comfort his tearful, heartbroken wife.

‘Wanker,’ Debbie mumbled, as soon as he was out of earshot. ‘Lying fucking bastard.’ She was absolutely seething. Billy wouldn’t lie to her about his age, and as for all the other shit ... she didn’t believe a word of it. It was definitely a ploy, just so she’d get rid of the baby. His standing in the community? What a tosser! Well, they could both go and fuck themselves. Perfect Peter and her drama queen mother deserved one another. As for the lies they’d concocted, she’d never forgive them for that.

Pulling her case out from under the bed, she started to pack her clothes and belongings. They wouldn’t have to wait till next weekend to get rid of her, she’d be long gone before then. She crammed in the last of her necessities, zipped the case and slid it back under the bed. She was seeing Billy tomorrow morning and couldn’t wait to tell him the whole sorry story. He’d been asking her to move in with him for the last few months, but she hadn’t wanted to upset her parents so had said no. Now, though, she couldn’t wait to set up home with him.

Billy had a council place on an estate in Barking. The area was a bit rough and his flat was dirty with virtually no furniture. In fact, it was the complete opposite to the clean house and nice area that Debbie had become accustomed to.

All it needs is a woman’s touch, a good clean, a bit more furniture and we’ll be fine, she told herself.

The last night in her perfectly furnished bedroom with its pink wallpaper, hi-fi system, TV, video, and all her other personal belongings, wasn’t an easy one for Debbie. She spent the whole night tossing and turning, unable to sleep. Ninety-nine per cent of her felt sure she was doing the right thing. Moving in with Billy and having his baby was what she wanted, wasn’t it? There was only that one little seed of doubt at the back of her mind telling her that her choice could be wrong.

There’s an old saying in life: ‘Little seeds grow into very big trees.’

Unacknowledged by her, Debbie’s little seed had already begun to sprout.

## TWO

JUNE SAT ON a floral-upholstered chair in the conservatory, a thousand thoughts spinning through her mind. She sipped her coffee and stared through the plate-glass window while Peter mowed the lawn. Watching her daughter leave home this morning, suitcase in hand, had broken her heart. She hadn't said a word as Debbie had walked away but kept schtum, to please Peter. What kind of mother did that make her? She should have shaken the girl, made her see sense, cuddled her and begged her to stay. Maybe even sat her down and told her the whole sorry story of her own younger years. Surely that would have been enough to make Debbie sit up and take notice.

Instead she'd done nothing, absolutely sod all, just let her daughter walk down the path and out of her life, with that no-good bastard Billy McDaid standing smirking by the front door. All she could do now was hope and bloody pray that her Debbie's life didn't turn out to be a mirror image of her own.

June Dawson had been only a kid, sixteen years old, in fact, when she'd had the misfortune to meet Johnny Fuller at the local fairground. Ten years older than herself, he was a handsome bastard. He had the clothes, the looks, the chat and the charm to impress a gullible teenager. June had fallen for him, hook, line and sinker. She could remember the night she'd lost her virginity like it was yesterday. He'd looked so good in his black Crombie, tight trousers and winkle-picker shoes, she'd been overwhelmed with lust for him, putty in his hands.

Her pregnancy had shocked her parents to the core and they'd demanded she go away to a home, give birth to the child and have it adopted. Blinded by a mixture of naivety and love, June had ignored their request and chosen her own path. A brief spell living with Johnny's mother was followed by a council tenancy in a house in the back streets of Poplar.

Overjoyed at having her own home and determined to be a good mother and potential wife, June threw herself into a homemaking role where cooking, cleaning, scrubbing and lovemaking were all part of her everyday duties. Trouble was, as happy as she was in her new life, her Johnny wasn't. Within weeks of their moving in together, he was spending more and more time in the local pub.

The night her Mickey was born would stick in June's mind forever. At just turned seventeen, she knew nothing about having babies. On the night her waters broke, she thought she'd accidentally wet herself. When the contractions started she put it down to an upset tummy, blaming the bread and dripping she'd eaten earlier. For four hours she lay on the floor, crippled with pain, hoping and praying that Johnny would come home. Finally, unable to stand it anymore, she crawled on her hands and knees to old Lil next door.

Lillian Wade had lived through two world wars. After taking one look at June, she grabbed a towel and a pair of scissors, and forty-five minutes later young Mickey Dawson let out his first cry.

Johnny Fuller arrived home five days after his son was born. Unbeknown to June he'd met some old scrubber, eighteen years his senior, from the Whitechapel area and had been staying at hers. After spending less than an hour with his first-born, Johnny headed off to the pub to wet the baby's head.

Life grew harder for June from that moment onwards. Money was scarce, and as time wore on she was left more and more alone with her son; Johnny was usually nowhere to be seen. But June, being a fighter, learned how to cope on her own with her boy. Her neighbours were wonderful, and whenever her so-called partner stayed away for long spells they helped her out with Mickey, making sure that both of them were okay. Many a cold night June and the boy sat huddled around a neighbour's coal fire for a bit of warmth; the rest of the time, they sat indoors with their coats on and a blanket over them.

As the years rolled by, June and Mickey settled into a nice routine. By now, Johnny hardly came home at all. If he popped in twice a year, he overstayed his welcome. Working up North was his excuse, but truth be told he was living with a bird over in Dagenham, playing Daddy to her two kids.

June's pleasant routine ended on the morning of Mickey's sixth birthday. Lily had baked him a cake, all the neighbours had chipped in to buy him a second-hand bike and a party was planned for him that afternoon. Hearing the front door open and slam shut, June thought it was Lily bringing the cake in.

'I'm in the kitchen, Lil.'

To her horror, it wasn't Lily at all. It was a drunken, unkempt, old-looking Johnny carrying a bin liner full of belongings in his hand.

'I'm home, darlin',' he slurred. 'For good this time, there's no more work up North.'

Life got a lot worse for June from that moment on. Nursing a broken heart and an alcohol addiction, Johnny drank for England, refused to work, and took out all his frustration on her and the boy.

The beatings started within weeks. First it was just the odd clump here and there, but within months he was knocking seven colours of shit out of her.

June hated him, wished he was dead, but she was trapped.

Due to his drink problem, he'd stopped wanting regular sex but she dreaded the nights he beat her. It wasn't the pain, she could handle that, it was the aftermath. The violence seemed to arouse him and he'd then force himself upon her. It was on one of these nights that Debbie was conceived.

A couple of weeks after June's pregnancy was confirmed, Johnny did another disappearing act. Money was still tight and life was tough, but once again the neighbours helped out and June began to smile again.

Debbie was just over a year old when her father returned from his last jaunt. This time his behaviour was worse than ever and the beatings became more frequent. Things came to a head a few months later when, instead of just knocking his wife about, he started beating the living daylights out of Mickey boy as well. After a particular vicious attack on her son, June confided in her neighbour Lily, who knew exactly what to do. The lad was rushed to hospital and the police were called.

June did not clap eyes on Johnny Fuller again from that day onwards. A year later she met Peter at a wedding and had not looked back since. He had loved her, supported her, and made her financially and emotionally secure. Which was why, whatever happened, she had to stick by him. He had rescued her from a living hell and she would always be indebted to him for that.

'Are you all right, my darling?'

Peter wiped his muddy boots on the mat and sat down opposite his wife. Taking her hands in his, he spoke softly.

'Everything will be okay, June, trust me. Debbie will come to her senses. But meanwhile we have to stick to our guns, be strong. What's meant to be is meant to be, my love.'

June looked into his eyes. He was so sincere, so sure of himself. Squeezing his hands, she smiled. 'I hope you're right, Peter, I really do.'

Her husband kissed her gently on the forehead. 'Believe me, darling, I'm always right.'

Billy carried Debbie's case as they walked towards the tower block on the Gascoigne Estate. Gagging as she stepped into the lift, Debbie held her nose to block out the smell. She had been in the same lift plenty of times before, but the stench seemed far worse now that she was pregnant.

Billy lived thirteen floors up, which gave Debbie plenty of time to study her surroundings. They consisted of graffiti, spit, fag butts and stale urine. Noticing her expression, Billy smiled.

'Aye, lassie, you'll get used to the smell after a bit, you will.'

Debbie pretended to agree, but made a mental note to use the stairs whenever possible.

'Now, make yourself at home, hen. I have to pop out for a wee bit, to pick some money up. I willnae be long.'

Debbie took a good long look at her new abode and felt increasingly depressed. 'An absolute shit-hole' was the best way to describe it. She'd been here before, lots of times, but always after a drink and of an evening. Her mum and Peter had never let her stay out all night, so she'd never had a

chance to see the place in daylight. The flat itself was okay, quite big for a council place, it was just so bare and desperately in need of decorating and some furniture.

Debbie looked into the bedroom and found there was nowhere for her to put her clothes. The one small wardrobe was full of Billy's stuff. As she sat down on the mattress on the bare floor, which served as the bed, Debbie started to sob. She would have to have a serious chat with Billy, she told herself. She wasn't coming round here once a week now, bladdered like before. She was a pregnant woman and needed comfort, a proper home.

Billy arrived back two hours later. Listening to Debbie talking between her sobs, he hugged her tightly.

'Shhh, now. Hey, come on, everything will be okay. I've got plenty of money. We'll get some paint tomorrow, spruce the place up a bit. There's a second-hand furniture place down the road – I'll take you there and we'll kit the place out. I didnae bother with all that shit before, living here on my own, but now you're here it's different. Now come on, stop crying, we'll get it sorted, I promise.'

Billy woke up early the next morning. Debs had been tossing and turning all night, she'd kept him awake for bloody hours. He glanced at her, and was surprised to see that she was now fast asleep. He hoped he'd made the right decision, letting her move in with him. Her performance last night, with all the tears and shit, wasn't his scene – dramatics had never been his game. He'd thought Debs was different, a laugh. He'd never seen her cry before, she'd always been so happy-go-lucky. He really hoped she wasn't about to change. For some reason or other, he always attracted nutty women. The last three had been all right until he'd moved in with them. Within weeks they all seemed to turn psycho on him.

Sighing, Billy slung his arm round Debs. 'Wakey, wakey.'

As he rubbed his erection against her leg, he willed her to respond. He was fucked if he was going to stand painting for hours, buy furniture he didn't want, and get nothing in return.

Stirring, Debbie reciprocated his kisses. She'd been silly last night, all emotional. This was her new life now. She loved Billy and was determined to make it work.

Billy was as good as his word. He bought a couple of tins of paint and then took Debbie to a tut shop where she chose a sofa, coffee table, small wardrobe, lamp and a chest of drawers. She refused to sleep in a second-hand bed, which pissed him off as he had to fork out for a brand new one. She also demanded saucepans, utensils and a big shop at Tesco.

'Fucking women,' Billy muttered, as soon as she was out of earshot. Three hundred and sixty pounds today had bloody well cost him! He just hoped Debs was worth it because if she wasn't she'd go the same way as all the others had.

Billy took a deep breath as he fought to keep his temper in check. In the past he'd made the mistake of lashing out at women, but he was determined to put all that shit behind him now and make a fresh start.

He really loved Debbie, but prayed she didn't push him too far. The others had all taken the piss out of him and he wasn't the type of geezer to take shit off anyone, especially a woman. His mum was to blame for the way he was, he knew that. She had fucked him up. He had tried desperately to forget his damaged childhood, but sometimes when women pissed him off, it came back to him. As he terrorised them, all he could think of was his whore of a mother.

Billy put the last of the Tesco bags in the kitchen, then rummaged through them and opened a can of Strongbow. Greedily gulping the cider, he calmed himself down. This was a new start for him and he had to make it work. If he didn't, his evil bitch of a mother would have won.

## THREE

SIX MONTHS INTO Debbie's pregnancy, the cracks in Billy's resolve began to show. Spending most of her time in the flat alone, while Billy spent his in the pub, had become second nature to Debbie, so she was surprised when he insisted she attend a pal's wedding reception, which was being held in a local pub.

'Do I have to come, Bill? I can't drink, and I feel so fat and frumpy.'

'Aye, I want you to come. All my mates are taking their other halves, so I need you to be there for me.'

As she got ready that night, Debbie felt like shit. She'd made good friends with a couple of the neighbours, Sharon and Donna, and was usually quite happy to spend her time at home with them while Billy was out gallivanting. After powdering her face, she applied blue eye shadow, squeezed herself into the one black dress she possessed, and stood facing the cracked mirror which hung next to the wardrobe. The sight of her reflection didn't do her mood any good. 'Bleeding hell,' she muttered. She'd overdone the bronzer and felt like an orange that had become too big for its skin. Studying herself, she picked holes in her appearance. Her shoulder-length brown hair looked thin and lifeless. Her nose was a bit too big for her face, and her teeth had always been crooked. When she'd been slim her features hadn't bothered her so much, some people had even called her attractive, but now she was fat it was a different story. She felt unsightly.

'You ready, babe?' Billy stood at the bedroom door, looking smart in his light grey suit.

Plastering on a false smile, Debbie pecked him on the lips. 'As ready as I'll ever be.'

To her dismay, both lifts in the block were out of action, and by the time she'd walked down the thirteen flights of stairs she felt absolutely knackered.

The party was awful. The pub was a shit-hole, everyone was slaughtered and the DJ was a blind man. She'd have tried to enjoy it if only she could have had a drink, but standing in the corner on her own all night, with only a glass of Coke for company, wasn't much fun. Billy had introduced her to everyone earlier. He'd even stood with her for the first hour, but now he was drunk and up at the bar with the lads.

Debbie found herself studying him. He looked really smart tonight. Like her, he was no oil painting. Billy was skinny and pale, with light brown hair and sharp features. Attractive in his own way, though. She loved his Glaswegian accent, it made her laugh, and he was always cool and self-assured.

'It's Debbie, isn't it? Debbie Dawson?'

Swinging around to see who was talking to her, Debbie vaguely recognised the short lad with blond cropped hair, but couldn't think where from.

'Darren,' he said, shaking her hand. 'Darren Jackson. I was in your class at junior school.'

Once the penny had dropped the evening flew by for Debbie and she spent the rest of the night with him, discussing their classmates, teachers and old friends.

Billy stood at the bar, seething. Talk about making him look a prick in front of all his mates! With his blood at boiling point, he could stand it no more. Slamming his pint down on the bar, he walked over to where his slut of a bird and the blond-haired dwarf were standing.

'Whaddya think you're doing, you fucking slag?'

Terribly embarrassed, Debbie tried to smooth over the situation. 'Stop mucking about, Billy. This is Darren. He's an old school friend of mine.'

'I couldnae give a fuck who the cunt is, we're going home!' Billy grabbed her arm and dragged her out of the packed pub.

As they walked back to the flat, Debbie felt more and more uneasy. Billy looked furious and hadn't said another word.

‘Tell me what’s the matter, Bill? Has someone upset you?’ she asked him. When he still said nothing, she carried on, ‘Surely you’re not annoyed because I was talking to that bloke. He’s only someone I went to school with.’

Squeezing her arm fiercely, Billy pushed her ahead of him. ‘Get home, you slag. I’ll deal with you indoors.’

The nearer they got to the flat, the more worried Debbie became. She’d never seen him like this before and his behaviour was intimidating. With the lifts still out of action, Billy shoved her towards the staircase.

‘Get up them stairs, bitch!’

Coming down thirteen flights of stairs while pregnant had been bad enough, but going up was even worse. Unable to keep up with his pace, Debbie sat down on the landing on the eighth floor, panting for breath.

‘Please, stop pushing me, Bill. I need a rest ... I can’t breathe.’

Billy grabbed her hair and pulled her to her feet. ‘You do as I say, you fucking whore! Get up them stairs, *now*.’

The look on his face told Debbie she had best do as he said. Petrified, she tried desperately to calm him down. She was frightened to go inside the flat with him in this state.

‘Billy, tell me what I’ve done? Please don’t be like this. I love you ... why are you doing this to me?’

Ignoring her plea, Billy dragged Debbie into the flat and pushed her down on to the sofa. He put on a Simple Minds LP and turned it up full blast. He knew Debs was friendly with the neighbours and didn’t want the nosy bastards knowing his business. Then he walked into the kitchen, took a can of cider out of the fridge and gulped it down. Taking a deep breath, he ran towards Debbie who had started to get to her feet and pushed her back on to the sofa, using his full body weight to trap her there.

‘You acted like a slag tonight ... making me look a cunt! If you ever, ever do that again, believe me, I’ll fucking kill ya!’

Not knowing how to handle the situation, Debbie loudly protested her innocence. ‘I’ve done nothing wrong, Bill. Honestly, he was an old school friend who ...’

She got no further. Billy stood up, lifted his right foot and kicked her with such force between the legs that it brought tears to her eyes.

‘Nooooo, Billy, stop it! Why are you being like this?’ she screamed.

Billy snarled at her, ‘I can do exactly what I want, Debs, and do you know why?’

Debbie shook her head.

‘Because *that* is mine,’ Billy said, pointing at her crotch. ‘That also is mine,’ he said as he gestured towards her oversized stomach. ‘And, believe it or not, girl, *you* are mine. If I was you, I’d get that into your thick skull and start behaving appropriately.’

Debbie was stunned as Billy left the flat. She’d done nothing to deserve this treatment, absolutely nothing.

Lifting herself gingerly off the sofa, she staggered over to the record player. ‘Alive and Kicking’ was playing. After what had just happened to her, it was the last bloody song she needed to hear. At a loss as to what to do next, she climbed into bed. She was too frightened to knock at her neighbours’. If Billy came home and she wasn’t there, it would make the whole situation ten times worse.

Pulling the old blue blanket over her head, Debbie started to cry. She was desperately worried about the safety of the child she was carrying, and now knew that her mother and Perfect Peter had been right all along. Who was Billy McDaid? Tonight had proved she didn’t know him at all. Devastated, she cried herself to sleep.

Billy was at his mate Andy’s flat on the second floor. He’d calmed down by now, the cannabis and Strongbow had seen to that.

‘I’ve had it now, mate, I’m off to bed. You stay as long as you like, Bill,’ his friend told him.

As Andy left the room, Billy felt his anger return. It wasn't Debbie who'd caused it this time, but memories of his childhood and the bastard cards he'd been dealt.

Billy McDaid was born in 1955, at home, in a slum in the back streets of Glasgow. Father unknown, Billy had spent his younger years watching a succession of uncles coming to and from the house. His mother barely spoke to him, and most of his time was spent with his brother Charlie, who was seven years older than himself.

Looking back, Billy must have been the only wean in Glasgow who actually looked forward to going to school. The teachers there were nice to him and showed him kindness, something he'd never known at home. When he was seven, his mum bought home a man called Uncle Colin. When he was nine, Uncle Colin came into his room one night, turned him on his front and shoved his penis up his arse.

'This is our wee secret, Billy. One word to your mother and you'll no' see her or your brother again.'

The abuse carried on for years. Every time he was in the house alone with Uncle Colin, he was subjected to the man's sexual depravity. By now his brother had left home and Billy hadn't a soul in the world to talk to about his predicament.

At eleven years old, he could stand it no more. He told his teacher. Mrs McLintock informed the appropriate authorities, who then approached his mum. The social worker stood by and did nothing as his mother then beat him to a pulp.

'You lying little bastard!' she screamed accusingly.

A children's home was the next stop for Billy. Hoping life would be better there, he behaved himself and tried his hardest. He needn't have bothered. He ended up bullied and sexually abused there, too.

At sixteen he made contact with his brother Charlie and went to live with him. It was only then that he found out that Uncle Colin had subjected Charlie to the same abuse as himself.

The next couple of years were the happiest of Billy's so far poxy life. He and his brother lived together, worked together and drank together. Billy felt that he had more or less recovered from his fucked up childhood; unfortunately, his brother felt differently.

Unable to deal with the guilt he felt for knowingly leaving his younger brother in the hands of a paedophile, Charlie began to experiment with heroin. The drug helped him forget what he'd done, but at the same time took a hold of him. He died three months later, of an overdose.

Overcome by grief, Billy went off the rails. He drank himself into oblivion and shagged everything in sight. Within six months, two girls claimed that they were carrying his children. Unprepared for fatherhood, Billy decided a fresh start was the best thing for him. He headed South and picked up work on a building site in Bow.

Hoping a change of scenery would make him forget the past, Billy worked his arse off and made new friends in the process. Sadly, as the years rolled by and he grew older, the past increasingly returned to haunt him. All his relationships seemed doomed. As soon as he got close to someone, all he could think about was his dead brother, and cuntsmouth Colin. He knew all the problems in his life were his mother's fault. That's why he hated women so much. Slags, they were, all of them. He didn't trust 'em one little bit.

Billy finished his drink and spliff, stood up and brushed the ash off his suit. Debbie, though, was a good girl, different from all the other slags, and he was desperate to make things work with her. He loved her, she'd been the making of him, and he owed it to her to make a go of things, whatever it took.

Shutting Andy's front door behind him, he took the stairs two by two. He was desperate by now to reach the thirteenth floor and put everything right again. Out of breath, he dashed into the bedroom.

'I'm so sorry, Debs, really I am. I promise you, babe, I will never hurt you again. I swear on my life. Please believe me?'

Debbie saw the sincerity in his eyes as he crouched down beside the bed. The baby had been kicking her all night and seemed as strong as ever. The love she felt for her unborn child was worth forgiving its father for.

'Just get into bed, Billy. You were well out of order earlier, but I'll forgive you, just this once. If you ever do anything like that again, me and you are history.'

Later, unable to sleep, she lay wide-eyed as Billy snored. Tonight had been awful but Debbie wasn't about to give up on him, not just yet. It was obvious now that Peter had been speaking the truth about Billy's past. Well, she'd made her choice and it was up to her to deal with it. Going back to her mother's, cap in hand, wasn't an option. Debbie was stubborn as an ox and the thought of Perfect Peter telling her 'I told you so' was a non-starter.

The only thing she could do now was to think positive: hope and pray that what had happened tonight was a fluke, a one-off. Turning on to her side, Debbie willed herself to go to sleep. Her baby seemed to move about morning, noon and night. She was having a nightmare pregnancy and couldn't wait for it to end.

Debbie wished more than anything that she could ring her mother, talk to her and ask her advice. Angrily, she wiped the tears from her cheeks. She knew she had to be strong. There was no other way.

Peter's last words to her still echoed in her mind.

'Life is full of choices, Deborah. People make their own beds, and if they choose the wrong one, they should bloody well learn to lie in it.'

## FOUR

MICKEY DAWSON PULLED UP at the top of the cul-de-sac, turned the van around so he wouldn't be seen, parked up and switched off the engine. Positioning the wing mirror so that he could clearly see his mother's front door, he pulled down his baseball cap until it partially covered his eyes. Picking up his copy of the *Sun*, he prepared himself to wait, however long it took.

Ten weeks he'd been out of prison, ten fucking weeks, and he still hadn't seen his mother or sister once, thanks to that jumped-up ponce they happened to be living with. Not wanting to cause them any grief, he'd decided against bowling up to the front door. He'd been itching to knock and give Peter a right-hander, just to wipe the supercilious look off his face, but he knew that in the long run it wasn't the best way forward. Debbie would probably have laughed, but it certainly wouldn't earn him any brownie points with his mother. This was why he'd decided to borrow his mate's plumbing van and was now waiting for the dickhead to fuck off to work before he made his move.

As luck would have it, he didn't have to wait long. Ten minutes later the front door opened, Peter appeared with a briefcase, jumped into his Ford Granada and sped off. Not wanting the nosy neighbours to see him, Mickey grabbed his phone. When he'd gone into nick, mobiles were unheard of and he'd purchased his first one only a couple of weeks ago. It was an absolute godsend, especially in his line of work. His mum's phone was answered on the fifth ring. A lump came into his throat at the sound of her voice.

'Mum, it's me. I'm outside in a Watts's Plumbing van. It's parked on the corner. I really need to see you. Come out for a drive with me and then I'll take you to lunch. Debs can come as well, if you like.'

June very nearly dropped the phone in shock. She didn't receive many calls in the morning and certainly hadn't been expecting this one. Part of her wanted to dash outside and envelop her beloved first-born in her arms, but she was too worried about Peter finding out to go with her instincts.

'Oh, Mickey, what are you doing outside? I'm not even dressed. What if somebody recognises you?'

'Don't start worrying, Mum, I'm in disguise. No one is gonna know who I am. Just put your glad rags on and get your arse out here! I've been sitting here, waiting for the Gestapo to go to work. The least you can do is come out for a drive with me and have a bit of grub. I am your bloody son, after all.'

'Okay, I've already had a bath. I just need to do my make-up and get dressed ... I'll be about twenty minutes.'

Mickey smiled as he ended the call. It had been nearly three years since he'd last had the chance to talk to his mum properly and he was desperate to rebuild their relationship, even if it had to be done in secret.

Hands shaking as she applied her slap, June finally closed her make-up bag and began to choose her outfit. She settled on a grey jumper dress. She knew she'd gained a bit of weight recently so put a black blazer on top to cover her bulges. Desperate not to look old-fashioned, she added black suede boots and slung on some gold costume jewellery as a finishing touch. Mickey was her only son after all and she was eager to look nice for him.

She was a bundle of nerves as she approached the white van parked on the corner. Walking past it, she gesticulated for Mickey to drive down the road a bit. Her little community was very close-knit and she was determined not to get caught out. Peter would go apeshit.

Conversation was stilted at first – awkward, in fact. Mickey politely asked June how life was treating her. And June tactfully asked him about prison.

'So how's Debs?' he continued. 'Ain't she at home, Mum? I've been dying to see her. Where is she, at work or something?'

June felt guilty as she explained the situation. 'Haven't you heard, son? She's pregnant. She doesn't live at home any more, she's living in Barking somewhere. She won't have no more to do with me and Peter. We tried to help her, really we did, wanted to pay privately for an abortion, but you know how headstrong Debbie is. She stormed out and I haven't seen her since. I think about her all the time, son, I'm so worried about her.'

Spotting a lay by, Mickey pulled over. 'Our Debs, pregnant? Fucking hell! What's her address? I'll go and see her, make sure she's all right. I can't believe she's up the duff. What's his name, the geezer she's with?'

'Oh, Mick, she's picked a real wrong 'un. His name's Billy McDaid. Peter had him checked out. He's got a terrible track record. Been inside for drugs, violence, and Christ knows what else! Years older than her, he is. We tried to tell Debs, make her see sense, but you know what she's like ... she wouldn't listen to us, thought we were making it all up.'

'I can't believe it, Mum. I'll tell you one thing, though, our Debs ain't silly. Surely the bloke can't be that bad. Leave it with me. I'll find out who he is and have him checked out my way.'

June patted his arm. 'Thanks, Mick, but don't go round there like a bull in a china shop. I'm desperate to know she's all right, but I don't want you getting in no more trouble.'

'I won't cause no agg, I promise ya. I'll just find out where she's living and then I can keep an eye on the situation, check up on her and that. I'll have a quiet word in the geezer's shell-like, too, make sure he treats her okay. It won't hurt for him to know Debs has got a big brother. If he's cute, he'll know what he's dealing with.'

June smiled. 'You are a good lad, Mickey.'

'I'm always there for you and our Debs if you need me, you know that, Mum. Now, how about that bit of lunch? There's a nice little boozier down the road, does some lovely home-made grub.'

'Sounds great, son.'

The meat pie, potatoes and fresh veg were melt-in-your-mouth material, but neither of them ate a lot. They had too much catching up to do. Finally Mickey paid the bill and cuddled his mum as he led her back towards the car-park. He loved her dearly and was overjoyed at being able to spend some time with her.

'Are you plumbing now, love?' June asked innocently, noticing the writing on the van.

Mickey chuckled. She didn't have a clue, bless her. 'No, I ain't, Mum. I borrowed the van off me mate. I wanted to keep a low profile and my motor would have stood out like a sore thumb.'

'Why's that then, love?'

'Oh, no reason, Mum. Just thought the van was more discreet to pick you up in.'

He daren't tell her that he was swanning about in a brand new Merc. She'd have given him a Spanish Inquisition about where he'd got the money from.

'So what are you doing for money? Are you working at the moment, love?'

Mickey chose his words carefully 'I'm doing okay. I'm working as a party organiser, setting up functions and stuff.'

June shot him a surprised glance. She had her Mickey down for a lot of things, but planning parties wasn't one of them.

'What do you mean? What sort of parties?'

'You know ... weddings, birthdays, anniversaries. All sorts of stuff, Mum.'

June knew he was lying, but decided not to pry. The less she knew about his lifestyle, the less she would worry.

'Where do you want dropping, Mum? I take it you don't want me pulling into the turning.'

'Drop me by that little shop, Mickey. I need to get a loaf.'

Bumping the van on to a stretch of kerb, Mickey leaned over and hugged her tightly. 'Does Peter always leave for work at the same time?'

June ruffled her son's dark hair, just as she'd done a million times when he was a little boy. 'I can't get out a lot, Mickey, you know what Peter's like. I can probably manage it about once a month. He's normally gone to work by ten but ring first, just in case. And do me a favour, son – find out how Debbie's doing. As soon as you have any news, ring me and let me know. I've been worried sick about her.'

'I'll ring you when I've seen her, but I have to say a lot of this is your own fault, Mum. You should never have lost contact with her, nor with me. We're your kids, at the end of the day. I know we're not perfect but blood's thicker than water. You shouldn't let that prick dictate to you. You have to learn to stand up to him before it's too late.'

June opened the door of the van and climbed out.

'Let's not spoil a good day, Mickey. I can't deal with this conversation right now. I'll see you soon, love. Ring me as soon as you have any news about Debs. Take care, son. Love ya.'

June had tears in her eyes as she left her beloved boy and began the short walk home. She knew what he'd said to her had been right. She also knew that she was too weak to do anything about it. Peter was so bloody domineering and if she started standing up to him, she was worried her days as his wife would be numbered. In Peter's world women were to be seen and not heard.

Mickey hit the A13 and headed back towards Bow. He'd been living there since he'd come out of the Scrubs. It was only a temporary thing, just till he got back on his feet. He was planning to move out to Essex once he got a few bob behind him, but for now Bow and his one-bedroomed bachelor pad suited him fine. He'd spent a fair few years as a kid there, working on Roman Road Market, and he knew the area and its inhabitants inside out. In fact, most of his contacts came from that neck of the woods.

Life was sweet for Mickey at the moment and had been since the day he'd walked out of nick. The money was rolling in thick and fast. He'd hooked up with an old pal of his, Big Stevie Roberts, and they were currently on to a nice little earner.

Big Steve had told him about his newfound business venture while he'd been on the inside. It wasn't until Mickey was released that he realised just how big it really was. Illegal raves were fucking massive, and he and Steve were currently netting a fortune, organising the little beauties. This was the score. Scour the M25, find a friendly farmer, smile at him, offer him a big wad of money ... and Bob's your fucking uncle.

Mickey was now in charge of finding the right venues and chatting the owners up. He looked the part and had the spiel. Steve was no good at all at that. A massive bastard, with a skinhead haircut, he looked like an out and out thug. He had a heart of gold, but the farmers weren't to know that.

There was a real biggie organised for a fortnight's time. It was due to be held at a disused airfield on the outskirts of Essex, and Mickey had been running around like a blue-arsed fly, trying to get things sorted. Everything about these raves had to be kept hush-hush. The old bill were doing their utmost to put a stop to them, and any tip-off they received was a tip-off too much.

Because of this, the advertising was mainly done on the night, via pirate radio stations who would give out a mobile phone number. Partygoers would ring up from a phone box to find the exact venue. The M25 would then fill up like rush hour as thousands of pilled-up punters headed off for the night of their lives. It was a bit like a game of cat and mouse with the filth, and so far the boys in blue were on a losing streak. Mickey and Steve were absolutely loving the chase, and up to this point hadn't had one rave cancelled.

Smiling to himself, Mickey thought about his mum. It had been so good to see her. She'd changed a lot since he'd seen her last. She had never been a stick insect but was now quite plump, with a real mumsy look about her. She looked even shorter than he'd remembered, though at only five foot she'd never been tall in the first place. Maybe it was the weight she'd put on. Mickey decided he liked his mum's new look. Her clothes were top drawer, her short dark hair cut into a modern style, and he thought she looked just like a mum should.

Parking the van he'd borrowed outside his mate's, Mickey stuck the keys through the letterbox and jumped into his Merc. He immediately punched Big Steve's number into his mobile. 'What you up to, mate?'

Steve was having a swift half in his local. He'd been hard at it all morning, trying to sort out the security for their latest rave, and was now having a well-earned rest.

'I'm in the Needle Gun, having a beer with Terry. Why, what's up?'

'How do you fancy a trip to Barking? Apparently me sister's got herself knocked up by some wrong 'un and I need to sort it out.'

'Okay, count me in,' Steve said, downing the rest of his lager.

After Mickey had filled Steve in, the lads decided the best way to do their homework was to pay a visit to a few boozers around the Barking area. They struck gold in the very first pub. The spotty kid of a barman was only too willing to spill his guts at the sight of a fifty pound note. Tucking it safely into his shirt pocket, he ushered them over to a quiet corner.

In ten minutes flat the lads knew Billy McDaid's life story. They were told where he lived, where he drank, and where he punted his puff and speed. They also learned that he wasn't exactly fucking popular.

'Wonderful! She's got herself knocked up by a middle-aged, drunken drug dealer *and* he's Scotch an' all,' sighed Mickey as they left the boozier.

Much to his pal's annoyance, Steve burst out laughing.

'Don't wind me up, Steve. It ain't fucking funny. What are we meant to do now?'

Trying to keep a straight face, Steve looked at his mate. 'Sorry, I didn't mean to laugh. It's just, well, the cunt couldn't have sounded any worse, could he?'

Mickey let out a worried sigh. 'No, he fucking well couldn't. My mother's gonna go apeshit if I tell her the full SP. I'm gonna have to keep schtum and pretend he's not as bad as we first thought. How do you reckon I should handle it, Steve? Should I knock seven colours of shit out of him, or should I go and see Debbie first? Check he's treating her all right?'

'You'll have to go and see your sister first. You can hardly go in with both feet, not if she's carrying his nipper.'

Mickey started the engine and looked at the address on the bit of paper he'd been given. 'Yeah, you're right. But I'll tell you this, Steve – if he ain't been treating her right, he'll pay for it. She's my sister, I love her, and believe me, if it came to it, I would fucking kill for her.'

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