

Infest

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Prologue

The cold, hard metal of the gun barrel rasped against her teeth as it was forced into her mouth. The trigger guard smashed into her bottom lip, splitting it open. The taste of blood, metal, and oil, mingled in her mouth, causing her to gag. She tried to draw in air through her broken nose, to slow her breathing and calm her mind. She had to regain dominion over her thoughts, to fight back against the panic before it overwhelmed her.

It wasn't the first time an unwanted object had been forced into her mouth; it wasn't even the closest she had come to death. The man holding the gun in her mouth had tried to kill her once already today. She had suffered at the hands of men throughout her life. It was always men. She wondered why. Where did it come from?

The idea. The belief they had agency over her body.

Her life.

What fuelled their primal urge to dominate, debase and destroy? The innate instinct to cause harm. The inherent violence manifested in the daily cycle of abuse and degradation suffered by those unable to defend themselves—where does it emanate from?

The capacity for evil.

She realised the sources were too many and varied to apprehend. Her assailant was amongst the worst of his kind she'd had the misfortune to encounter in a short life punctuated with extreme violence. The fact he was in a position of authority did not surprise her; they were drawn to power. These men.

She despised this sick, twisted degenerate with all her being. She allowed the anger to build inside her, to fill her. She would need to harness her rage and turn it against her attacker. She tried to pull her head away from the gun, but his grip on her hair tightened, threatening to rip it from her scalp, forcing her back.

She refused to give up and be subjugated. Her options were severely limited; her left arm had been rendered useless, handcuffed to the bed,

while her injured right arm offered a slender chance at resistance. However, she was resolute she would not allow herself to be a victim and continue to suffer this violation any longer. She had to hold on to hope and vowed to herself that she would persist in her struggle for survival until the last reserves of her strength were exhausted.

She just needed a chance, an opening, however small. The slightest opportunity had to be seized upon if she stood a chance of getting out of this situation alive. Her life had always been a struggle against the odds. Today was one more entry in the litany of the horrors she had been forced to abide in order to ensure her continued existence. She contained a strength within her that enabled her to endure when others would have submitted to the surety of death.

She wanted to live to see him pay for what he had done. She could never forgive the transgressions he had committed against her. She had bested him once before and would have her vengeance, even if she had to chew off her hand at the wrist to free herself and tear out his throat with her teeth.

Chapter 1

Adam drained the last mouthful of beer from his glass and wiped the remaining moisture from his lips with the back of his hand. He felt something rising in his throat and swallowed it back down before it could escape. He set his glass down and felt a wave of nausea wash over him. He grasped the edge of the table, closed his eyes and steadied himself. When he opened his eyes again, his surroundings slowly swam back into focus. He fixed his attention on the rings, scratches and dents marking the thickly lacquered wooden surface of the table his hands were gripping tightly, tethering him to the world and keeping him from tipping into oblivion.

Adam realised that he was drunk. He should have paced himself, but he was in a festive mood; Christmas was only two days away, and he had completed his last day of work for the year. His children had finished all of their sporting activities and dance classes for the year, meaning he did not have to drag himself out of bed early to drive them anywhere tomorrow. On arrival at the pub he had quickly downed his first couple of drinks, while his colleagues were still nursing their first. With each sip, his nerves settled, and his tongue loosened. Soon, he was deep in conversation, his words flowing freely, too freely. His colleagues listened politely at first, but Adam failed to notice the signs of disinterest—the glazed eyes, the drifting gazes, the polite nods growing less frequent as he continued sharing his opinions and musings to anyone within earshot.

Adam glanced around the pub's dimly lit interior, watching his work colleagues deep in conversation with one another. The people sitting on either side of him had turned their backs on him, creating an unassailable chasm between them. He sat forgotten between the two groups, ignored. He never felt as lonely as when he was in the company of others, a silent witness to their enjoyment.

He pulled his phone from his pocket and read a two-word text from his wife written in capital letters to infer the importance, demanding he:

GET MILK. He chose to ignore the message and did not reply. He glanced up briefly to confirm that no one was paying him any attention and scrolled through his emails, searching in vain for anything of interest. He considered sending a message to one of the friends he had lost touch with over the years.

His wife had not been keen on any of his mates, saying they were vulgar and a bad influence on him, berating him for going out without her while refusing any joint invitations. He had made excuses not to meet up with them when invited until the invitations stopped altogether. He opened his address book and scrolled through the names until he found an old drinking buddy, his finger hovered over the call button. The fact that his wife would not have approved gave him pause and then impelled him to press the button, emboldened by the alcohol he had consumed. His small act of rebellion was curtailed when his call went to voicemail. He could not think of anything to say and hung up without uttering a word.

He decided to get another beer. His colleagues barely registered the grating sound of his chair scraping against the tiled floor as he pushed it back away from the table. He rose unsteadily to his feet, cleared his throat and stood awkwardly waiting for someone to notice him. He considered interrupting their conversations to ask if anyone else wanted a drink but didn't want to be saddled with buying the final round. Instead, he slipped away to the bar and ordered himself another beer from a bored-looking young woman who acknowledged his request with a curt nod.

He rested an arm on the counter while he waited and felt cold beer beneath his skin. He quickly withdrew his arm, pulled a wad of serviettes from a metal dispenser on the counter, and wiped the sticky liquid from his arm. His drink was placed in front of him, and he paid the woman, who frowned at him when he deposited the wet serviettes in the puddle of beer on the bar in front of her.

He arrived back at his table to discover that his work colleagues had left. He slumped into his chair, and his heart sank. He took a long swig

from his beer and looked around. The area had been almost entirely drained of inhabitants; only the most committed denizens remained, deep in conversation with their fellow drinkers. Adam was the only one sitting alone, a solitary figure amongst strangers. The companionship he witnessed, and craved, compounded his own feeling of loneliness.

Adam reminisced about better times when drinks on a Friday night after work used to carry on until Saturday morning. Memories of his old crew bought a wistful smile to the corners of his mouth. Remembering when he had a regular cohort of people his age who were more tolerant of him, but times had changed. Nowadays, the younger crowd only lingered for as long as the bosses' card remained behind the bar. As soon as it was time to start paying for their own drinks, they scattered, dispersing to continue at the clubs and bars packed with people their own age, places he could not bring himself to enter, where he felt like an unwelcome intruder. A witness to others' enjoyment, unable and unwilling to participate in the customs and practices alien to him, much like his own home.

He could not face the thought of going back to the house where he dwelt and felt like an interloper. A figure relegated to the periphery, an unwanted and barely tolerated trespasser in his own home despite the mutual love he shared with his children. How he wished it was just him and his children.

His daughter Sophie was born nine years ago, followed by her brother Thomas arrived, completing their family unit. Or so he thought. He hadn't bargained on his wife's mother and sister moving over from Thailand to stay with them once the kids were born.

In the beginning, his wife insisted she needed help with the children, and for the first couple of years, it made sense. But as time wore on, his patience wore thin, yet they were still there. His mother-in-law might have been a lovely lady, but she spoke no English, and he spoke no Thai. For the first few years, she was a great help with the children, allowing his wife to continue enjoying her activities while Adam worked and paid

the bills. He tried to hide his resentment, but it seeped into every interaction with his wife.

When the kids started preschool, he hoped his mother-in-law would be thanked and shipped off back to Thailand. Unfortunately, she had grown old and unwell, and it was her turn to be cared for. It was even more unfortunate, for Adam, that his wife had no intention of giving up her tennis lessons, salsa classes, spa trips, and other assorted trappings of the decadent western way of life to which she had become accustomed. So her sister, the youngest and only unmarried family member, arrived to take care of the matriarch. This left Adam's wife free to pursue her lifestyle-enhancing pursuits unhindered.

Even though Adam's wife and sister could speak English, all conversations in the house were in Thai. His children, growing up bilingual, switched languages effortlessly. Adam tried to learn Thai, took courses, and even attempted to read his children's books, but it seemed impossible. He gave up, sitting passively, excluded from the conversations that became background noise. He was a foreigner in his own home.

He hoped every day would be his mother-in-law's last. Not out of malice, but for the freedom it would bring. The relations were spending almost every cent he earned. His wife was the worst of all, if only he had known what she would become when he had met the shy, sweet girl on a magical holiday in Thailand. He used to blame himself for her transformation, regretting bringing her here to Australia. He wondered if she would have remained the same innocent girl if she had stayed in Thailand, rather than becoming the parasite he now saw, draining him and robbing him of his will to live.

Adam had resolved to divorce his wife years ago but stayed for his children. He adored them and couldn't bear the thought of being separated from them. When he confronted his wife a couple of years ago in a drunken rage, saying he was going to leave her, she threatened to take their children to Thailand, ensuring he would never see them again. He would die before he let that happen.

Adam rose unsteadily to his feet and grabbed the table for support as the room swayed around him. The sound of breaking glass jolted him back to reality. His empty pint glass lay shattered on the ground. Time to go. The few people remaining in the pub briefly paused conversations to observe the cause of the minor commotion but soon lost interest in the drab, drunken businessman. The glass crunched underfoot as he made his way to the exit.

He stepped out onto the neon-washed streets of Kings Cross. A group of people talking loudly passed him by, oblivious to the stranger in their midst. The perennial outsider. Adam felt lonely; he craved contact with another human being. He wanted to reach out and touch someone, to hold them, caress them, and be held. He wanted to feel something, anything—companionship, however fleeting. Home could wait; there was no intimacy for him there. The children were fast asleep, and his wife was unlikely to even notice him flop into bed.

He drunkenly ambled along the pavement, walking in the general direction of the city, towards Oxford Street. As he moved away from the bars, the people thinned out until the streets were devoid of life. Adam was alone, a solitary figure slowly weaving his way through the streets. Tears had begun to well up in his eyes; he gave in to the self-pity eating at him and began to sob as the tears spilled down his cheeks. After a few minutes, the sobs subsided, and he wiped away the traces of his sadness with a shirt sleeve.

He was oblivious to his surroundings, absorbed in his misery. He crossed a road beside an alleyway, a noise startled him. He stopped and took a moment to see what the source of the sound was. Four women in tight, revealing clothing stood together in the alleyway, smoking and talking. He guessed they were sex-workers and walked towards them. It was dimly lit in the alleyway, but he could see the women were attractive and felt himself getting hard.

One of the women turned towards Adam and looked him up and down with cold, calculating eyes, surveying and assessing him for signs of danger, memorising his features in case she was called on to describe

him later. Her instincts told her he was harmless, and her instincts were rarely wrong. She'd had more than enough experience with dangerous men to be able to spot one on sight. Some of the other women in her line of work were less discerning, taking unnecessary risks if the money was good.

After one last drag of her cigarette, she dropped it on the street and crushed it under her foot, which was a little large for her slim frame, Adam noticed. Although her feet were far from being her defining feature. She was very attractive, even if she wore more makeup than he would prefer. She was also tall, taller than him. She had long dark hair, pale skin, and long slender but toned legs encased in thigh-length boots, revealed by the short dress that barely covered her crotch. However, it was her breasts Adam could not help but admire, barely concealed beneath a figure-hugging dress, standing firm against her slender frame. He guiltily stole a tantalising glance at them. He wanted her now.

'Hi honey, are you looking for some company?' she asked.

'Yes, I am,' Adam said.

'You do know we're Trans?' she said.

'Trans?'

'Transsexual, honey. If it's a vagina you're after you'll have to go elsewhere.'

Adam had never been sexually adventurous, he liked women. He liked the way they looked, the way they felt, and the way they smelt.

However, he liked what he saw tonight. His desire for sex with this beautiful person had not diminished.

'How much?' he asked.

'\$200 and we use a condom.'

'Alright, let's go.'

Adam followed her further down the alley admiring her figure and experiencing a level of excitement missing from his life for such a long time. He felt like he was an observer, disconnected from the scene, watching someone else do something he would never contemplate. They reached a doorway and she knocked three times. A moment later a tall

guy with a long dark ponytail, clad in a leather biker jacket, opened the door and beckoned them inside. Adam's date sauntered past, and he followed, head down and body hunched over.

They entered the lobby of a reasonably large house. There were about five women sitting in chairs or lounging around smoking.

'Pay the man \$40, honey,' she said.

Adam pulled two twenties from his wallet and handed them to the man, failing to hide the tremble in his hand as he did so.

'Have fun. I'll phone when the times up,' the man said, pocketing the money.

Adam followed her up a narrow staircase past a couple of closed doors and into a small room dominated by a double bed. The window on the left side of the bed was blacked out. A lamp with a red lampshade, and an old Bakelite phone with a round dial, stood on the bedside table between the window and the bed. Adam remembered his parents owning a similar phone when he was a child. He had heard they were worth a lot of money these days, although God knows why. He remembered how excited his family had been when they had replaced theirs with a modern push-button version. It all seemed so incredibly long ago now.

'What's your name?' Adam asked.

'Marci.'

'I'm Adam.'

'Pleased to meet you, Adam. Would you like to join me on the bed?' Marci asked.

She unzipped her thigh-length boots and sat on the edge of the bed. Her short dress offered Adam a glimpse of her panties as she sat down. She patted the bed beside her with one hand and beckoned to him with her other hand.

He walked over and stopped in front of her. He was savouring the moment. Looking down into her big brown eyes. She unbuttoned his trousers and let them drop to the floor; a second later his underwear had joined his trousers around his ankles. She took him into her mouth, and

he felt as if he was falling in love. His wife refused to perform oral sex on him, saying it was dirty. He wondered what his wife would think if she could see him now. He thought about taking a picture with his phone and sending it to her. There would be no going back from that. It seemed like a good idea for all of three seconds, before he thought about losing his children forever. Now was not the time to be thinking about his children, and certainly not his wife. This was his time, and he would be paying dearly for it.

He started to unbutton his shirt. He wanted to be naked and feel his body pressed up against hers. He was afraid he might peak too soon and not get everything he could from the experience. He had managed to remove his shirt and caressed Marci's full breasts. He had never touched fake breasts before. Tonight was a night of a lot of firsts, and touching fake breasts was probably the least of them, but he was enjoying the new sensation.

Marci leaned away from him and slipped out of her dress, which she neatly folded and placed on a chair beside the bed. She wasn't wearing a bra, and her firm breasts stood proud of her slim body. Adam stepped out of his trousers and underwear and felt faintly ridiculous standing naked, except for his shoes and socks. He dropped to one knee and removed one shoe and then the other. He considered leaving his socks on; he didn't want to know what sort of state the carpet was in and how many bodily fluids it had soaked up over the years. In the end, the socks came off, and he stood in front of Marci naked.

She pulled a condom from her bag along with a tube of lubricant. She pulled the condom down over his erect penis and kissed the tip. He did not like to use condoms; he found the whole process acted as a passion killer and would often become flaccid before he had got it all the way on. He would then have to live with the embarrassment and frustration of another fumbled attempt at fornication. Each time it happened would compound the situation until he gave up on them completely. His wife knew this and said she wouldn't have sex without a condom. Two children were enough for her. He had tried to get her

to try alternative forms of contraception but she refused. He could not remember the last time they had sex together; it was so long ago.