

FROM THE ACCLAIMED AUTHOR OF *GIRL 4*

DEADSET

WILL CARVER

IF
YOU LIKE
PETER JAMES,
YOU'LL LOVE
THIS

HE'S GOING TO FINISH
WHAT SHE STARTED

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Acknowledgements
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About the Book

Detective Inspector January David doesn't love me.
He loves his missing sister. He loves his job.
But he doesn't love me. Not in the way he should.
I am his wife. I am *still* his wife.
And I will do anything for him.
No matter what I have to sacrifice.

About the Author

Will Carver is thirty-three years old, married and comes from Reading. His fantastic debut, *Girl 4*, was published in 2011, with *The Two* following in 2012. *Dead Set* is his third thriller.

Also available by Will Carver

Girl 4
The Two

Dead Set

Will Carver



arrow books

Mum, this one's for you.

'The easiest way to attract a crowd is to let it be known that at a given time and a given place someone is going to attempt something that in the event of failure will mean sudden death.'

*Erik Weisz, also known as Harry
Houdini*

The Truth

IN NOVEMBER 2006, Dorothy Penn consented to have sex with the man who would take her life. She was discovered standing naked, tied to her bed, which had been flipped upright, and shot through the mouth at close range.

She was the first.

She was Girl 1.

Over the next two years, this man continued to kill. Each victim chosen for their name, each from a different London borough, each killed with increasing theatricality, taking inspiration from the world's greatest magic tricks, mutating them into scenes of morbidity. The press called him 'The Zone Two Killer'.

His real name is Eames.

The night before Dorothy Penn died, Detective Inspector January David saw something. In his sleep. A dream, a vision, an intuition of a giant, dark figure occupying an empty black space in his mind, feeding him clues about the woman who would die within the next twenty-four hours.

This apparition would visit him the day before each victim would be taken, delivering his message through a perpetual grin, giving the detective enough time to stop the murder. January David called him 'The Smiling Man'. He disappeared the night that Eames was captured.

Five innocents died at the hand of Eames. One survived.

Girl 4.

Audrey David.

The detective's wife.

This was not through luck or a mistake; she planned it this way. She planned everything. Manipulating the mind of a serial killer to do her sinister bidding in a warped attempt to be noticed by her husband, to be loved. Loved more than the sister who has been missing from his life for over twenty years.

She failed.

And now she is gone. Left without a word. January David does not know of his wife's involvement, he knows not where she is, only that she is not alone. The baby will be eighteen months old by now. Her baby. Eames' baby. She naively believes that this is all behind her. That January David no longer cares.

She wants him to care.

But The Smiling Man has returned; another girl will die in the next twenty-four hours.

For now, Eames remains incarcerated in a high-security psychiatric hospital.

With four more tricks on his list.

Prologue

WHEN A PERFECTLY coiffed reporter perches himself inside a cell and throws a question across a flimsy wooden table, believing he already knows the entertainment value of the answer, that's not me he's trying to bait. If it were, his adrenalin would lose its battle with fear.

When this journalist's adversary claims not to remember murdering anybody, when they eventually cave, stating that *killing is like a drug, that we all go a little mad sometimes, that occasionally I feel like a vampire*, that is not reality. That is not something I would say.

I am not a sound bite.

I don't want notoriety.

Just leave me to do my job.

I'd rather disappear.

In the beginning, when I gave myself up, when Detective Inspector January David took the glory of capturing me, when he thought it was the end, everyone wanted an interview: they needed the exclusive conversation; they had an idea for a true-crime story or a novel; they were making a documentary.

Think how lucky the filthy reporter will feel that I didn't jump across the table and strangle him, the relief he'll experience as the door is locked behind his back on exit; when he gets to go home and tell his wife that she is safe, I am still locked away.

Think how protected this hack convinces himself he is with the camera pointed directly at my face, and how naive he truly is to believe that I care.

I've been in this place for nearly two years now. You can't call it an asylum. We are no longer known as lunatics. Political correctness. Or the rather weaker reason that there has been an evolution in the attitude towards mental health. It is a hospital. You must refer to it as a hospital.

For the criminally insane.

You have to whisper the last part. Or say it in your head.

But there is no space in my mind for anything other than Audrey. The last time I saw her she was barely conscious. Folded in half, waiting for her unappreciative husband to arrive and not save her again. Not be there in her time of need.

When the saw dropped.

That was January David.

Detective Inspector January David.

That is not who I am.

When the columnist asks about your childhood, whether it was normal, whether it was loving, his knees bounce nervously under the table I could easily tip over. His hands tap silently against his thighs beneath the thin wooden top I could force down on his neck as he lies on the floor, his windpipe crushed and clamped together before the man with the camera feels the impetus to react. He wants me to say that my father hit me. That he left. That I suffered some kind of abuse, which manifests itself as violence and hatred towards women. But that is not me either. I'm nothing like all the others.

I am Eames.

They know of five people that I killed. What they should want to know is why I let Girl 4 live. They should want a reason for Girl 7 to still be breathing. But they speak only of my mother's death and the families of my victims. Because that is good television or magazine copy. Maybe they can rile me. But they do not ask why Girl 4 and Girl 7 are the same person. Why they are both Audrey David. The

detective's unfaithful wife; the woman I love. Why is she still alive? How can I love this woman?

I have not finished with her.

She was not supposed to die then.

That is the simplest of answers.

But her time has come.

When January David uses the term 'career case', that's me he is proud of. It is I who define him. When this same detective believes enough time has passed to place part of history in a locked compartment of his brain, just as the faces of the five victims he failed to protect start to blur in his mind, as the scent of his wife finally fades from the material of their formerly shared home, that will be the optimal moment for a demon to return to his life and reopen those wounds, unlocking that compartment.

That monster is me.

Imagine his confusion when he finds Girl 8.

CE23.

Think how terrified he will be that I could walk straight out the front door.

Detective Inspector January David, when will you realise that Audrey was not the final trick? That this is far from being over? That things have changed. Altered. Metamorphosed. That there are four more.

Your wife was not the reveal.

She was merely misdirection.

It was never the plan to stop at Girl 7.

That's not me.

I can't stop.

Part One

Pledge

Girl 8

Wednesday

CHELSEA, 22:53

I'M MEETING EAMES at the theatre.

This afternoon I laid the foundations of my imaginary illness to my colleagues and my boss. My head hurts. It might be a migraine. I feel sick. My neck is stiff. Is it hot in here?

I'll call them in the morning and fake a sore throat. Maybe I'll cough for good measure.

I've been vomiting all night.

My gut keeps cramping.

I'm sweating but I feel cold.

The framed poster on my living-room wall says *Amen Avenue*. Written and directed by Kerry Ross. That play was over two years ago, when Eames was still killing people and we were reading the newspaper articles thinking it could never happen to us. That was before I'd forgotten his name.

The experimental theatre company I once belonged to is no longer inflicting its horror on small, discerning crowds in Chelsea since our performance space closed two Novembers ago. The Old Sanford Meisner Theater would only seat seventy-three people at capacity and is, at best, off-off the theatre district. *Amen Avenue* was the first and last play I wrote that was performed.

Until now.

My old theatre company website is still active and has the contact details of each member listed. Nobody has taken the site down because it is a record of the things we

achieved as a group. We're all still proud of it even if we aren't in touch as often any more. That is how Eames found me. I don't even use that email address any more, I just kept it in the vain hope that I may need it again some day, when I can leave my fledgling PR career and move back to the theatre. I don't hate my job; it's great. It's just not where I want to be in five years. Or ten. Or the rest of my life. So feigning sickness is hardly a crime.

My nose just started bleeding.

My skin won't stop itching.

I think I need to take the morning off.

Every couple of weeks I go into the email account to keep it activated. As usual, everything is junk. Job offers, pills to enhance my apparently dreary sex life, discounts and free shipping applied. And what seems like a philanthropic gesture to fund a play. Somebody contacting playwrights and directors in the area with the hope of resurrecting the Sanford Meisner Theater as a performance space for lower budget exploratory ventures.

This is the ticket.

A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

I am being presented with my dream in order to take away my life.

Too wired to sleep, I flip open my laptop and email the former members of our troupe, hoping they, like me, retained their accounts and empty them weekly of trash. Desperately, excitedly hoping that they, like me, still allow themselves to dream.

Tomorrow, I will call in sick. Women's problems. Ear infection. I'm having trouble sleeping. I will be picturing the next production. Getting the gang back together. Filling those seventy-three seats. I won't be worrying about e-shots and website banners. I won't be distracted by a distant memory of the name Eames.

Tomorrow I will know what a mistake I have made as I lash out, kicking my legs hard against the floor for leverage,

waving my arms about hoping to hit something, fighting for breath. I will remember Eames.

Tomorrow, when they find my body, when they see that I have been made to look exactly like one of his previous victims, that I have been chosen as the understudy to Audrey David, everyone will be reminded.

And they will recognise me as a fool.

The Foot

Wednesday

CAMDEN, 23:57

ALAN BARBER IS not important to Aria Sky's life story, at least not as a person, a personality; it is only his actions that carry significance. And he only knew her in death.

He has a list of sins throughout his life, he has even added some this evening, but he is incapable of murder. The first time he noticed the young girl it was late and he was pissing all over her.

It begins in Camden.

And ends in Regent's Park.

The Taittinger gathers dust on the top shelf. Below that, the Disaronno is crying out for some wannabe trendy sophisticate to order it with orange and ice while winking at a female stranger across the room. The Macallan whisky doesn't look like it has been opened on the shelf beneath, but just under that is the place Alan Barber calls home. Somewhere between the Gordon's, Plymouth and Tanqueray.

'I can't get fat on gin and tonic,' he tells the other two men at the bar. They are a decade or two older than he is and are sticking to ales and bitters. 'Clear spirits are the key to staying slim while having fun.' He doesn't tell them the effect that the tonic water has on him. That he spends half the next day on the toilet losing liquid and calories.

Recumbent bulimia.

Dysentery of excess.

Two hours pass and Alan Barber alternates between the three available gins on offer so nobody can tell he has had an entire litre to himself: each bottle has only gone down by one third; it's barely noticeable.

Then his friend finally arrives.

His name is irrelevant; in fact, his actions are negligible. The one thing he does is keep Alan Barber drinking into the late hours, testing his constitution, forcing him outside with that woman then walking him through the park late at night and waiting while Alan Barber relieves himself through a fence which has a four-year-old girl on the other side.

'What can I get you, (Insignificant Friend)? The usual?' Alan asks.

His friend nods and sits down.

Alan Barber orders a Disaronno with orange and ice for his friend and a Plymouth and tonic for himself. He lays a ten-pound note on the bar and excuses himself to go to the lavatory while the barmaid completes the order.

At the furthest urinal, facing the corner at an angle, an older, more portly gentleman leans with his left hand against the tiled wall, his right hand by his zip, whistling. Alan Barber never sees his face.

This is unfortunate because, unlike Alan, *he* is important.

He is significant.

He is capable of murder.

Alan Barber is so drunk that later, when the police question him, he will not be able to recall this seemingly arbitrary encounter. At first.

Though he does not need to clear his throat, Alan coughs as he approaches the urinal furthest to the right, thus alerting the other patron to his existence.

'When you get to my age, you have to whistle sometimes just to get things moving,' the faceless killer jokes, masking himself from view, fixing his eyes on his flaccid, unused dick.

Alan Barber grunts an acknowledgement towards his left then stares down into the bowl, looking at the yellow cakes, which smell of bleach, piss and lemon. He does not avert his eyes even when the notable character to his left finishes, walks behind him, washes his hands and leaves.

When he returns to the bar, his friend is sitting with a girl. He has bought her a drink with the ten-pound note that Alan trustingly left, and there is now nothing in the way of change.

'Hey, Alan' - his friend stands up from his stool - 'this is (a female name Alan Barber instantly forgets).' He does remember that they went into the cold, empty beer garden after closing time and that she sat on the bench, unzipped his jeans and performed an impressive oral dance on him, complete with humming interludes. He omits this portion of the night from his original testimony, too. He doesn't mention that he walked away, unable to ejaculate.

Leaving the Edinboro Castle pub, Alan Barber and his friend, who has been waiting patiently at the end of Delancey Street, stumble around the perimeter of Regent's Park until they spot a young girl walking on her own and, in their inebriated state, think it will be hilarious to follow her for a while.

Stop.

It's not her.

She's not the one who dies.

Part of the way into the park, Alan Barber decides to stop pursuing the woman. He needs to empty the gin from his bladder. He knows there is a toilet nearby on one side of the small coffee shop, which is closed.

This is the point where his life gained some meaning. Some clarity.

He jogs on from his friend, turns right at the bush, which was suggested as an adequate urinal, then turns left up the path to the brick building partially covered by the undergrowth.

The lights are on but it is locked. Alan Barber pushes and pulls at the door in frustration before being overtaken by a state of urgency. He pulls at his trousers violently before poking his penis between two of the iron bars of the fence, which runs around the ground to the right of the building.

Dropping his head backwards, he looks up at the sky and naturally arches his back enough to change the trajectory of his open-air urination. It hits a muddy slope and begins to splash against something flat. He looks to see what it is.

Toes.

Pale, white, tiny, delicate toes.

Instead of pulling back or stopping or jumping over the fence, he continues to empty his bladder, circling around the exposed digits, revealing the outer arch, part of the ankle.

He screams the name of his friend.

Still, he doesn't move. He doesn't react. Adrenalin does not force him to vault the fence and take a closer look or dig through the mud with his hands. He becomes a grotesque statue of an inconsequential, drunken life. His hands drop to his side, his flaccid penis drips between his legs, his eyes fixate on the excavated-by-gin-sodden-kidney-waste foot.

He can see it is a foot.

A child's foot.

And he assumes that she is already dead.

At no point does it occur to him that this was recent and that he could still help in some way, that the last time he evacuated his bladder he stood next to the man that buried this body.

He is the one to call the police and he waits behind the fence gazing at the dead, porcelain foot until they arrive.

So forget about Alan Barber. He is not a suspect. He has a witness to corroborate his actions. You can forget about him too; he's an idiot. There is CCTV footage of Alan at the pub he admitted to drinking at with his friends. It is time-

stamped to confirm his story. He is just a man who was on his way home and found a girl who was never expected to be found.

This is what Paulson and Murphy have been missing.

What they have been waiting for.

This is the front line.

January

Wednesday

HAMPSTEAD, 23:59

I SAW MY sister.

I saw Cathy.

She was standing in the corner of my living room, her head bobbing slightly as she faced the wall; it looked like she was counting. I knew it was her. Her hair was the same. Her manner the same. She was wearing the same polka-dot dress she had on the day she went missing.

That spring in '85.

When everything withered.

And then she just disappeared.

It has been just over six weeks since I saw her. Since I have slept well enough to dream. Since I was last at work. My democratically enforced sabbatical has afforded me the opportunity to arrange the journals my mother left to me after her death, and gain insight into the intuition we seem to have shared. I drink less. The dark shadows under my eyes are ever-present, whether I am rested or not. I've had time to reflect. And I'm ready to go back. Return to my job.

To lie.

I will admit to my superiors that my drinking had escalated on the last case, the hunt for Celeste Varrick, and I won't use the excuse that both of my parents had died and my wife had left me after sleeping with a fucking serial killer. I'll explain that I was exhausted when returning home the night I solved that mystery, that everything had

conspired too abruptly, that I must have been hallucinating or projecting as a result of the alcohol level in my body and the emotional fatigue.

That it was a shadow or a trick of light. A wind-blown curtain.

That, whatever it is that I think I saw, it could not have been my sister.

I will lie.

Because everyone but me thinks my sister is dead.

And these are the things they want to hear.

I know what I saw. I know Cathy. And it is time that I return to lead my team. Chief Inspector Markam needs to bring me back in. Not because a man named Alan Barber has numbed himself with gin and will foolishly trail an innocent girl through Camden in the early hours, unaware of his impending discovery. That is not my case. Not yet.

I just need to work. That is who I am. It is all I am now. My parents are gone. I accept that the unresolved issues with my father will remain unresolved; I can bear the slow erosion of unanswerable questions. I have locked Eames in a box in my mind; Audrey's compartment has been placed in the opposite corner of my memory.

A point of equilibrium has been reached. The sabbatical I never wanted to take has worked in the way that nobody truly expected it to. I'm ready. Ready for work, for the next case. Ready to dream.

But, if that is so, I must also prepare myself to experience nightmare. And nightmares have the power to unlock the chambers of grief and torment and misery and murder that a person like me hides in the recesses of his mind.

They can bring back the very incidents you have been trying to forget.

I have been ignoring Eames. I've overlooked Audrey. And said goodbye to their infidelity.

It will soon be tomorrow.

And The Smiling Man wants me to remember.

The Front Line

Thursday

REGENT'S PARK, 05:23

MURPHY CONSIDERS HIMSELF to be the inspector in January's absence.

Paulson would never refer to him in that manner.

As *Acting Detective Inspector*, Murphy revels in echoing the message he had received only moments before from his unknown supporter to Paulson, the man he now regards as a subordinate.

'We've got one. And it's going to be huge.'

'What are you talking about, Murph?' Paulson, his mobile pressed to his ever-decreasing cheek, pants heavily as he continues to march on his new routine, thumping along the London pavements in his early-morning, pre-work power-walk. Nobody is out at this time. Nobody can see an overweight man trying to sweat out the excess kilos.

'A case. We've got a case. A young girl has been found.'

'Oh fuck.' Paulson hates those words. Why a *young girl*? Why does it have to be another young, innocent girl?

'We don't know how long she has been dead for. Discovered by a couple of drunks. A shallow grave.'

Paulson remains silent, put off by Murphy's verve.

'Meet me at Regent's Park. The corner of Broadwalk nearest to Park Square Gardens. We'll go in together.'

Detective Sergeant Paulson ceases his exercise and rests against the concrete wall surrounding the stone front garden of one of the houses on his street, his lower back pushing against the bricks to support his weight. And he despairs.