

~ Deadlight ~

DEADLIGHT

Fresh Cut Edition

Sample

Troy Barnes

~ Deadlight ~

Part 1

THE GIRL
IN
BLACK

1

Jake's Place was the type of bar that held a comfortable familiarity as soon as you entered. The fireplace located at the far end was constantly ablaze with erratic, dancing flames. Antique styled lights on the walls and ceiling were dimmed for a relaxed atmosphere. Music played at a volume loud enough to enjoy, yet subtle enough to partake in friendly conversation. Medium-sized round tables, surrounded by timber chairs, scattered the carpeted area to the left of the entrance, and commonplace regulars were always found seated at the top end of the long blackwood bar on the right. It was only a small place, but everyone felt welcome and anyone was.

Thirty-seven year old Jake Nolan was proud of his little corner of the world. Since stepping out for his first beer as a teenager he had dreamed of opening his own place one day. The idea hibernated in his creative mind, waiting for the perfect moment to arrive, and it did. Three and a half years ago, Jake signed the lease to the old bakery building on the corner of Nicholson Street and Kentish Road. The Old Times Bakery had been in business for over twenty years when the owner died of a heart attack while selling a loaf of his famous thick-slice bread. As there were no family interested in continuing the baking tradition, it was emptied out soon after. The building was located on the outskirts of Carter, the city where Jake grew up. After months of hard work it was finally open to the public. The ambient sign above the front door read 'Jake's Place'. Jake loved that sign from the first moment he switched it on.

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It wasn't long before a dedicated group of locals started to congregate at the bar on a routine basis. An area in the far corner was transformed a year later, allowing room for local musicians to do a few acoustic sets on Friday and Saturday nights. The younger crowd stayed longer if there was entertainment provided and staying longer meant spending more money. Jake considered that prospect to be a good thing. A few older regulars weren't as keen on the bands, so he started a weeknight 'Happy Hour' a few months later between the hours of seven and eight, to keep them content. The business had blossomed. As Jake's eyes looked around the room that had once only lived in his mind, he couldn't prevent a smile appearing.

He was proud of what he had achieved.

2

It was Thursday night. Half-price drinks had been running for ten minutes and the night was quiet. A group of five, all wearing dark suits, sat at the large table closest to the front entrance. Jake knew their kind had a personal aura of confidence about them, but they were wasting their time with it here. Everyone understood that a suit around this part of town equalled a smart-arse salesperson on a cheap wage. Over by the blazing fire stood two young men, each drinking a pint of draught. It was obvious they were both under the legal drinking age. After working a bar for a while Jake found it easy to pick them out. He could still remember what it was like to be at that stage of life and it was rare to see any cops, unless it was a Friday or Saturday night. As long as they weren't causing any

trouble, they were no problem. Jake found it amusing to watch them glance his way every few minutes, forever wondering if their ruse had been busted.

An attractive girl with shoulder-length dark hair sat alone at the table in the corner. Jake didn't think she could be any older than twenty. She was wearing a short skirt and a tight top with a long stylish leather jacket. A pair of boots that finished just below the knee completed the package. Everything was black. If the girl was a prostitute then the customer potential was at an all-time low for her tonight.

At the top end of the bar sat Steve, Craig and Carly. Steve Jackson was a happy, married man of six years and a plumber by trade. His friends referred to him as the shit-stirrer of the group. He didn't like it much, but friends will be friends. In the middle was Craig, Steve's younger brother. Currently unemployed, he helped with the plumbing during busy periods for some cash-in-hand work. Other than that, Craig's life revolved around his faithful PlayStation and the occasional sexual exploit. Matt Carlson, known to everyone as Carly, was the last of the regular trio. For the past seven years he had worked at the nearby hardware store and lived for their fortnightly card games. All the men had a similar large build, dressed casually in denim jeans and T-shirts.

Carly was the reason they were drinking heavily on a work night. The night before last, his girlfriend of two years had left him. While he had been at work, Melissa moved out of the house they had been renting for the past twelve months. She had gone to live with her parents. The only thing she left behind to prove she was ever there was a note sitting on the kitchen bench.

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I'M SICK OF BEING TAKEN FOR GRANTED

GOODBYE MATT

P.S. FUCK YOU

“How about another round there, guys?”

The voice was Jake's and he knew the answer before either of them spoke.

“What do you reckon, Jakey?” Carly replied.

Carly paused, glanced over his right shoulder and turned to face Jake again.

“Who's the girl?”

“Dunno,” Jake replied while pouring the first of three new beers.

“She pranced in just before you guys arrived and has kept to herself all night.”

A cheeky grin appeared on Carly's face.

“So what's she drinking?”

3

A few moments later, Jake found himself standing at her table. A glass of bourbon and Coke was in his hand. Her gaze found him and he felt a little embarrassed.

“The guy at the bar in the white shirt asked me to bring you a fresh drink.”

She didn't answer.

He placed the glass next to a packet of cigarettes that sat on the table.

The girl loves black, he thought.

She spoke in a course, sultry voice. "What's his name?"

"Matt Carlson. His friends call him Carly."

Jake was surprised the girl expressed any interest in the cowardly advance. She didn't appear the type to be impressed that easily.

"You can inform Mr Carlson that the last thing I came here for tonight was to be picked up by a piece of shit like him."

As soon as the words left her mouth the bourbon flowed to where they had originated. With only ice left in the glass, she slammed it down on the walnut table. Jake started to apologise, but he didn't have the chance to finish. She snatched the cigarettes and strode past the cheap suits and straight out the front door. Jake could hear the sound of laughter coming from the bar. It was Steve and Craig, amused at the failed attempt.

"Well," Carly whispered under his breath. "That went well."

4

A bright moon was out and the night air was colder than it had been in Carter City for some time. A small chill filtered down Carly's back. He shuddered. Steve had offered to share a cab past Carly's house, but he decided to walk instead. He thought it might help to sober up a little before going to bed. Matt lived at twenty-two Temmar Street. It was an easy flat walk of about two

kilometres from Jake's Place. After a long period of staggering, he stopped and supported himself against a street sign. Beattie Road. He was halfway home. Carly looked down at his wrist to check the time and it occurred to him that the watch was a birthday present from Melissa. He ripped it from his wrist with drunken frustration, breaking the leather band, and then tossed it on the road. The timepiece smashed into the bitumen. He looked at it with a smile and then continued home using everything but a straight line.

It took another fifteen minutes for Carly to reach the letterbox with the number two stuck to it. The other numeral had fallen off months earlier and was on the to-be-fixed list. He paused on the wet grass before making his way to the front door. A part of him was hoping to see a red sedan parked near the garage at the top of the driveway. He expected to see Melissa sitting in the driver's seat, singing to her favourite song. She would be waiting for him to arrive home. Waiting to say she was sorry for what she wrote. She would step from the car as he approached. *I miss you Matt*, are the words that would leave her lips. A single tear would fall down her soft cheek. Her innocence would be alluring and they would have the most amazing sex until the sun came up. Make-up sex is always the best kind. That same hopeful part of Carly could now only see an empty and lonely stretch of oil-stained concrete.

Soon after, he fumbled a key into the door lock. After much time, Carly closed the door and walked along the hallway towards the kitchen. Two days of washing up sat piled up in the sink. The thought of Melissa was left silent on the cold driveway. A few minutes later the television was on and Carly was asleep in his favourite lounge chair.

5

Carly woke to uncomfortable pain. Cramp had set in to his arms and legs. The automatic reaction was to stand and stretch it away, but he wasn't able to move from the chair. It was dark. Something was wrong.

Different.

Silent.

The television wasn't on.

Carly looked out the window to see a well-lit streetlight, so that meant the power wasn't out.

"Are you scared?" a voice in the surrounding darkness whispered.

Carly's lips started to tremble.

"Who's there?"

He heard a flicking sound in the corner near the doorway and a small flame appeared in the void. The owner of the whisper lit a candle that was sitting on top of the stereo cabinet. For the first time, Carly could see the reason for the agonising cramp. Both hands were bound together with a piece of old green garden twine. He figured his feet were also bound. A length of orange rope wound around his waist halted any movement from the lounge chair.

Fear slammed through Carly's veins as the realisation of being held captive by an unknown intruder in his own home set in. The shadows in the corner started to change as something stepped into the flickering light of the candle. A small part of him expected to see a raving lunatic with bloodshot eyes, or a horror movie

demon with deep red skin and horns protruding from its bloody forehead. Carly looked up from where he sat and there was no madman, no demon. Just a young girl. It was the girl from Jake's, the girl in black. She held a large kitchen knife in her right hand. Her knuckles had gone white.

“You should be scared,” she whispered.

6

The girl sat on the floor. Seconds turned to minutes as she stared at him like a child does a new puppy, like she wanted to play with him. Carly knew there would be no playing. The knife she held placed that fantasy into disarray. He felt confused.

What was happening here?

Why was she so silent?

How much time had passed?

He wished the watch was still on his wrist and not being pulverised by passing traffic. The reflection from the flame glimmered off the glaze of her blank eyes.

Still she stared, scouring his thoughts and invading his mind.

“I know what you did,” she said.

Carly felt something warm between his legs and looked down to see his own urine. At that same moment, an eerie realisation stepped forward. It didn't make any sense, but now he understood.

He knew why she was here.

~ *Deadlight* ~

“It ... it ... it’s the woman, isn’t it?” Carly stuttered into the silence.

The girl didn’t move.

For a moment he didn’t think she was going to answer, but then she blinked. Carly jumped in his own skin.

“Who was she?”

The girl moved her index finger along the edge of the knife. A small drop of blood ran down the silver blade.

“She was no one. Just a dumb whore,” Carly managed to blurt out.

He sounded desperate. She continued to search his eyes, digging in every crevice and devouring every whimper.

“What do you want from me?” he screamed as the chair moved forward a few inches with his surge of anger.

Tears ran down the cheeks of his frightened face and his nose began to run.

More time passed.

“Why did you do it, Mr Carlson?” the girl in black asked her captive.

Carly was frustrated. Question after question.

“I couldn’t get it up and the bitch laughed at me,” he told her, staring down at his stained lap.

The girl’s face remained free of expression and Carly’s frustration was beginning to boil.

“So, just because your baby cock wouldn’t work and she found it amusing, you killed her?”

The girl moved closer.

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Carly's attitude change was immediate. He looked like someone who was telling a joke, but was about to laugh before reaching the punch line.

"Yes, you stupid bitch," he bellowed at her with renewed confidence and a crazy smirk on his sweating face.

"I choked every dirty breath of air out of that slut. I did that whore a fucking favour!"

The knife sliced in and out of Carly's stomach like it was butter. He could feel something warm between his legs again, but it wasn't urine this time.

He looked down again.

It was blood.

His blood.

The girl in black crouched down, watching the life drift from his leaking body. She stared at the liquid seeping through what was once a white shirt and smiled. Half an hour of silence passed. Sensing the end, she jumped to her feet and headed towards the doorway. Through blurred vision, Carly could see her leaving. He spoke as he struggled to stay conscious.

"How ... did ... you ... know?"

Carly could taste the blood building up in his throat.

She turned and faced the dying man. Dark hair covered half her face. The blood-covered knife in her hand was dripping on the carpet below.

"I could see you," she told him in a toneless voice. "I can see all of you."

She blew out the candle.

Matt Carlson sat alone in the dark, drowning in the warmth of his own blood, unable to leave his favourite chair.