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Desire

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Chapter One

Lisa Costello woke up next to her husband's corpse.

Her nightdress, originally a yellow Chinese silk with delicate embroidery, a priceless heirloom of his mother's, was soaked with his blood, reddish-brown where it had oxidised. Blood caked everything: her hair, her skin, the diamonds of her engagement ring. It was on the Aubusson rug and the tapestries on the wall.

And, of course, it was all over their marriage bed.

Lisa stared blankly. At first she was too shocked to take it in.

She was still coming to. Her head thudded with the relentless pain of a serious hangover. She was dehydrated; her temples pulsed, blood pumping loud in her skull. Her mouth and tongue were wretchedly dry. So dry she couldn't even scream.

The last thing she remembered was slamming the door in his face, stumbling towards the bed. She'd been drunk – but not *that* drunk, surely. She was just

drowning her sorrows against the farce of a marriage over before it had even begun.

But this sight was quite real. She was looking at Josh's body. His carefully styled salt-and-pepper hair was flecked with his own blood; his lower body soaked in it. He'd been stabbed, several times. There was a horrible wound at the side of his throat.

Lisa tried to sit up.

That was when she realised she was holding the dagger.

She glanced down, almost unable to release her fingers. A wedding gift from that local aristocrat Josh's company was dealing with – Prince Samyan, that was his name. It was antique, made of pure gold and decorated in the Thai fashion: a smooth ivory handle, slightly curved. It had been kept very sharp. Sickened, she threw it on the bed, but her fingerprints were still on it, reddened against the white bone.

Desperately, Lisa tried to remember. Something, anything, after the fight. No dice, it was all blank. Jesus. An alcoholic blackout. She panted in terror and looked around, her brain screaming in protest as she turned her head. No broken windows, the doors were sedately in their frames. No burglar had busted in here.

She had murdered Joshua Steen on their wedding night. She had got drunk, and she had killed him. Stabbed him, tried to slit his throat, with one of their

wedding gifts. She didn't remember any of it, but that didn't matter, did it?

She stumbled from the soaked satin sheets of their ornate four-poster bed and headed to the bathroom, where she vomited, dry-heaving. Almost nothing came up. She had a blurry memory of being sick the night before, after Josh started shouting at her. Maybe she'd emptied her stomach then. She gulped some water from the tap and instantly retched again. Even though she was hideously thirsty, the toxins in her stomach would not even allow her to drink.

She sobbed with confusion and terror. Joshua was a rich man, and he had powerful friends. His family was connected in society.

And they all hated her.

Nobody could understand why one of America's top movie producers, with thousands of gorgeous, accomplished models and actresses to choose from, would marry a waitress practically half his age. OK, Lisa Costello was pretty, but hardly able to play in the California league. Her mother, who had come from a small English town, was dead, and her father had left the family when she was ten and not been heard of since. Lisa was no match for a man who had dated Oscar winners, athletes and the Vice-President's cousin.

The American tabloids loved to hate her. They stalked her at the supermarket, took long-range

photos of her on the beach. Her non-model's face, her normal curves, everything was lit in the worst possible way. They ran unflattering pictures of her next to Josh's ex-girlfriends. THE MOUSE AND THE MOGUL, one of them screamed. JOSH'S JOKE. Lisa wasn't worthy. And the press never let her forget it.

She'd stayed in the relationship partly to spite them. Because Lisa was stubborn. She wasn't a quitter. Even when it was clear it was not going to work. Even when she knew she would have to bail out sometime.

She was trapped by the massive fiasco of this wedding, the millions of dollars it cost, the private beach resort, the chartered jets, the society columns and photographers. To cancel at the last minute would have made Josh look like a fool. And she cared about him enough to spare him that, at least.

What was the answer? She'd go through with it, give him his day in the sun, then push for a quickie divorce six months down the line.

How stupid. What a mistake.

She wished to God she had just walked away. Let the celebrity magazines crow how they were right. Who cared? Why did she care? Her younger self wouldn't have given a monkey's. But Josh's universe was seductive, of course it was. Lisa wasn't a saint. To go from struggling with the rent to this opulent fantasy – yeah, sure it was hard to give that up. And she'd learned habits from her dead bridegroom, like

the importance of clothes and caring about what the press said.

Josh hadn't much approved of her friends, and to her shame, Lisa had dropped them. In truth it was hard to stay friends with your mates from the surfer bars and the part-time job at the diner when you suddenly acquired a mansion, a chauffeur and two bodyguards. She had paid the price for her selfishness, for being disloyal and dazzled. As she discovered the bargain she'd made, as Josh's control-freakery, cruelty and faithlessness became clear to her, she had no allies to back her up. Just some future in-laws who despised her and told her constantly how fortunate she was to be in this man's life. How amazing it was he'd chosen her for his bed.

Lisa was *planning* to call it off. But she never pulled the trigger. So the wedding juggernaut rolled on, and she let herself be flattered, and bullied, and bribed into submission. The celebrity florists, the spread in *People* magazine, the Vera Wang dress, the epic diamond ring. Lisa Costello was a star of the show, and trapped in a glittering cage. Locked into marriage, no way out . . .

Until she saw Josh with Melissa. Actually on her wedding day. Two hours after they'd exchanged vows.

Then – the row. The start of which at least fifty of their guests had seen.

Lisa had stormed up here, to the honeymoon suite, for privacy, to get away from her sniggering

bridesmaids and the whispers of the guests. She'd been screaming at him . . .

She lifted her head from the sink. Her reflection was haggard. Her hair was matted, her eyes bloodshot, with dark circles underneath. She was still wearing the ruby-rimmed platinum Blancpain watch Josh had given her; local time was coming up to nine in the morning.

A surge of panic welled in her throat.

Housekeeping.

Any minute now they'd be knocking on the door.

She limped to the doors of the suite and hung a 'Do Not Disturb' sign outside. Then she locked and bolted them. She moved to the telephone, rang reception, and said they were enjoying their honeymoon and were on no account to be disturbed until noon.

She made herself sound calm. Oh God! She was terrified.

This was Thailand. There was an extensive guard of Thai police around the estate, a private hideaway owned by Josh's partner, Peter Mazin. Five members of the royal family had attended this wedding, along with two government ministers and a US senator. Thailand was a death penalty state. Christ!

The sadness and the guilt would come later.

Her husband was dead, and she could see his mangled body, but right now, all she could feel was fear. A white wall of terror blocked everything out.

She had to think. She had to think *now*.

She forced herself to get back into the bathroom, where she ran the shower, watching the warm water sluice the blood off her body. There was no way to dispose of her nightdress; she just left it. More nausea rose in the back of her throat, but her stomach heaved dry. There was no time to be ill. How far away was the airport?

She washed her hair, her fingers fumbling to gain some speed. She towel-dried it, then ran to the vast closets, ornately carved from cherrywood. Her clothes had been unpacked and placed on hangers. Instantly she found what she was looking for: her Escada jeans, her Nike sneakers, a plain black cotton T-shirt from Marks & Spencer, one of a few relics from her old life. She picked out a Hermès scarf and her Ray-Bans and hastily pulled them on.

Her wallet was there, Joshua's too. She took all the cash. There was more than two thousand US dollars and thirty-five thousand Thai baht. Her passport and his were both downstairs; security had collected them all before the wedding.

But Joshua had a key to the safe. Gingerly she approached his body, trying not to look at his face. It was in his trouser pocket. Her fingers trembled as she investigated. She knew she was depositing DNA, but what the hell; there weren't going to be any other suspects, were there?

Thank God, there it was. She fished it out and took

it to the sink, rinsing off the blood. Then she crept to the door.

The corridor was silent; Joshua had rented the entire floor. His sister was up here, sleeping it off, but Lisa could hear no sound from her. The hotel staff were keeping their distance.

There was no other way out anyway. She had no choice and no time. She opened the door and slipped into the corridor. It was empty and silent, apart from the pounding of her own heart. Softly she pulled the door back shut. It closed with a heavy click anyway, but nobody came.

She would not risk the elevator. There was a stairwell, and she ran down that, as fast as she could manage, moving against the wall to steady herself at times. She was dizzy, sick, dehydrated. But she could not afford to pass out.

She exited the stairwell on the leisure floor. Here they had a gym and pool. She could hear the sound of the machines; some health-nut Californians, colleagues of Josh's, were in there exercising already. Her blood was racing around her skin without the slightest need for aerobics; there was someone in the locker room, and she needed to go in there.

She walked in, ready to spin some line of bullshit, to smile and make conversation, talk about the wedding night that never happened, whatever was needed. But no, the woman was wearing slippers and

the brown dress of the estate staff; she was cleaning, and her look at Lisa was blank. She didn't recognise her, didn't care.

Lisa moved to the safe next to the lockers and inserted her key. There they were, a neat row of passports, stacked and ready to go. She flicked through them till she found what she was looking for: Janet Parks, an English actress. She was roughly the same build as Lisa, and last night she'd been very drunk, passed out in the fountain by the ornamental temple. Lisa had watched two of the wait staff carry her away to her bungalow. She'd be up later than anyone else, miss her passport after everyone else. Lisa picked up her own too, as cover, although the police were bound to block it.

A side door led from the locker room out to the grounds. Lisa let herself out and sheltered for a minute under a thick golden bamboo bush. She tied the scarf around her wet hair and slipped on the sunglasses. She was in a back part of the hotel garden, and she could see the road through the estate; it led down to each bungalow and guest house, and then out towards Phuket City. She felt ill enough to faint, but she made herself jog. Each step, each pace, took her further away from that horror, from Joshua's lifeless body, that bloody dagger. She ran, tense, always waiting for the shout, for a siren, a shotgun, guards running towards her, but nobody came. And suddenly she was running

past the hotel's sign, and she was out, and there they were, the little group of taxis, beat-up and battered, the drivers waiting for wedding guests to emerge, to strike out on their own, those precious Westerners with all their money.

She made herself slow to a walk. The taxi drivers smiled at her. The guy at the head of the queue tossed down his cigarette, stubbing it out with his shoe, and climbed into his car, joking with the men behind him. To Lisa, his every movement took an age. They would knock on Josh's door soon; they would be coming. She would rot in a festering Thai jail until they hanged her.

She smiled as briskly as she could and slipped into the back seat. The cab stank of smoke, maybe enough to mask her sweat and fear. 'Phuket airport,' she said clearly.

The driver pulled away and switched off the meter. 'Thousand,' he said.

A thousand baht. Thirty dollars. Lisa nodded and put the notes on the passenger seat. She held up another thousand to the mirror.

'If you get me there fast,' she said.

He grinned and stepped on the accelerator. Had that been necessary? He'd remember her now, when the police came asking. But speed mattered more than secrecy. Getting out of here was more important than anything.

*

Felix rolled over in bed, checked his watch. He had slept well, as he usually did after a kill. The shower he'd taken in the hotel bathroom had been wonderful; it was short, but he never liked to leave a crime scene with blood on him. He had folded Lisa's slack fingers around the dagger – great touch that, the antique dagger, the royal wedding gift – and then allowed the fragrant hot water to blast the arterial blood off his skin. His clothes were splashed, but that was one reason he always wore black.

It was the middle of the night when he left the hotel bedroom, a lock of Josh Steen's hair in his pocket as a souvenir. He would visit Lisa again, in jail, when she was waiting to be executed, in the guise of a counsellor or a cleric, and get some of her hair too. That would be a thrill. He liked to keep those little surprises in his pocket for later.

It would be good to see Lisa Costello like that. His cock stirred at the thought of it. She had looked so goddamn hot on that bed, passed out cold in her little nightdress. Great ass, tight but real round, sticking out from that small waist. Good tits too. Natural, generous. The kind of body that promised a man a fuck he would never forget. She'd been his willing little helper all along. It would have been a simple enough kill if nothing had gone wrong at the wedding. Nobody liked Lisa; she was easy to blame. But that fool Steen had gotten himself into a fight. A giant, public, screaming

row. And Felix's curvy little alibi had been knocking back those drinks and causing a scene before he even got himself into the picture.

It was just so beautiful. If he'd paid her she couldn't have played her part better. Nobody would look anywhere else for the killer now. Absolutely nobody. He'd enjoyed thinking about what a stupid, gorgeous, curvaceous little bitch she was when he was standing next to Steen's warm corpse, playing with himself, looking at that lovely ass, her legs spreadeagled over the marriage bed.

Mostly clean, he had exited the hotel through the staff entrance in the back, behind the gymnasium. One of the managers shouted at him to join the clean-up crew in the reception tent. Before dawn came, the Thai and Filipino staff would have made the entire elaborate edifice disappear; not so much as a flake of confetti would remain on the ground.

How carefully Steen had planned it all, like a military operation. Felix grinned at the thought. And it would go on just fine without him.

Felix had ignored the manager and gone home to bed in his flat outside the complex, the little place he rented in town. By the time one of the other workers complained he was shirking, he would be long gone, on a first-class flight to Manhattan, where somebody had a beef with a bent congressman who took bribes but didn't deliver.

He glanced at his watch. Late morning. The drug would still be in Lisa's system; she would be out cold. A perfect time for him to stumble upon them, raise the alarm.

He rose and showered again. That would cause a delay for a couple of minutes, but he liked to be clean. Psychological, no doubt, to do with being a killer, but he didn't care about any of that crap. Didn't see a shrink, didn't want to. Being fucked up from this life had to be normal. He just got on with delivery.

He pulled on his staff uniform and prepared to get back to the house. Room service . . . the deferential waiter, the knock on the door . . . then a cry of horror, an alarm raised . . .

Brilliant. He didn't normally play games like this, but the set-up was too perfect. She'd wake dazed and sick, confused, glance at the bed, try to take it in, notice her own hand . . .

By then the staff would be in the room. She'd be in custody, probably hysterical. He loved it when they cracked up right in front of him. Pleading innocence while she was soaked in her husband's blood.

They would summon the local police and Lisa would be flung in some festering jail to rot, and nobody, not the British consul, not some high-powered defence lawyer, would be able to help her. She had no friends anyway. Nobody cared. His bluntness with the weapon, the chloroform, the slow,

brutal stabbing, the blood everywhere – none of it would matter. The arrogance of taking a shower right in Josh Steen’s bathroom, leaving his hair and cells everywhere – Felix had a free pass. It was an obvious murder. And he had the perfect alibi.

Lisa Costello. Guilty.

He slipped from the apartment, smirking, and into his car. Ten minutes later he was in the hotel, yawning as though he’d been hard at work all night.

‘Manuel.’ The manager, Newton, a Canadian, was snapping his fingers, reading Felix’s metal name tag. He was posing as one of the catering crew, mostly Americans, flown over to ensure that Josh Steen’s guests got the ultimate white-glove service. The local Thais were used for set-up, cleaning, background stuff. Steen had gone with a major, expensive US company to run his party, and he’d willingly paid for the charter plane.

Nice of him to be so profligate. Made blending in a piece of cake.

‘Get out to the terrace and check for any broken glass fragments.’

‘*Si, señor.*’ He had perfected the whiny, subservient voice; if asked, Mr Newton would recall Felix as pounds lighter and much shorter than he actually was, due to his meekness. It was psych stuff, and you could take it to the bank. ‘But first the champagne, yes? The room service.’

'Who ordered room service?'

'Oh, *si*. Mr Steen and Mrs Steen. Shall I take up now?'

The boss stared at him. 'When did this happen? Mrs Steen rang us. Don't disturb till noon.' He grinned and made an obscene gesture. 'Guess he's getting laid. Marry for money and you earn every cent, right?' He laughed.

Felix's pulse quickened. Years of practice kept his face steady; his hangdog expression didn't change. But this was bad. How the hell . . . She should have been out still, unconscious. The dose he had administered was more than enough.

He ran through the possibilities in his mind. He'd got the wrong drug, administered it incorrectly to the wine. She hadn't drunk that wine after all, had put the glass down and picked up someone else's . . . but nope; the girl had fainted on to the bed in a classic symptom of toxicity. More likely she had drunk some but not the whole dose, plus she had the constitution of an ox.

She must still be up there, panicking. Smashing windows maybe, or trying to hide the sheets.

'How long ago did she call? Maybe I got message wrong.' He gestured vaguely towards the kitchen. 'Bellhop tell me.'

'Couple of hours.'

'Maybe I make mistake.'

'Hold up. If they want champagne, we mustn't keep them waiting.' Newton was reaching for the phone on

the wall, punching in the number of the honeymoon suite. Felix hovered. He was greedy for information. This was always his favourite part of any kill; the discovery, the drama, the screaming . . .

His boss hung up after a few minutes. 'No answer at all. I'll go check on them. Get the champagne anyway, bring it up just in case.'

Felix hurried to the fridge, fetched the champagne and ice bucket, picked two crystal flutes out of the dishwasher and set them on a silver tray. He hated every second's delay. Within moments, he was bounding up the stairs after Newton, the tray barely moving on his outstretched hand; he had a gymnast's balance, which came in useful on a number of jobs. When he reached the corridor to the suite, the door was closed; Newton was knocking on it, hard.

No response. Perhaps she had killed herself. Yeah, that would be a nice neat way out. Nobody looked twice at a murder-suicide. It wouldn't be so much fun as a trial and execution, but it would work.

He had the money already. So that was cool. But the more spectacular the kill, the bigger his fee on the next job and the one after that. High-profile cases were worth more. He shrugged mentally. If Lisa had taken the easy way out, there was no point crying about it.

'Señor Newton, maybe open door just a little peek, check if they OK,' he suggested.

His boss already had the skeleton key in his hand

and was turning it in the lock. Felix moved forward, champagne tray at the ready, straining eagerly to see his work.

The door creaked open.

'Holy shit!' said Newton. 'Oh my God! Jesus!'

Don't bother Him, Felix thought, smiling. He had nothing to do with it.

Newton had run inside the room and was standing there, gulping for air like a fish, his chest heaving. Felix put on his concerned face and moved inside with him, letting the champagne tray drop to the floor for effect.

'Santa Maria!' he gasped.

Josh Steen was pretty much where he'd left him. The dagger was on the floor by the body. His gaze scanned the room, real quick: closet door was open – so she'd taken a few clothes. He checked the bathroom. That was ajar too. She had showered and run. Jeez, he didn't think she had it in her, that little Limey nothing. Why did she bother? There was no point. She'd be stopped at the airport, or picked up by Thai police if she tried to stay on the mainland. But people weren't logical, not in that state.

Man, Lisa Costello must be feeling sick. And she must think she'd killed her meal ticket. Sucks to be her.

Still, Felix wasn't pleased. Until Lisa was caught, it would be an open loop; it would bother him. The client might try to fuss about it. He was going to call,

just to make sure. In fact, he would call right now.

‘Mistah Newton – I can’t take this, I going to be sick. She kill him,’ he gasped.

His boss spun around. ‘Manuel, go call the police! Have everybody look for Mrs Steen! Call the owner! Tell the family! Get people out of the hotel . . .’

‘*Si, si* – then I go home, yes?’ Felix sobbed. He withdrew from the suite. Go fuck yourself, old-timer, you can do all that shit. His presence in the room was now explained, should they find any hair or DNA – not that he thought it was likely. Yeah, he’d call the police. And he’d call the FBI in LA and he’d call CNN. Nice anonymous tip-off.

After that he was getting on a plane. It was fun to be around the scene of the crime, but you didn’t want to overstay your welcome. He would call his client from the airport. He decided not to track Lisa. As long as the media convicted her, the trial was just a formality. Felix’s commission was fulfilled, right? Josh Steen was dead.

Besides, he had a strong feeling that his client would get somebody else to do the tracking.

Felix went downstairs to use the phone. After that, he had a little date with Congressman Louis Cantor.

The road to the airport was dusty and hot. There were a thousand cars, she was anonymous. Lisa dared not lean back against the seat and close her eyes. If she did

that, she might be sick again, or try to. Maybe the driver would throw her out. She had to keep it together. The cars and trucks streamed past her; he was driving so fast. She kept her eyes on the asphalt, on the signs. Twenty kilometres to the airport. Ten . . .

They were there. He looked around and gestured, asking her which terminal.

‘International,’ Lisa said, and forced a smile. It was still only half nine. She might make it, she just might. She passed the extra notes across and jumped out of the car, running into the building, fighting her nausea.

It was a big airport; unexceptional enough. Check-in was a large hall divided by pillars, yellow on the bottom half, the floor white with huge pink cross-lines. There were baggage cart displays, ticket sale booths, rows of airline check-ins. She was instantly relieved to see plenty of travellers just like herself, twenty-somethings carrying just backpacks or even without luggage at all; Thailand was the backpacker centre of the universe.

Her thirst could no longer be denied. She was forced to waste precious time at a Dunkin’ Donuts stall. She bought water, a coffee and a large chocolate doughnut to try to raise her blood sugar levels after the alcoholic crash. With trembling hands she passed over some more of her precious baht notes, and unsteadily unscrewed the cap off her water bottle. The drink moistened her dry mouth; she could feel her

cells sucking up the hydration, pleading for more. Her gorge rose, but she told herself to calm down; mind over matter; she had to get on a plane, and they don't let drunks fly.

A quick look at the departure schedules. There were flights to lots of places, some safe, some not. Finland – Milan, even. God, how she longed to board a flight to Milan. But she dared not do it. They would discover Josh soon, and some time after that, find out Janet's passport was missing. They'd put out a stop on it at the airport. How long before they checked all the guest passports, not just her own? This would be a celebrity case, lots of pressure. If she took a long-haul flight, her little ruse would be found out before she landed. Police would be there to arrest her before she got off the plane. They would turn her around; she'd probably never even get through immigration to claim asylum.

Breaking for freedom too early would be a death sentence.

A short-haul flight was the only answer. She had to be off the plane before they found out about the passport.

But the closer destinations offered little comfort. Singapore. Mainland China. Hong Kong . . . every one of them could extradite her back to this hellhole. All these Asian countries had the death penalty, didn't they? The lot of them! But she had to make a choice anyway.

Before she could be extradited, she'd have to be caught.

And a little chance was way better than none at all.

Dragon Airlines was flying regularly to Hong Kong. Lisa had an old friend from school who lived in Hong Kong, or used to. They hadn't stayed in touch. But that was more than she had anyplace else in south-east Asia. Maybe she could repeat the trick, borrow Alice's passport. Steal it if she had to. Alice had shorter hair, and she was dumpier, and a brunette. But she was at least the same age, and British. Maybe she could figure something out.

A slim chance. But a hell of a lot better than nothing. Lisa had no idea if Alice was at the same address, or still lived in Hong Kong at all, but she had to try. She walked up to the ticket counter and got in line, trying not to let her stress show as the couple in front of her asked about upgrades and vegetarian meals. She nibbled a little on the doughnut. It gave her sugar, and something to do. Each second took an age to pass.

'Can I help you, miss?' the agent said.

Lisa tried for her most brilliant smile, the one that had landed Joshua Steen.

'I'm thinking about going to Hong Kong for the weekend. Wondered if you had anything on standby.' She forced a chuckle. 'Coach of course.'

'Let me see.' The woman did not respond to her humour, but that was OK. She was brisk and looking

right through Lisa. 'There's an open seat on the next flight if you hurry. Luggage?'

Lisa shook her head. 'Kind of an impulse thing.'

'OK. Then you should make it. How you like to pay?'

'I have cash,' Lisa said. 'US dollars OK? I only want one way. I might go see a girlfriend in Sydney after that.'

The agent nodded, uninterested. 'Standby one hundred eighty dollars.'

Lisa counted the money out. She had hundreds; the agent did not care. She passed back the change in Thai baht and gave Lisa a boarding card.

'Gate 122, boarding now. You hurry.'

She sure would hurry. Lisa rushed upstairs to the metal detectors and passport control. She was fortunate; it wasn't too busy. When she came to the passport desk, panic almost overwhelmed her, but the surly man sitting there barely checked her photograph; she was waved through and nobody cared that she was running to the gate. When she got there, passengers were filing into the plane. Lisa offered her boarding card; it was placed in a machine, the stub given to her. She had a middle seat, way in the back, and she was grateful for it.

She buckled herself in and sipped slowly at her coffee, nibbling on the doughnut to settle her stomach. Each moment the plane sat on the Tarmac was torture. Each minute was torture. The whole flight would be an eternity of terror.

Finally, the plane moved from the gate, taxiing out on the runway. Thirsty, sick, her heart thumping and her head pounding, Lisa watched with utter relief as the wheels lifted from the Tarmac and the plane moved into the sky. It was nine forty-five. She'd asked the hotel to back off until noon; would the maids knock then, or wait a few hours? Would Josh's sister, or his mother, interrupt them early? Her heart crunched in pain as she thought about that. God, but she had hated those women, so petty towards her, so cold to Josh, greedy for his money . . . but they *were* his family. Miriam had given birth to him. She tried to imagine their horror, the wail of grief that would rip through them when they saw him, found him, poor Josh, the master of the universe a cold, helpless, blood-soaked corpse on that bed. The moment would scar them both, as it had scarred her, for life. Whatever quarrels or fights . . . how small those things seemed now, how very little they mattered. Horrible waves of guilt and pity and fear raced through her. She dug her nails into her palms, distracting herself with the pain, trying not to be sick, to push the image away, concentrate on her survival. Once those poor women found him dead, how quickly would they assume she had done it?

Everything depended on the passports. The estate guards would call the police. Rumours would sweep the hotel, the wedding guests. The selected, hand-

picked journalists Josh had chosen to attend – tame poodles permitted to report on the big society wedding – would suddenly find themselves, celebrity hacks though they were, in the middle of the story of the year. What the Thai police did not think to do, the paparazzi would suggest to them.

Lisa didn't know how long she had. This flight was three hours and forty minutes. She would also have to get through Hong Kong immigration. None of what happened now was in her control.

The 'fasten seat-belt' sign was switched off. An air hostess was coming round with a trolley full of drinks. Some louts, British holidaymakers, were already asking for alcohol. Lisa would join them. She never wanted to drink, not ever again in her life. But the hangover was brutal, and she needed to be whole, to cope with the forward journey, the escape. She knew enough about drinking to understand that hair of the dog was real. A little alcohol now would attack her liver, her poor, bruised liver, but while it dealt with the fresh assault, the toxins besetting her would lie low; the symptoms would be masked; like a miracle from Lourdes, she'd feel better. And Lisa needed to feel better.

The trolley arrived, and she asked for a white wine, although she blushed as she did it. It was passed to her without comment. She poured the liquid into a little plastic glass and swallowed, feeling her sanity return

with every slug, not able to care about the internal damage it was doing. She was sorry she had killed Joshua. Sorry she had seen him with Melissa. Sorry she'd been dazzled by him in the first place, sorry she'd gotten drunk at her own wedding. But she dared not cry or make any sort of scene; the hole in her heart would have to do for penance this morning.

Lisa Costello was sorry for a lot of things. But she did not want to die.

The wine flowed down her gullet and into her body. For the next few hours, life was out of her control. She put her head back against the synthetic leather seat, and started to pray. What else could she do? She didn't want to get caught. She didn't want to die. Right now, nothing else mattered.