

Welcome to the first Chapter of

DEADLIGHT

1

Jake's Place was one of those pubs that held a comfortable familiarity when you first entered. The fireplace located at the far end was constantly ablaze with bright and erratic dancing flames. Antique style lights on the walls and ceiling were dimmed slightly allowing for a relaxed atmosphere. Surrounding music played at a volume loud enough to enjoy, yet subtle enough to partake in a friendly conversation. Half a dozen medium sized round tables surrounded by timber chairs scattered the cosy carpeted area to the left of the entrance. Commonplace regulars were always found seated at the top end of the six metre 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 pub beer as a teenager he had dreamed of one day opening his own place. The idea hibernated itself away in his creative mind waiting for the perfect moment to arrive.

Eventually it did.

Three and a half years ago Jake took over the lease on the old bakery building on the corner of Nicholson Street and Kentish Road. The Old Times Bakery had been in business for a bit over twenty years before the elderly owner died one morning 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 cleared out soon after. The building was situated on the outskirts of Carter, the city in which Jake grew up. After two long months of hard work and the spending of just over ninety thousand dollars it was finally open to the public. The small ambient sign glowing above the front door read JAKE'S PLACE. Jake loved that sign from the first moment that it was switched on.

It didn't take long before a dedicated group of locals began to congregate the bar on a routine basis. An area in the far corner was transformed a year later to allow room for local bands to do their thing on Friday and Saturday nights. The younger crowd had a tendency to stay longer if there was entertainment provided, and staying longer meant spending more. Jake had considered that prospect to be a very good thing. A 'Happy Hour' concept was then instigated a few weeks later between the hours of seven and eight each weeknight to keep the regulars who didn't like the band idea nice and happy. The business had blossomed. As Jake's eyes wandered around the lightly filled room that had once only lived in his mind he couldn't prevent a smile appearing.

He too was happy, and extremely proud.

It was Thursday night. Half priced drinks had been running for a bit over ten minutes. So far things had been fairly quiet. Four men and a woman in their mid twenties sat at the large table closest to the front

entrance. They all wore dark suits. Jake knew that their kind always 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 meant only one thing. A smart arse salesperson on a cheap wage. Over by the blazing fire stood two young guys, each drinking a pint of draught. It was obvious that 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 the cops were hardly ever around until Friday nights anyway. As long as they weren't causing any trouble, they were no trouble. Jake actually found it slightly amusing to watch them both glance shyly toward him every five minutes, forever wondering if their rouse had been uncovered. An attractive girl with shoulder length dark hair sat alone at the table in the darkest 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 happily married man of six years and a plumber by trade. His mates referred to him in jest as the shit stirrer of the group. He didn't like it much, but mates will be mates. In the middle was Craig, Steve's younger brother. Currently unemployed he helped with the plumbing during busy periods for a bit of 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 last seven years he had worked at the nearby hardware store and lived for their fortnightly card

games. All of the men held a similar large build and were dressed casually in denim jeans and T-shirts. Carly was the reason they were drinking hard on a work night. The night before last his girlfriend of two years has left him. While he had been at work Melissa had moved out of the house that they had been renting for the last twelve months. She had gone back to her parents. The only thing she left behind to prove that she was ever there was a note sitting on the kitchen bench.

I'M SICK OF BEING TAKEN FOR GRANTED

GOODBYE MATT

P.S. FUCK YOU

“How bout another round there boys?”

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

“What do you reckon Jakey? Think about it mate.”

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

“So who’s the girl?”

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

“She pranced in not long before you guys arrived and has kept to herself all night.”

A cheeky grin appeared on Carly’s face.

“So what’s she drinkin’?”

A few moments later Jake found himself standing at her table. A glass of bourbon and ice was in his left hand. Slowly her gaze fell upon him. He suddenly felt kind of silly.

“The guy up at the bar in the white shirt asked me to bring you a fresh drink on him,” Jake told the girl.

She didn’t answer.

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

The girl really loves black he thought.

She spoke in a coarse yet sultry voice. “What’s his name?”

“Matt Carlson. His friends call him Carly.”

Jake was surprised that the girl was even expressing any interest in the cowardly advance. She didn’t appear to be the type that would be impressed that easily.

“Well you can inform Mr Carlson that the last thing that 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 free drink flowed to where they had originated. With only ice left in the glass she slammed it down onto the stained walnut table. Jake started to apologise but he didn’t have the chance to finish. She snatched the cigarettes and strode briskly 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, obviously amused at their friends failed attempt.

“Well,” Carly whispered under his breath in disappointment.

“That went well.”

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 home past Carly's house but he had decided instead to walk. He thought it might help to sober up a bit before lying down. 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 briefly and supported himself against a street sign. It was Beattie Road. The halfway mark. Carly looked down at his blurred watch to check the time when it occurred to him that it was a birthday present from Melissa. In drunken frustration he ripped it from his wrist breaking the leather band, and propelled it onto the hard surface of 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 many months ago and was on the to be fixed list. He paused out the front on the wet grass before making his way to the front door. A part of him had been hoping to see a red sedan parked at the top of the driveway near the garage. He expected to see Melissa sitting in the driver's seat singing along to her favourite song. She would be waiting for him to arrive home. Waiting to say that she was sorry for what she wrote. She would step from the car as he approached it. *I miss you Matt* are the words that would leave her lips. A single tear would wade down her soft cheek. Her innocence would be alluring and they would have the most amazing sex until the sun turned up. Make up sex was always the best kind. That same hopeful part of Carly could now see only an empty and lonely stretch of

oil stained concrete. In no time after, a key was being fumbled into the front door lock. Carly closed the door behind him and walked up the passage towards the untidy kitchen with two days washing piled up on the sink. The thought of Melissa was left lying silent in the cold on the driveway. It took only a few moments before the television was on softly and he was sound asleep in his favourite daggy lounge chair.

Carly woke a few hours later to instant pain. Cramp had set in to his arms and legs. Automatic reaction was to stand and try to stretch it away but for some reason he wasn't able to move from the chair. It was still dark. Something was wrong.

Different.

Silent.

The television wasn't on.

Was it a blackout?

Carly looked out the main window to see a well-lit streetlight.

“Are you scared?” a voice from the surrounding darkness whispered softly.

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 roughly bound together with what looked like a piece of old green garden twine. He figured that his feet were also bound but the cramp prevented any lifting to prove it. A length of orange rope wound tightly 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 slowly 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. There was no madman. There was no demon. Instead there was a normal person.

A young girl.

The girl from Jake's.

It was the girl in black.

She held a large kitchen knife tightly in her right hand. Her knuckles had gone white.

"You should be," she whispered.

The girl sat on the floor a few feet from the chair that Carly was tied to. Seconds turned into minutes as she stared at him like a small child does to a new puppy. Like she wanted to play with him. Carly knew there would be no playing. The knife that she held instantly put that fantasy into disarray.

He felt confused.

Scared.

What was happening here?

Why was she so silent?

How much time had passed?

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

Still she stared.

Searching for something.

Scouring his thoughts.

Invading his mind.

“I know what you did,” left her lips.

Carly felt something warm between his legs. He looked down to see that it was his own urine. At that same moment an eerie realisation stepped forward and his mind screamed in silence. It didn't make any sense but now he understood. He knew why she was here.

“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 that she was going to answer when suddenly she blinked. Carly jumped in his own skin.

“Who was she?” she asked, running 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 like a child trying to explain to the shopkeeper why he stole the chocolate bar from the counter. Still she searched his eyes. Digging in every crevice. Devouring his every whimper.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?” Carly screamed pathetically as the chair moved forward a few inches with his surge of anger.

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

Still more time passed.

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

Carly was frustrated.

Question after question.

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

The girl’s face stayed expressionless 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.

Carly’s attitude changed immediately. He looked like someone who was telling a joke but was about to laugh before getting to the punch line.

“YES YOU STUPID BLACK BITCH,” he bellowed at her with renewed confidence and a child-like smirk on his sweating face.

“I CHOKED EVERY LITTLE DIRTY BREATH OF AIR FROM THAT SLUTS CHEAP ARSE. I DID THAT WHORE A FUCKIN’ FAVOUR.”

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

He looked down again.

It was blood.

His blood.

The girl in black crouched in front of him, watching the life drift from his trapped leaking body. She stared at the liquid seeping through what was once a white shirt and smiled. Nearly half an hour of silence

passed. Sensing the end was upon him she jumped to her feet and headed toward the doorway. Through blurred vision Carly could see her leaving. Struggling to stay conscious he spoke.

“How....did....you....know?”

Carly could taste the blood building up in his mouth.

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

“I could see you Mr Carlson,” 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 slowly on the warmth of his own blood, unable to leave his favourite chair.

“We’ve got another,” the husky male voice spoke down the line of the phone.

Nathan was lying alone in bed holding the handset loosely to his right ear. His short blond bed hair blended in nicely with his half open bloodshot brown eyes. Half asleep he let out a long sigh.

“Where?” his drained voice asked.

“Twenty-two Temmar Street. It’s on the far edge of town,” the person on the other end informed him.

Nathan rolled over. On the bedside table sat a framed picture of a pretty young girl on a beach with crashing waves in the background. The breeze messed about her natural long blonde hair. It was his daughter, Tegan. His mind wandered for a moment. Next to it was a run down

clock radio with a bright green display. It glowed two fifty-seven. It was early.

“I’ll be there in thirty,” he informed the caller.

A few minutes passed and then at last he tore his tired slightly overweight body from the confine of the warm bed to find some clothes. Nathan was on the road ten minutes later trying his best to wake up before he reached his destination.

Detective Ritchie Clements was standing in the middle of the front yard when his partner Nathan Stone parked outside the house behind the police car. Ritchie was a large round-faced individual that believed the general population was designed purely for his own amusement. Most people at a glance wouldn’t know how to take him at first, but he was a good friend and very good at his job. About a dozen spectators stood in a group watching, curious about the official happenings in their street. Nathan turned off the engine of his ageing silver wagon and hesitantly stepped out onto the sidewalk.

“Sorry to interrupt your blissful slumber,” Ritchie said as he moved toward the vehicle.

Nathan closed the door behind him and met Ritchie halfway. He looked down at the lit cigarette in Ritchie’s left hand.

“Got a spare one of those things?” he asked with lingering hope.

“Sure have partner,” was the correct reply.

“Grabbed you a fresh packet on the way just in case. I know what you’re like this early in the morning.”

Ritchie reached into his jacket pocket and tossed the new deck into Nathan’s waiting hands.

Thank God for Ritchie he thought to himself.

The wake up scent of smoke was soon flooding his waiting lungs as he followed his partner of six years up to the front door. A uniformed policeman stood at the entrance. His priority was to prevent anyone who shouldn't be at the scene from being there.

“Mornin’ John,” Nathan said to the appointed guard before glancing out to the road. “I see the sideshow already kicked in.”

“Just another day at the office,” John replied with a cocky voice and an eager grin.

John Stiles had only been in the force for eighteen months and was still excited to be involved in the action. Nathan couldn't remember that feeling.

You'll soon learn boy.

Too soon.

He gave John a smile and followed Ritchie inside.

The victim hadn't been dead long. Maybe an hour at the most. His skin was only just warm and the main collection of blood between the legs and on the floor near the feet was still wet. Ritchie began as he always did reading from some notes.

“Matthew Carlson. Twenty-eight years of age. Last seen by two of his friends outside a nearby pub called Jake's Place around eleven last night. Everything points to him being a normal guy with a normal job. No record on file. Not even a speeding fine. From all accounts he's a Boy Scout.”

Ritchie always had a habit of referring to victims without a criminal record as a Boy Scout. Male or female.

“Who found him?” Nathan inquired wandering slowly around the room. A large framed poster of a semi naked woman under a waterfall hung on the wall near the roadside window.

Good taste he thought examining other minor bits and pieces.

There were several drips of blood staining the carpet near the doorway.

They took the weapon with them.

“Woman by the name of Melissa Draper,” Ritchie answered.

“They had been live-in lovers for quite a while until she moved out on Tuesday. Apparently she missed the guy and just had to come back for forgiveness. Or something like that.”

Nathan crouched down just in front of the body to examine it closer.

“Her timing was absolutely fucked up,” he said jokingly to his partner.

Neither of them reacted with a smile.

Nathan delicately examined the way the victim was bound to the chair.

“He was meant to die slowly,” Detective Stone said into the quiet of the room, not really speaking to anyone. There were more dried blood droplets on the carpet in front of the body.

“Only a single wound. The killer bound him to the chair, stabbed him once in the stomach knowing that it would take a while, and then watched. Watched him suffer. Enjoyed the suffering. Why?”

There was no answer spoken and it wasn't needed. The question was delivered at himself. Nathan stood back on his feet and walked over to Ritchie by the television.

“Same message?” he asked him.

“Yep. This ones on the back of the front door,” Ritchie told him as they both entered the hallway and headed back toward the entrance.

John was still standing tall and proud. Nathan pushed the door closed using his cigarette packet so as to not disturb any possible prints.

You know there won't be any prints Nathan.

The science guys would arrive sometime soon. On the inside of the light brown door that had swung in front of his weary eyes were four roughly scrawled words. They were scratched into the paint. Nathan assumed it was with the murder weapon.

I CAN SEE THEM

A cold shiver ran through Nathan's entire body. He had read these words three times in the last four months. This was now the fourth. In all that time the only thing they had determined was that the murderer was right handed. That narrowed the current list of suspects to around three hundred thousand. Give or take a few.

“The next door neighbour heard the victim yelling at someone around one-thirty. She just assumed it was a fight with the girlfriend. Reckoned it wasn't uncommon,” Ritchie informed his partner while he was thinking.

Nathan started talking out loud again.

“Three murders in four months. Everyone from a drug runner to a rich housewife on the north side. Nothing to connect any of them except that message.”

He lit another cigarette and gestured to the message left behind.

“What the hell is going on here Ritchie? What the fuck does this person think they are doing?”

Ritchie just shook his head from side to side and stared at his partner without any answer.

Nathan stared back at the door. His face was blank.

What is it that you think you see?

*I hope you enjoyed that small taste of
my debut*

Supernatural Horror Thriller,

DEADLIGHT