

CHAPTER ONE
The Last Supper

3rd July 1991

Kathy could not smile.

Despite the promise from the monster that he was about to finally let her go, she could not curl the corners of her mouth up. She stole a glance at him out of the corner of her eye. The revolting brute had his attention firmly fixed on the road ahead. She could not believe that after everything she had been through, he was finally going to let her go. *It seems too easy*, she thought as they drove toward the Travelodge Hotel, just up the road from where they lived. The girls were in the back seat happily playing with their Care Bears as the little, yellow Gemini pulled into the car park.

As the party of four walked through the foyer toward the hotel lift, she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the full-length, mirrored panels. *God, I'm looking too thin*. She straightened the jacket that hung loosely off her slight frame, then turned her head square on to face the mirror, checking her makeup as she kept walking. The dark-blue bruise under her left eye was still well hidden beneath the layers of makeup she had applied. She had had too many years' practise covering up the brutal beatings, and had become quite an expert at camouflaging the damage he caused. She buoyed her spirits by reminding herself that after one more sleep, it would be over.

He had not said a word since they left the unit, and as they entered the lift, Kathy could not help notice a change in his eyes. Sure, he had always had dark, broody eyes that

could switch from charming to menacing at lightning speed, but tonight they were filled with a different intense darkness, a real malevolence. Tonight he seemed a million miles away, but wherever that was, it was not a happy place. *No*, she decided as the lift ascended to the rooftop, *these are not the eyes of someone sad. These are the eyes of someone in a very bad place.*

Looking at Bruno, she wondered why she had ever been attracted to him. He got his thick, dark hair courtesy of his Italian mother, and his heavy, solid, thickset build he inherited from his Ukrainian father. Bruno had a distinctly European look about him. He was not very tall, standing at five-nine, but he always appeared much bigger than he actually was.

A young, Asian hostess met them as they emerged from the lift, greeting them with a slight bow and clasped hands.

Tiffany and Jennifer excitedly ran ahead as Kathy quickly motioned to them to come back. “We have a booking under the name Kardos,” she said, trying to appear upbeat when all she could think about was what was going through Bruno’s head.

The kimono-clad hostess gave a little nod and smiled, then politely asked them to follow her as she shuffled towards a table located close to the buffet. She then disappeared to seat others.

Under different circumstances Kathy would have loved a night out in a restaurant like this, but on this night, she just wanted to make sure everything went smoothly, without any eruptions. Bruno was behaving like a ticking time bomb and could explode at any time.

“Okay,” Kathy said, slipping into Mum mode, a familiar role she knew she could confidently carry off on a night with growing tension. “What would you girls like to drink?”

“Pink Lemonade,” Tiffany shrieked in her high-pitched voice.

“Me too! Me too!” Jennifer added.

“Righty then and, Bruno, what are you going to have?” she asked in the friendliest voice she could muster.

Without lifting his gaze from his hands, which were clasped on the table in front of him, he said in a quiet tone, “A double JD and Coke.”

Trying not to read anything into his petulant mood, Kathy waved the waitress over to the table and gave her their drink order. In the short time since they arrived, the revolving floor had rotated just enough for the view to have changed from the darkness of the ocean beyond to now reveal the glittering lights of the busy tourist strip, flashing neon signs, and the constant flow of traffic moving along the highway.

“Let’s get something to eat,” Kathy said, hoping Bruno realised she was also directing her suggestion to him. If he did realise, he did not let on, ignoring her request as he took his last gulp from his now emptied glass. The girls, on the other hand, did not need to be asked twice; they were up and on their feet, almost running to the Asian banquet laid out over three long tables.

Kathy walked past the food-laden tables searching for suitable options for the girls, steering them away from some of the spicier dishes, instead opting for the safe favourites she knew the girls would devour: fried rice mounds on each plate with spring rolls on one side, lemon chicken and Asian-style vegetables on the other. The girls had already eyed the desert table, and both were anxious to get through the compulsory part of the meal so they could make a beeline for the yummy goodies.

“You eat what’s on your plate and you can choose whatever you like from the desert buffet, deal?” Kathy asked.

“Deal!” they replied in unison.

Looking across at Bruno, Kathy noticed he had ordered another drink for himself and was nearly through his second double JD and Coke. An involuntary sigh escaped her mouth

as she thought how this evening had all the key components to deteriorate into a night from hell.

Their floor had revolved 90 degrees and was now facing towards the dazzling, bright lights of Surfers Paradise. She remembered a carefree time in her life when Surfers had been her stomping ground. She fondly recalled the fun times she had when she was younger, hanging out in Surfers with her crazy girlfriends. It seemed like light-years ago. She gently rubbed the side of her head, still sore from where Bruno's sizeable fist had pounded her days before.

The girls had almost cleared their plates in anticipation of hitting the desert table as promised. Kathy walked over to the dessert buffet with the girls. A long line had formed at the main buffet, and she was glad she booked for an early dinner; the thought of queuing for food was one of her pet hates.

"I think your eyes are too big for your tummies," she said as the girls loaded their plates with all kinds of sugary goodness.

Tiffany's crème caramel threatened to wobble off the plate as it jostled for room amongst the other sweet delicacies. Normally Kathy would have indulged her sweet tooth too, but on this particular night she did not have an appetite. The sweet and sour pork she had distractedly picked at was sitting uncomfortably in her stomach. At fifty-five dollars a head, she thought the restaurant had made a good profit out of their table tonight. Bruno did not even leave the table to look at the buffet, preferring an entirely alcoholic meal.

The girls' little faces strained as they tried to finish what was on their plates. Worried that another mouthful would see them hurling the contents of their little stomachs in the car on the way home, Kathy advised them to leave what was left alone.

"You'll make yourselves sick if you keep going," she lovingly warned them.

Bruno had barely spoken a word since they left their unit a couple of hours ago. He just sat there holding his drink in his hands. He stared into the dark liquid as though it held the secrets of the universe within. He was behaving differently than his normal, volatile, abusive self. The fine hairs on the nape of her neck stiffened as she thought about what he might have in store for her that night.

Was she being naive thinking he would release her and the girls from his terrifying clutches? *Why, after everything I've been through with this animal, would he let me go without a fight now?*

Trying to keep herself together for the sake of the girls, she asked the waitress for the bill and began getting the girls ready for their departure.

Even though Bruno had drunk several double Jack Daniels, putting him well over the legal limit, Kathy knew better than to suggest she drive home as they walked out to the car. Strapping the girls into the back seat, she hoped they would make the short trip home in one piece.

The drive had had its questionable moments, but they made it home. Kathy stood quietly watching her little girls' brush their teeth in the bathroom before bed. She loved them with all her heart. Her two beautiful girls were polar opposites in appearance. Tiffany, with her sky-blue eyes and golden spun hair, was six years old and you could already see the beauty she would one day grow into. With contrasting looks, Jennifer's chocolate-brown eyes and thick, tumbling, dark curls cascading over her shoulders had all the makings of becoming a smouldering Latino beauty. Their differences made it almost impossible for anyone to pick that they were in fact sisters. There was no need for a DNA test; both girls just took after their fathers. Bob, Tiffany's father, was fair skinned. Jennifer's father, Bruno, was dark.

Thinking about Bob made her sad. He was a good man, and she was consumed with guilt about leaving him. She had tried not to think about him; it stirred up her grief and always left her in tears.

A shriek from Tiffany pulled Kathy away from the familiar memory lane she was dangerously close to walking down.

“Jennifer, don’t put toothpaste in your sister’s hair!” Kathy scolded as she got a flannel and blotted off the globs of toothpaste dangling from the ends of Tiffany’s golden locks. “Right, its bedtime, girls. We have a big day tomorrow.”

Frog-marching Jennifer into the bedroom she shared with her big sister, Kathy asked what story they wanted her to read tonight.

“Mrs. Merryweather’s Letter,” Tiffany enthusiastically requested. Jennifer was more interested in trying to pull the tuft of hair from her Care Bear’s head as she rolled into her bed.

Kathy situated herself on the side of Tiffany’s bed with the book and read the familiar bedtime tale until she reached the final line. “Soon the two friends were sharing a pot of tea and a lovely plum cake and wondering how on earth the letter had managed to deliver itself without any help from the postman! The end.” It always amazed Kathy how Tiffany would hang onto every word of the story, despite having heard it so many times she could recite the tale word for word. *She’s a clever girl*, Kathy thought, *just like her father*. After prayers and a kiss good night, the girls were so tuckered out from their evening excursion that they were minutes away from sleep. Kathy turned off their light and, leaving the door ajar, walked out and almost ran headfirst into Bruno.

“I need you to come somewhere with me.”

“I can’t,” she said, confused. “I’ve just put the girls to bed.”

“That’s okay. Wayne has come up, and he’s going to stay up here and look after them,” Bruno countered. He quickly added, “We won’t be long.”

Wayne was their bar and restaurant manager, and Kathy knew she could trust him with her precious girls, but she really did not want to go out. Knowing the strange mood Bruno had been in tonight, she decided it would be best to go with the path of least resistance and agree to accompany him to God knows where.

As she got back into the passenger’s seat of her little, yellow Gemini for the second time that night, Kathy felt horribly uneasy. *Nerves? Yep. I’m just nervous about tomorrow.*

It was L. B. Day, Leaving Bruno Day, and as the day drew to a close, she became more and more anxious.

Bruno got into the driver’s seat. Then, realizing he had forgotten something, he got out and walked to the back of the unit. In the car’s mirrors, Kathy watched him walk back a minute later. It was dark and she could not see what it was he went back for. He threw something into the boot that resounded in the car, and she instinctively knew something terrible was about to happen. Every fibre of her being screamed for her to get out of the car and run, run for her life, but on this night she did not listen. Her thoughts of fleeing were extinguished when she considered her girls asleep in the unit; she needed to protect them. She could not run anywhere.

As the car pulled out onto the highway, she tried to assuage her fears by telling herself he was taking her to the casino. After all, he was a degenerate gambler and with the amount of Jack Daniels he consumed, he probably thought he would be a guaranteed winner that night.

The lights of Jupiters Casino loomed in front, and for a brief moment Kathy began to chide herself for dramatizing the situation. When the car did not turn into the casino and instead continued straight past it, her fears returned with a vengeance.

She did not dare ask him where they were going; she was too frightened to hear his response. Intuitively she knew something awful was about to happen, but what exactly? Her mind raced with possibilities, playing out several scenarios in her head. Stopped at a red light, she contemplated jumping out of the car and making her escape, but she had nowhere to go. Her girls were locked up tight in the unit. She would never make it back there before Bruno, and she could not risk anything happening to them.

There was nowhere to go, no one to run to, not even the police. *Fat lot of good they had been*, she thought angrily, remembering the countless times they left her to his abusive tendencies.

Bruno drove on towards Nerang while Kathy tried to work out where on earth he was taking her. Desperate for clues, she spotted a sign saying Hinze Dam. The absence of street lights just made the area seem even more remote and secluded. He must have been familiar with the area because he seemed to know just where to turn off the main road. After driving along what felt like a grassy area, he brought the car to a stop. For the first time since getting into the car, he turned to Kathy and spoke.

“This is the end of the penny section,” he said.

She knew exactly what he meant. He was going to kill her. Her mind raced, trying to think of how she might get away. Bruno was overweight and out of shape; he smoked more than a packet of Dunhill’s a day, and he was a heavy drinker. She could try and outrun him, perhaps find somewhere to hide in the bush and wait till morning. Then her mind went back to her two beautiful angels asleep in their beds, terrified that he would do something to them if she escaped. If she just disappeared, there was a chance he would at least let them live.

“Don’t even think about trying to run. If you do, I’ll have to kill you another way, and babe, trust me, you don’t want that.” His voice was thick with menace. It was as if he read her mind.

“I had hoped to give you a needle, but the fucking shit never arrived. I had the perfect plan. It would have been a fucking great ending for you, but my fucking mate let me down.” He said the words like he was talking about something almost fun.

Kathy’s mind went back to several days earlier when she overheard Bruno speaking on the phone. He sounded agitated with whoever he was speaking with.

“What do you mean, you can’t fuckin get any?” he had said. “Listen to me. I need some, and I need it by the end of the week!” As he hung up, he muttered, “Fucking useless asshole!”

At the time she had an uneasy feeling about that conversation, but with everything going on, it was soon forgotten—that is, until now. Kathy joined the dots and knew he had planned to overdose her on heroin, something she had never had the desire to try.

Bruno turned the interior light on so he could see the terror in Kathy’s face.

“I was going to shoot you up with enough shit, you would have been bleeding from your eyeballs,” he said with a look of glee. “I would have turned you out onto the street. You would have been another statistic, just a drug-fucked whore who had too much of a taste. It would have been a perfect way for you to make your exit from this world. What a pity.”

Kathy just sat there frozen, listening. She knew Bruno was a killer; he had made no secret of it over the years. He never gave her enough information for her to go to the authorities with, just enough to keep her in fear of him, and it had worked nicely.

It was not as though Kathy needed the proof to know who and what she was involved with. There was one time when Donny, a craggy-faced, old ex-safe cracker who had spent much of his time incarcerated for his crimes, had tried to warn her about Bruno’s propensity towards violence.

“Darling,” he had said, “be careful of that bastard! He has no soul. His nickname is Toe Cutter, but he won’t stop at the toes.”

Donny was supposed to be Bruno's mate, but he had a soft spot for Kathy. There had been many times he had seen her sporting a black eye or worse and he had expressed his concerns to her. As much as Donny appeared to want to help Kathy, he never, ever said anything to Bruno about his violence toward her. It was the knockabout's code not to get involved with a mate and his missus.

She had no idea of the time, or how long had they been sitting there in the car. *Ironic. He had nothing to say for hours, and now he won't stop talking. Was he thinking all night about his closing speech? My God, he really is insane!*

Bruno continued to drone on about why he had to kill her.

No, not insane. She had gone to see a psychiatrist years ago, desperately trying to figure out what type of a nut job she was with. At the first appointment, Kathy explained to the female shrink that she was not there for herself but to get an understanding of what kind of mental disorder Bruno had, because she knew he had one. After several weeks of hearing her horrific stories, the doctor said to her, "You have yourself a textbook sociopath."

Up until then Kathy did not know anything about sociopaths, but Bruno taught her everything she never wanted to know. Her mind went back to when they moved into the restaurant Bruno had somehow acquired.

Bruno declared one afternoon, "I've bought a restaurant coz I'm going straight!" She did not believe him.

Located on the Gold Coast Highway at Broadbeach, Tuxedo Junction was a spacious and beautifully appointed restaurant. The family moved into the three-bedroom unit above the restaurant, and Kathy was soon working long days and nights five and six days a week. Bruno's idea of work was sitting at the bar getting drunk with patrons. Kathy could not count

on him to help. The one thing she knew she could rely on was Bruno raiding the nightly takings and heading straight to the blackjack tables.

It seemed like another lifetime ago, but it had been less than a year. She shuddered when she thought about the savage beating she had taken the time she stupidly tried to stop him. He had flung her around the bedroom like a ragdoll, his rage so uncontrollable he could not stop hitting her. When he did finally stop, he knew he had gone too far. Her face was a bloody mess.

He made sure to disconnect the telephone. Then, as he was about to leave the room, deadlocking her inside, he said, "I'm going to tell everyone that you have gastro and can't come out. The last thing anyone'll want is to catch it. You're staying inside this room until your face heals up."

He did not want her getting any skinnier; her ribs were already sticking out, and he did not like his women too thin. So he would visit her a few times a day, bringing her food and water. He also left her a concoction to take. He told her they were painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs. She resisted taking them and stockpiled them instead.

Four days passed, and she remained locked in that room. Her mind was beginning to play tricks on her. She remembered the time she had been stuck in a jail cell. *Did that happen or was it just a dream?* She could not be sure anymore. Listening to her children laugh or cry just outside her door but beyond her reach was driving her crazy. *Yes*, she thought, *Bruno has sunk to a new low*. In an odd way it was worse than his beatings, this new and sadistic emotional power game he inflicted.

On the fifth day, with no likelihood of being freed, she gulped down a handful of painkillers and jumped the few feet out the bedroom window onto the rooftop of their restaurant. Looking over the edge at the drop below, she knew she had no choice but to jump the eight or ten feet to the ground. Her head spun; the pills had started to kick in.

Once at the beach, she walked through the dangerous surf until her feet no longer touched the bottom. She began swimming further and further out into the angry sea, huge waves pounding, forcing her under. She did not fight them; she did not care. She did not want to live any longer. Bruno won!

She had swallowed a lot of sea water. Her body was feeling weightless as she began to drift into another continuum, when she suddenly felt a hand snatch the back of her neck and pull her from her watery submission.

“No, leave me. I don’t want to be saved,” she begged.

He did not listen.

The doctors at the Gold Coast Psychiatric Ward asked her about the bruises all over her face and body. She told them the truth, but she knew they were as powerless to change anything as she was. For two days she sobbed, slept, and waited for Bruno to make his next move.

Her mind snapped back to where she was, and she made her decision. *I have to get out of this car and run as fast as my legs can carry me!* Opening the passenger-side door, she managed to get one foot out of the car before his left arm came flying across her chest with a *thump* hard enough to knock the wind out of her.

“You’re not fucking going anywhere!” he bellowed. “I thought you might try something like that.” He got out of the car and opened the boot.

Oh my God, he’s getting a gun!

Bruno had access to plenty of weapons; Kathy had seen them. On one occasion she even had one pressed to the temple of her head in his own happy version of Russian roulette. Bruno opened the back door of the car and wound the rear window down a small amount.

Kathy had no idea what he was doing, but then she saw him thread a hose through the small opening. It suddenly dawned on her.

That's what he went back for at the unit. That's what he put in the boot.

Opening up the driver's door, he looked at her with cold, black eyes and grabbed both of her tiny hands in one of his. He put them onto the gear stick. With his other hand, he gaffer taped around her hands and the stick, ensuring she could not try another escape.

So this is how I am going to die, gassed to death in my own car.

It was a car her dad had bought her about a year earlier. Bruno had traded the car she owned when she met him in on a new one. Of course he had not put that car in her name, and when he needed some extra cash, he was quick to de-horse her. Kathy's father bought her a cheap but reliable second-hand car so she had some independence, something Bruno desperately wanted to deprive her of.

In her mind she could see her tombstone: "Born 11-8-1959 Died 3-7-1991." The tears started to flow; her mind went to Bob, poor Bob, Tiffany's dad. He had been a good husband and father, and she missed him terribly. She thought about her mother, who she had always had a fractured relationship with, but now they had a better, deeper connection. She knew her mother did love her, even if she never said so.

Would she look after my girls? Do I want her to look after them?

She thought about her own childhood, and though she knew her mother would never win mother of the year, how she had made a glorious comeback as a grandmother. She was neurotic, though, and too old to raise little ones.

Maybe my sister would take them in. She already has three children of her own, she's in a good marriage and is financially able to take care of them.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Bruno as he resumed his mad ranting after getting into the driver's side. After all, he had a captured audience. "Babe," he said, his voice thick

with torment, “I was going to bring the girls along for the ride with us, I thought it would be fitting if we all went together, but I changed my mind when you were telling me about how much your mother loves the girls. Your fucking mother might be a crazy, old bitch, but she does always send the kids cards and letters, and for some reason the girls seem to love her.”

Kathy’s heart skipped a beat at the thought of her babies in the back seat, inhaling the deadly gas, if not for a throwaway conversation she had with the crazy bastard just a few days earlier. It was just small talk at the time, but she silently thanked God she had said those things and that the psycho had chosen to spare them.

“You fucking thought that I was going to let you go? Did you really think you were going to take my daughter away from me?” He glared. “You don’t know who you’re fucking dealing with, do you? You fucking hump!”

Yes, I do know who I am dealing with, a fucking maniac who I hate with every ounce of my being.

Kathy believed in God and used to pray every day. God had answered her prayers before. She remembered the time when she was only eight years old and had lost a pet mouse. Crying, she had prayed to God to help her find Mickey the Mouse. Within a few minutes she put her hand on a towel hanging over the railing and felt a little lump underneath. It had been Mickey! That was a defining moment for her. She knew without any doubt that God really did exist, and from that small favour, her belief had grown.

Since she met Bruno she had turned to prayer a lot more than ever before, though these days the prayers went something like, “Please God, keep me and my girls safe from this madman. Please God, help us to get away from him.” This time she prayed to God to save her, but if he was not going to, then to at least make sure her girls would be looked after.

Kathy wondered how long it would take for the gas to take effect. Bruno started telling her that it would be good for them to die together. That was the way it should be,

together for eternity. Her mind reeled at the thought of being with this evil bastard forever. She wanted to say that they would not be going to the same place; he would be heading straight for hell and would burn for all eternity.

“Don’t worry, babe. Everyone is going to think this is a double suicide.”

No, nobody is going to buy that.

All of her friends knew of the long history of abuse and the violence she had been subjected to at the hands of this nut. No one would believe for one moment that she did this willingly.

Kathy felt herself growing sleepy, her eyes getting heavy; she tried as hard as she could to fight the sleep that wanted to consume her, a sleep she knew she would not wake from. He was still talking and she thought, *If this is the end, I don’t want the last voice I hear to be his*, so she went deep within her mind. Willing herself to stay conscious, she thought of her children. Tiffany was just six years old and had lost another tooth. She squealed with delight when she found the two dollars the tooth fairy left under her pillow. Jennifer, at just four years old, was a tough little cookie. She could be a bit of a bully to her big sister, but whenever Kathy disciplined Tiffany for something naughty she had done, Jennifer would stand between her and Tiffany to protect her big sister. Tears began to fall down Kathy’s cheeks as she thought about her beautiful girls and all the things she was going to miss: school graduations, boyfriends, weddings, grandchildren . . . all this was being stolen from her by the father of her youngest child.

As Kathy’s vision faded to black, she thought, *All my life, Mum was right. I am unlovable.*

