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Tuesday

Monica Silverman heard muffled voices from outside her cell door, accompanied by the rattle of keys.

‘I wish they’d leave me the fuck alone,’ she said under her breath.

The hatch slid open and Bob Anderson stuck his cheery face into the gap.

‘Monica, it’s Bob Anderson. We’re going to open the door – please stand at the back of your room.’

She thought Bob was all right, as screws go. He didn’t give her any hassle and was always polite enough – but she just wanted to be left alone.

‘What’s she doing, Bob?’ Monica recognised the new voice. It was Gill O’Leary – a chubby, middle-aged woman with curly brown hair and thick-rimmed glasses, who grated on Monica’s last nerve.

Monica chose not to react to Bob’s instruction, then she heard him say, ‘Nothing. She’s just sat on her bed, staring at the floor. I fucking hate it when she doesn’t move.’

She allowed herself a smile. She knew that her inaction would wind them up. *If I sat still for long enough, maybe they’d fuck off.*

‘Ask her again,’ said a squeaky woman. A new voice.

‘Monica, we need to come in and speak to you. Can you please stand against the back wall of your room?’

For fuck’s sake. Well, if they’re not going to leave me alone, I’m going to have some fun.

She stood up from her bed and walked to the back of the room without looking in their direction. Then she sat on the floor, cross-legged, rested her hands on her thighs and closed her eyes, as if she was ready to meditate. Bob let out a heavy sigh.

‘What is it, Bob?’ asked the squeaky one.

‘She’s fucking meditating at the back of her room,’ said Bob.

Monica took his exasperation as a small victory.

‘Oh well, it could be a lot worse,’ said Gill. She was right. Monica could make life a lot worse. She opened her eyes just enough to see through her eyelashes.

‘Come on then, in we go,’ Bob prompted his colleagues. The door handle turned slowly.

Bob and the two female officers stepped into Monica’s cell in a V formation, the women standing at Bob’s shoulders, primed and looking ready to pull him out of the cell.

They took another step forward. As they did, Monica slapped the floor, hard. All three screws jumped back half a step. Bob gasped. Monica saw him. She saw them all. They absolutely shit themselves. She lifted her head to look at them and couldn’t resist a smile.

‘That wasn’t funny, Monica.’ Bob shook his head.

It fucking was. I just about managed not to laugh out loud.

‘We’ve been sent to bring you to the office, so I need you to get up, slowly, and turn around, so we can put some restraints on you,’ Bob told her.

‘If she wants to speak to me, why doesn’t she come down here?’

‘You know that’s not how it works. Now come on, let’s not make this difficult.’

‘Why would *we* make it difficult, Bob? After all, we’re all friends here, aren’t we?’ She watched Bob, unmoving. She looked from one screw to the other, figuring out who she could have the most fun with on the way to the governor’s office. The squeaky one was new. Her ID said she was called Beth, and she looked young and a bit ditzzy.

Monica Silverman was a convicted serial killer who, in the judge’s words, had ‘carried out multiple heinous acts, including abducting, torturing and dismembering a number of women’ before being caught. She’d been inside for three months. In that time she had assaulted six prison officers – one, they said, was unlikely to ever work again, such was the extent of her injuries. She’d also assaulted quite a few inmates.

She’d learned a long time ago how to appear removed and cold. This made her almost impossible to read. To date, no one in prison had come close to giving her anything

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resembling trouble. She was bigger than most women – not out of shape, just big. Monica had been a champion hammer thrower before she got locked up, and this gave her a massive advantage over her peers in terms of strength and power.

‘Come on then, Monica, let’s get on with it,’ Bob said. He glanced over his shoulder at the two officers on either side of him, who stood, poised.

Right, time to have some fun, Monica thought.

Beth and Gill nearly jumped out of their skins when Monica thrust her arms out in front of her, pressed the sides of her feet into the floor and sprang to a standing position, as flexible as an Olympic gymnast. Bob instinctively took a step back; Beth and Gill moved with him. He didn’t take his eyes off Monica. She just stood there: statuesque, grinning at the three of them. They all looked freaked out.

‘Turn around and face the wall,’ said Bob, clearing his throat and trying his best to sound authoritative.

‘Oh, I love it when you’re masterful.’ She laughed. ‘Don’t you two just love it?’

‘That’s enough, Monica. Now turn around and face the wall.’ Bob raised his voice.

‘Oh all right, calm yourself. I was only having a bit of fun.’ She decided to play along for a minute and see what happened next. She turned and faced the wall of her cell and, without being prompted, put her hands behind her back. Monica heard the screws shuffle forward together, staying in formation, in case they needed to restrain her. Bob closed the ratchet handcuffs around her wrists and turned her around to leave the cell. As Bob guided Monica, Beth and Gill moved around to his flank. They started to walk her towards the cell door. About a metre from the door, Monica realised their mistake. She grinned.

They’d fucked up – and put her between them and the doorway.

She kicked the door frame hard, throwing herself back into the guards, bowling them over like skittles.

Beth was on her knees in front of Monica. Monica kicked her with full force, catching her under the jaw, forcing her head back. It smashed against the cold, hard, floor.

One down, two to go, she thought.

Before they could stop her, she rounded on Gill, who was scrambling to her feet. Monica swept Gill’s legs out from under her then stamped on her forearm as she lay on the floor. The crack of breaking bone, and her accompanying scream, gave Monica a real buzz. Bob was bigger and slower than his team-mates. When Gill screamed, Monica grinned at Bob, then threw herself towards him, driving her forehead into his face, splitting his nose and smashing his top lip against his teeth. She rocked back onto her knees as he instinctively raised his hands to his bleeding face.

He looked defenceless. She was enjoying herself.

She dived forward again and sank her teeth into his forearm, biting down and ripping out a chunk of flesh. Bob let out a blood-curdling howl.

Monica stood and looked at the three of them, on the floor, all helpless. She didn’t want to kill them, even though she could easily have done so. To her, it was just a bit of fun.

Monica stood for what felt like an age, staring at Bob.

A full response team came racing through the door, summoned by Gill who’d pulled her alarm. Monica looked at them, unflinching, her face smeared with Bob’s blood, spitting out bits of his flesh.

Bob watched, holding his arm, as the team took Monica to the floor. She didn’t fight back; she just grinned. They dragged her to her feet and marched her out of the cell. Bob didn’t move.

Next, a team of medics came rushing in, accompanied by more prison officers. Beth lay motionless on the floor. Ignoring his own injuries, Bob scrambled to her side and took her wrist, checking for a pulse.

‘We need to get Beth out of here and to hospital, along with you and Gill,’ said Charles, one of the prison medics. ‘Can you walk? Gill, what about you?’

They nodded. Gill was cradling her arm, her face contorted in pain. Bob had blood streaming from his face and arm, and was starting to feel drowsy. He swayed back and forth,

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then his legs crumpled beneath him. He crashed to the floor beside Beth, aware of the frenzied activity around him but unable to focus, unable to speak. His head swam. The room became a blur of lights and noise, which all seemed to be getting further and further away. He tried to speak, tried to call for help, but nothing came. No sound, no words. His eyes closed slowly – he was too weak to hold them open. Then the sounds around him ebbed away to nothing and all went black.

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The response team bundled Monica into an isolation cell. For sport, she managed to bounce one of them off the door frame as they steered her inside. As soon as she was inside the cell, she felt the familiar release and speedy exit of the prison officers. They were all afraid of her and she knew it.

The heavy steel door banged closed and an out-of-breath voice barked a meaningless instruction at her through the observation hatch. She didn't catch what they said before they slammed it shut.

She was alone again.

She allowed herself a brief smile of victory, stepped backwards until her back touched the cold door, then slid down it to sit on the floor. Monica found the solid doors reassuring: she knew that, while they stayed locked, she had the solitude she craved and no one placing demands on her.

Monica was three months into five life sentences, set to run consecutively. She knew she would never get out of prison. She'd also decided that she was smarter than most inmates and that her crimes, and her physicality, made her a formidable prisoner. She was pretty sure she was feared by fellow inmates and guards alike. This amused her. For the first couple of weeks, she'd used the communal exercise yard, dining room and showers as her own private playground, picking off victims at will, with no one quick enough or strong enough to stop her - always making sure she was out of the sight of Guards. She'd carried on just as she had done before her arrest: picking on the petite and the timid, girls that reminded her of her mother, with their perfect hair, swaying hips and annoyingly perfect bodies. She didn't feel the need to kill them; she just had some fun with them.

In week three, things had changed. As she was dragged out of another session of isolation by visibly anxious guards, she was told something she hadn't expected to hear.

'You're going up to see the governor,' one of the three prison officers said as they handcuffed her hands behind her back.

'May I ask why?'

'Because I was told you are. Now get a move on, Silverman.'

She found his tone rude and noted his name ... for later.

She was pushed roughly along the corridor towards a steep set of metal steps, through two heavy locked doors and into a carpeted corridor. The lead officer leaned around her and knocked on an office door, then they walked her through into a basic reception area.

'Monica Silverman to see the governor,' the guard said to a stern-looking woman in her fifties with tortoiseshell glasses and a high forehead. Monica stood silently, compliant.

'Go through, she's expecting you,' Tortoiseshell replied, nodding towards another door. The three officers marched Monica into the governor's office then took a step back to line up behind her. The office smelled of expensive perfume and leather chairs - not overwhelming, quite nice.

'Monica Silverman, please take a seat.' A woman in a smart navy skirt suit sat at the desk. Monica did as she was told and sat down in a comfortable grey chair, in front of a curved grey desk. The woman, who had straight, shoulder-length blonde hair, smiled at her. Monica didn't get smiled at very often. She noticed that the governor had nice teeth.

'I'm Governor Dominicali, and you, Miss Silverman, are causing too many problems for my team. This is something that will not be tolerated, whether you have a five-year sentence or five life sentences. You pose a unique problem for an establishment such as this, because my officers, as well trained as they are, are not used to the level of aggression that you are displaying. In addition, your fellow inmates have a different idea of what makes a formidable prisoner - well, at least they did until you arrived.' She paused. Monica felt the governor's eyes inspecting her, as if she was searching for a reaction. Monica returned the searching look with an emotionless stare.

'Am I going to have a problem with you, Miss Silverman?'

'Probably, Governor.'

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‘Hmm.’

Dominicali didn’t rise to the bait. Instead she shifted her attention to the three officers and said something that surprised Monica.

‘Leave us,’ she said flatly to the officers.

‘Ma’am, are you sure?’ the lead officer stuttered.

‘Yes, quite sure, thank you, Mr Stevens.’

‘OK, we’ll be outside, ma’am.’

‘Thank you. Do close the door on your way out.’

The three guards turned and left, as instructed. As soon as they had closed the door, Dominicali got up and walked around towards Monica, then perched on the desk. Monica felt a spike of arousal as the split in the governor’s skirt opened, revealing a glimpse of a well-toned thigh. The governor clearly looked after herself. Monica moved her gaze up to meet Dominicali’s, who smiled at her again, making it clear she’d seen her looking.

Monica wasn’t bothered.

‘You and I need to have little chat,’ the governor said.

Monica sat up straighter and looked her in the eye. ‘Oh?’

‘You have a unique set of skills that, if given the right level of focus and direction, could be very useful.’

‘I don’t follow, Governor.’

‘You will. Stay with me.’ The governor returned to her own side of the desk and sat down.

‘We have some prisoners here who, for whatever reason, were given completely inappropriate sentences by the presiding judge. The result is that these low-lives squander taxpayers’ money and we just have to smile sweetly and take it.’

‘So, where do I come in?’

‘You, my dear Monica, are in the perfect place, with the perfect opportunity and the perfect set of skills, to help me rebalance the scales.’

‘Sorry, I still don’t follow.’ Monica was deliberately being obtuse. The governor sighed and steepled her fingers in front of her face. Monica decided it wasn’t a kind face, or one to be trusted, so she decided to stick to her vague, non-compliant approach.

‘OK, let me spell it out for you. We have women in here who are serving very little time for crimes that should’ve resulted in life sentences. And, if the law had any balls, death sentences. What I’m proposing is, that in exchange for some bespoke privileges and a more comfortable time in here, you help me by clearing out the trash. How does that sound?’

‘Like an abuse of power?’

Dominicali rolled her eyes. ‘And you, of all people, are in a position to turn down such an offer? I think not. Let’s face it, you have a talent for what you do. You evaded capture for long enough to allow you to kill repeatedly and you’re stuck in here for life, whether you like it or not.’

‘So when you say you want to rebalance the scales, or clear out the trash, what you’re actually saying is that you would like me to kill my fellow inmates on your behalf?’

‘Kill, torture, frighten – it depends what’s called for, I guess.’ The governor said with a shrug.

‘And who decides what’s called for? You?’

‘Of course. Who do you think?’

‘I’m not good at following instructions – or hadn’t you noticed?’

‘Ha ha, yes, that had come to my attention on more than one occasion. I don’t have to be prescriptive. I can give you the target and you can pull the trigger, so to speak, in any way you see fit.’

‘OK. Let’s say, hypothetically, that I’m interested in your offer. What’s in it for me?’

‘What would you like?’

Monica paused, just long enough to judge that Dominicali was becoming uncomfortable with the length of the silence. Then, just before the governor filled the quiet, Monica spoke.

‘A more comfortable cell, for a start. The hole you’ve thrown me in is crappy.’

‘OK.’

‘And access to the gym. The screws stopped me going after I accidentally hit someone with a dumbbell.’

Dominicali laughed. ‘It was hardly accidental. You hit her around the side of the face with a twenty-kilo weight.’

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‘I meant to hit her in the nose, ergo, an accident.’

‘Anything else?’ asked the governor, clearly not impressed by Monica’s counter.

‘Only one thing.’

‘Yes?’

‘You let me deal with them in whichever way I see fit. No interference.’

‘Fair enough – on one condition. You don’t make too much of a mess. Nothing that can’t be cleaned up ... and nothing that can get back to me.’

‘Oh, don’t worry, Governor, you’ll be safe, up here in your ivory tower.’

‘Don’t push it.’

‘So who’s first?’

‘I’ll let you know by the end of the week. I’ve got some files to review and sentencing guidelines to check.’

‘How will you let me know? I can’t come up here every two minutes.’

‘Oh, don’t worry. You’ll know.’ With that, the governor held up an open hand to Monica, ending the conversation. She leaned over her desk and pressed an intercom button on her phone, asking her PA to send the officers in.

They came in and flanked Monica. She glanced from one to the other, wondering whether to elbow one of them in the face, then thought better of it. She was keen to see if the governor’s offer was for real, and she didn’t want to mess it up for the sake of an ungratifying brawl.

The governor was true to her word. Monica was moved to a much nicer room, complete with a TV, and given access to the gym, although she had to use it on her own, in the presence of two prison guards, both of whom stayed well away from her while she was heaving weights around.

A week after their initial meeting, a note was passed to Monica in a sealed envelope. When she opened it, written in stylish handwriting were the words ‘Alba White, 13b, exercise yard, 3.30 p.m.’

It had been easy. Two guards she’d never seen before came to collect Monica from her cell and took her to the yard, where Alba was walking on her own. The guards turned towards the wall, as if deep in conversation. Monica made her way over to Alba, who looked wary as the much bigger woman approached.

‘Have you got a ciggie I can bum?’ Monica asked.

Alba gave her a relieved look, then reached into her pocket. As she looked down at the packet to retrieve a cigarette, Monica punched her hard in the side of the head. She felt the familiar buzz of excitement as her prey crumpled to the ground. As soon as Alba hit the floor, Monica crouched beside her and pressed her forearm against the smaller woman’s throat, slowly squeezing the life out of her.

When she was sure the job was done, she lifted her arm and glanced over towards the guards, who were still facing the wall. She looked down at Alba, shrugged and walked back to the guards. One of them looked over at Alba’s lifeless body, then at Monica. He didn’t say anything. Neither of them did.

They walked her back to her room in silence, escorted her inside and locked the door. There was some gossip around the prison about Alba, saying she’d been offed. But nothing about Monica.

This pattern had been repeated a couple more times in the weeks that followed. Each time, the same two guards collected Monica and took her to what she assumed was a prearranged place, where her unsuspecting prey met their fate. Then she was walked back to her cell in silence.

3

‘Boss, there’s a call for you from the prison,’ DS Drew Taylor said to DI Lomas Baxter.

‘The prison? What do they want?’

‘I don’t know. They said they wanted to speak to you directly, wouldn’t elaborate.’

Lomas nodded and picked up the phone. ‘DI Baxter, how can I help?’

‘Is that Detective Inspector Baxter?’

He rolled his eyes. ‘Yes, how can I help you?’

‘This is Mike Button, I’m the Head of Custody at HMP Brookham. Would you be able to come up to the prison? There’s been an ... incident ... and I was told to call you.’

‘Oh? Why would that be?’

‘It involves Monica Silverman, and she says she’ll only speak to you.’ The caller let the name hang on the line.

Lomas broke the silence. ‘OK, tell me what happened.’

‘Three of our officers went into Miss Silverman’s room to collect her for exercise. Two are on their way to hospital with injuries caused by Miss Silverman...’

‘And the third?’

‘The third is dead.’

There was a short silence.

‘OK, I’m on my way. Has the coroner been called?’

‘I’m calling them next. Will you bring a team to inspect the scene?’

‘Yes – our guys will look at everything. I’m assuming the cell is locked down?’

‘The room is locked, yes, Detective Inspector.’

Lomas noted the clipped tone in Button’s answer, but ignored it.

‘Good. Can you collect Miss Silverman’s clothes and bag them up for our forensics team? She’ll also need swabbing, so can you make sure she doesn’t get access to a shower?’

‘Yes, of course. She’s in isolation at the moment, so there’s no danger of her showering.’

‘OK, great. We’ll see you soon.’ Baxter hung up and spun his chair round to face Drew.

‘Right, Drew, grab your coat. We’re going to prison. It seems Miss Silverman has killed a prison guard.’

‘What?’

‘Yep, two hospitalised and one dead. She’s told them she’ll only speak to me. I guess, on the plus side, at least we don’t have to hunt her down this time.’

On the way to the prison they were quiet, immersed in thoughts about Monica Silverman and the gruelling investigation their team had gone through to catch Monica and put her behind bars. An investigation that saw them both taunted and threatened by the monster that was Monica.

It had taken a year and a half to get the case to trial, and three months to hear it. Monica had only been inside for three months.

Lomas had worked many cases in his years on the force, but the pressure that had mounted during the hunt for Monica Silverman, as the death toll rose and she became more brazen, had been intense. The press and public were always fascinated by serial killers, and Monica Silverman had been no different. She had gained celebrity status by the time she went to trial. He hated the way the UK press sensationalised killers, feeling that their treatment took little to no account of the feelings of the victims’ families and friends.

Soon, they were parking at the prison.

‘Right, let’s go and see what Monica’s been up to this time,’ Lomas said.

‘More of the same, isn’t it? Just a different place.’

They walked into the prison, showing their ID and signing in. Lomas was impeccably dressed as always, in a smart navy suit and white open-collared shirt. Drew wore a thigh-length grey coat over black trousers and boots, and her long red hair was pulled into a neat ponytail. They waited for about five minutes then were met by a smiley man in his mid-fifties, with a round belly and blushed cheeks. Mike Button shook their hands.

‘Lovely to meet you both. It’s been a hell of a day. Can I check you’ve left your phones, keys and other belongings in the lockers provided?’

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‘We have. We just have the recording equipment to take through, and one of your officers has just checked it,’ Lomas answered, familiar with the protocol.

‘Fantastic. This way, please.’ Button swiped his ID against a card reader and an automatic door swung open, taking them into a double-door airlock. They stood together, waiting for one door to close before the next opened. The three of them went into a sterile-looking corridor that smelled of cleaning fluid, with grey doors set into the walls at intervals.

‘It’s the next door on the right – room three.’ Button pointed at a grey door. ‘I’ll be on the other side of the glass. There’s a table at the side of the room for your recoding equipment.’

‘And Miss Silverman?’ Asked Drew.

‘Already in the room waiting for you. We had her brought up when you arrived.’

‘Thank you, that’s very efficient,’ said Lomas, pleasantly surprised.

‘Thank you, DI Baxter. We try.’ He swiped his card and held the door open for them. As soon as they walked through the door, Lomas saw Monica grinning at them, her wrists connected to the top of the desk by handcuffs.

‘Detective Inspector Baxter and Detective Constable Taylor,’ Monica said, beaming at them.

‘Detective Sergeant Taylor,’ Lomas corrected. ‘Hello, Monica.’

‘Congratulations, Drew – a well-deserved promotion, no doubt. You must be very pleased. Well, I must say it’s lovely to see you both – and you look so well.’

Lomas pulled out a chair and sat.

Drew set up the equipment, they went through the formalities of starting the interview, then Lomas dived in. ‘It didn’t take for you long to revert to your standard behaviour, Monica.’

‘I’m sure I don’t know what you mean, Detective.’ Monica’s dark eyes narrowed and she tipped her head to one side.

‘You’ve only been in here three months and already someone is dead. Bob Anderson, a guard at the prison, died earlier today in your cell.’

Monica’s expression changed as Lomas said Bob’s name. What looked like a genuine look of surprise came across her face. ‘Oh, that is sad. I liked Bob. He was one of the ones you could have a joke with, and there aren’t many of them in here, let me tell you.’

‘You mean, you didn’t know Bob Anderson was dead?’ Drew asked.

‘Nope, I had no idea. They don’t tell me much. They marched me off to a different part of the prison quite quickly, then I guess they called you.’

‘But you did attack three prison officers, Monica, so it can’t be a complete surprise that they didn’t leave your cell fit and well?’ Lomas sounded sarcastic.

‘I guess so although, to be fair, I would have expected the squeaky one, Beth, or Gill to have come off worse. I bit a little piece out of Bob’s arm, but not big enough for him to bleed out, unless he had a blood thinning condition, I suppose.’ She looked thoughtful.

‘Initial indications are that Mr Anderson suffered a heart attack, brought on, no doubt, by the encounter with you in your cell.’

‘They call them rooms,’ Monica said.

‘Sorry?’ Lomas said.

‘Rooms – they call them rooms, not cells. Apparently it helps the women feel less threatened and vulnerable if the place they’re imprisoned in is termed a room. Personally, I couldn’t care less, but there are some fragile little things in here.’

Lomas continued. ‘So, to be clear, you don’t deny attacking the three officers? And you now understand that your attack on the guards led to the death of Bob Anderson?’

‘Well, when you put it like that it’s hard to dispute. I suppose you’ve got me, Detective. Although I’m not entirely sure what you think you’re going to do about it. I’m never getting out of here – my sentence will still be running long after all of us are dead. So frankly, what does it matter?’ She turned her palms upwards and shrugged as she spoke.

‘It matters because an innocent man who came to work today, to do his job, is dead.’

‘When you put it like that, it does sound more dramatic. He has a way of making the mundane sound like a drama, don’t you think, DS Taylor?’

‘No, Monica, I don’t.’ Drew’s voice was stony.

‘Oh well, suit yourself. Is that all, DI Baxter? It’s just that I’ve got a busy day ahead. You know, reading, looking at the wall, counting the hairs on my arms, that kind of thing.’

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‘That’s all for now, Monica, but we may need to come back and talk to you again. Don’t leave the country, will you.’

Monica smiled, looking amused.

They ended the recording. Lomas eased his chair out from the table.

‘Before you both go and before my *bodyguards* come in to collect me, you need to know something. There’s much more going on here than you realise.’

‘Meaning?’

‘Meaning there are forces at work within these walls that are far darker than I, DI Baxter. Guard!’ With that, Monica closed her eyes, signalling the end of the conversation. Lomas heard the door being opened.

Lomas and Drew looked at each other as smiley Mike appeared in the open doorway.

‘All done? Right, this way, please. Monica, the team will be in to collect you shortly.’

‘Who are you calling shortly?’ Monica said without opening her eyes.

Lomas smiled as the expression on Mike’s face remained unchanged.

‘Tell me, Mike, is the governor around? I’d like to give her an update on our chat with Monica.’

‘No, she’s off today. But I’ll let her know you’d like to speak to her, if you wish.’

‘No, that’s fine. I’ve got her email, I think. I’ll drop her a note, but I’ll leave her this card. Could you pass it on?’

‘As you wish.’

They made their way back to reception and collected their belongings from the lockers. It wasn’t until they were back in the car that Drew broke the silence. ‘What do you think she meant by that last comment?’

‘I don’t know, if I’m honest. Either she has something she wants us to know, or she’s trying to divert our attention away from the fact she just killed a prison officer. But this is Monica Silverman. She’s not stupid. Evil? Yes. Stupid? No.’

‘I know she’s not to be trusted, but it sounded like she had something she wanted to share, then she thought better of it.’

Lomas had to admit that he felt the same. They’d spent hours interviewing Monica after her arrest. Although the crimes she’d committed were heinous and reprehensible, she had never tried to shift blame or duck the responsibility for her actions. This had earned her a modicum of respect from Lomas, although he would never tell anyone this.

Just before they got back to the station, Lomas had decided what he wanted to do. ‘Do a little bit of digging into the prison, Drew. See if there’s been anything out of the ordinary happening – especially with anyone connected to Monica.’

‘Anything in particular you want me to look for?’

‘Well, given that it’s Monica, I’d look for anyone who’s died.’

4

Wednesday

Niamh Dominicali paced as she waited for Mike Button to arrive in her office. She'd arrived half an hour earlier, at 7.30 a.m., and had been told by her PA, Claire Kidson, that the police had been at the prison interviewing Monica following Bob Anderson's death. Niamh thought that Claire had taken a little too much pleasure in letting her know. She knew that Mike should have called her and told her. As Head of Custody, it was his job to deal with this kind of thing, but Dominicali hated being blindsided by anything. Button had called her and told her about the attacks, so why the hell hadn't he let her know he'd asked the police to come in? She knew, of course, that he was just following process, which he did to the letter, always, but she was still enraged to find out what had happened from Claire – with her smug smile, looking disapprovingly at Dominicali over her tortoiseshell glasses as she spoke.

Her phone buzzed and she tapped the intercom button. 'Yes, Claire?'

'Mike Button here to see you, Governor.'

'Thank you. Please ask him to come in. Could I get a coffee, please?'

'Of course, coming right up.' She could hear the smug tone in Claire's voice and could only imagine how she'd spoken to Mike when he arrived.

The door opened slowly and a sheepish-looking Mike Button edged into the office.

'Mike, come on in.'

'Good morning, Governor.'

'Take a seat. We need to have a chat.'

'Is it in relation to the incident from yesterday?'

'Yes, it is. You see, while I appreciate the fact that you called me and let me know that Miss Silverman had attacked three of our officers, with terrible consequences, what I did not appreciate is that Claire was the one who told me this morning that the police had been here yesterday to interview Monica.'

'Well, of course they were, Governor. As per policy. In the event of an assault resulting in serious injury or death, the police must be notified immediately.'

'I know what the fucking policy says, Mike! The point is, you didn't let me know when they were coming in to interview Monica. Had I known, I would have made myself available. When something this significant happens, I want to know about it. Do I make myself clear? This is my fucking prison, so make sure I know what the hell is going on. Got it?'

Mike didn't make a sound as she ranted at him. He just sat looking at her, his face becoming redder than normal.

'I'm sorry, Governor, but I did call you. Your phone went to voicemail. I left you a message informing you that I'd contacted the police and the time they would be here.'

Niamh grabbed her mobile from her bag and punched her thumb against the bottom edge of the screen. Nothing happened. She hit the screen again. Still nothing. Her battery was dead. A wave of embarrassment swept over her. It didn't last long and was quickly replaced by anger.

'You could have emailed me and marked it urgent. I would have read it immediately.'

Mike, still red-faced, looked as though he was going to protest some more. Niamh glared at him, almost daring him to argue. After a few seconds, he spoke. 'I'm sorry. My mistake – it won't happen again.'

Dominicali was almost disappointed. She'd half wanted to keep venting at him, but she would take the victory.

'OK, well, let's not dwell on it. These things happen, I guess. So what did they have to say?'

Button shifted in his seat, looking as if he'd sat on a drawing pin.

'What is it? Don't tell me there's something else I don't know.'

'No, it's not that. It's just that they asked if they could see you after they'd finished interviewing Miss Silverman.'

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‘They always want to eyeball the governor – want to ask a few leading questions about systemic abuse or prison officer procedure. There’s always something. They don’t dig around for meaningless shit as often as the press, but they still like to have options when it comes to blame. That’s why you should have let me know.’ She knew she had to stop driving the point home before she made Button cry, but she was pleased with how the conversation had gone full circle, from her having a flat battery to Mike being wrong for not calling her. Niamh decided to have one more dig before she put him out of his misery. ‘Anything else I need to know about? Any more surprise visitors?’

‘No, that’s all, Governor.’

‘OK, thank you. You can go now.’

Without another word, Button got up, put DI Baxter’s card on the edge of her desk and scurried out of the office, his head bowed.

Niamh flopped into a comfy armchair in the corner of her office and steepled her fingers under her chin, thinking about how the police interview with Monica might have gone. She would have to talk to Silverman, but she would take her time to plan how the chat would go. She needed to make sure that Monica knew who was boss, and that she wouldn’t let the cat out of the bag on their arrangement in exchange for a lesser punishment for killing Bob.

Only then did her thoughts turn to Bob. Niamh had liked him. He’d been really helpful when she’d arrived at the prison. To begin with, she knew it was because she had long hair and tits and wore a skirt to work. It was nothing new to Dominicali; she’d had to deal with it during her rise through the prison system. But Bob had quickly got past that and had become a trusted confidant who had helped her find her way in the prison and had given her all the gen on prisoners and guards. Within weeks, she’d known who the corrupt ones were, like Bell and Rodriguez. It had been easy for her to get them on-side in her arrangement with Monica. They were the only ones she asked to take instructions to Monica, and they were always the ones who collected her and brought her to see Niamh.

She walked over to her desk and pressed her intercom. ‘Claire, could you order some lovely flowers for Irene Anderson, please? And could you get me a card so that I can send her a personal note?’

‘Certainly. Would you like your coffee now?’

‘Yes, please.’

She’d forgotten about her coffee while she’d been chastising Mike. Claire had clearly known that it wasn’t the right time to come in. She secretly liked Claire, even if she could be officious at times.

Niamh drained her coffee and asked Claire to get Bell and Rodriguez to come and take her to see Monica.

‘You mean, in her room, Governor?’

‘Yes, that’s precisely what I mean. I don’t think it sends the right signal, getting a prisoner who has committed such an awful act of violence brought up to my office, do you?’

‘No, I suppose it doesn’t. I’ll get hold of them right away.’

It didn’t take her two henchmen long to get there. She’d only had time to deal with a few emails, including one that was a notification of the incident involving Monica. Claire buzzed through to let her know her escorts were outside. She grabbed her suit jacket from the back of her chair, checked her appearance in a mirror that hung on the wall in a small, private room just off her office.

When she left her office, Bell and Rodriguez were standing on either side of the door. Bell was tall, thick-set, with stubble and perfect black hair. Rodriguez was more or less the exact opposite: short, bald and always looked as though his shirt was about to come untucked. But they were both as crooked as they came. When Niamh had approached them about earning some extra cash on the side, they’d been more than happy to do whatever she asked. In the past few weeks, they’d become an essential part of her network. Their collective greed meant they were often around, due to the amount of voluntary overtime they picked up, always willing to cover another colleague’s sickness or leave days.

‘Where to, Governor?’ asked Bell.

‘Wherever the delightful Miss Silverman is, please, gents.’

They nodded at each other. Bell led the way, with Rodriguez hanging back to let Niamh fall into step between them.

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The three of them made their way to the isolation block, which housed prisoners who presented a risk to themselves – or others. Monica was in the end cell.

Rodriguez checked through the observation panel. He told Niamh that Monica was lying on her bed and hadn't moved. He opened the door and stood to one side to let Dominicali go in.

Silverman didn't move from her bed, or acknowledge the governor's presence. She lay still, as if she was sleeping, but Niamh could see that she wasn't.

'I think we need to talk, Miss Silverman.'

Monica didn't reply.

'I hear you've had a busy day.'

Still nothing.

'Look, cut the crap and sit up. You're not impressing anyone with the thousand-yard stare, so knock it off.'

Monica swung her legs over the side of the bed and sat up, glaring at the governor. Niamh stiffened as the prisoner moved, but didn't flinch. The stare didn't bother her; she had enough experience not to be intimidated by the likes of Monica, although she'd rarely faced anyone with such raw power, or the ability to be physically threatening.

'Could you step outside and close the door, please, gents? I'll let you know if I need you, but I don't think Miss Silverman is up for making things worse.' She said, waving the back of her hand. She waited a moment for the door to be closed, then turned her attention back to Monica.

'Do you want to tell me what went on in your room yesterday? Killing one of my guards and hospitalising two more is not exactly in the spirit of our arrangement, is it?'

'Bob wasn't deliberate – not that you'll believe that. I was only having some fun with them and didn't mean for anyone to die.'

'No, I believe you. But you bit a chunk out of his arm and have really messed up the other two. And for what? To amuse yourself for two minutes?'

'I suppose so, but it's not like we're in a zero-tolerance environment when it comes to violence, is it, Governor?' Niamh could feel the self-righteousness oozing from Monica.

How dare she try and justify what she did by comparing it with what we've been doing? Dominicali raged internally.

'I think, if that's the angle you're planning on working, you're on very thin ice.'

'I wasn't,' Monica replied.

'Good. Now, what did the police have to say?'

'Oh, they assumed I was guilty. In my position, it doesn't really matter whether I meant to kill Bob or not, does it? I'm a convicted killer. Who would believe me if I said anything to try and defend myself? But, as I said, Bob wasn't deliberate. I actually quite liked him.'

'Yeah, me too. He was a nice guy.' Niamh paused for a second, her thoughts drifting to Bob and his widow. 'OK, well, you're going to be in here for a while and I don't think there will be any little side ventures any time soon. We've had a few too many *accidents* in the last few weeks – it will raise suspicion if there's anything else.'

'OK, understood.'

As Niamh turned to leave, she heard the rub of fabric and felt an arm slip around her throat, pulling her in tight. She grabbed Monica's arm and tried to pull it away, just far enough to catch her breath, but it was no use. Monica was too strong. She felt herself being pulled backwards. Unable to shout, she kicked the door. Bell ripped the door open, Rodriguez behind him, both wide-eyed, clearly not expecting this. Niamh was struggling for breath and thrashing around, without effect.

Bell stepped forward.

'Come on, Monica, this is not the best idea, is it? Let the governor go,' he urged. Niamh could tell that he was trying to stay calm and gain control of the situation.

'Fuck off, Bell-end.'

'This isn't going help anything, is it? Come on, let the governor go.'

'I told you to fuck off. Now get back or I'll kill her.'

Niamh could feel the taut muscle of Monica's forearm against her throat. She couldn't move. She tried to stamp on Monica's foot, and felt a hard fist bury itself in the back of her ribs. It hurt a lot, but she couldn't scream. The thought of what had happened to Bob, Beth and Gill immediately popped into her head and fuelled an uncommon panic in her. She tried

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again to fight Monica off, driving her elbow backwards towards her attacker's ribs, but to no avail. Bell opened his mouth to speak again, but he was too late. Monica spun Niamh around to face her. As her body turned towards Monica, she saw a fist coming towards her face ... then everything went black.

Monica threw the governor's limp body onto the cell floor, as if she was casting aside an item of clothing, then turned her attention to Bell and Rodriguez.

She saw Bell's fists clench as he stepped forward. Monica immediately dropped to a crouch and swept his legs out from under him, stamping on his face as he hit the floor. Then she grabbed Rodriguez by the back of his sweaty little head and bounced his face off the cell wall repeatedly, until he too became limp. She turned back to Bell, who was trying to get up, and kicked him in the ribs, flipping him over. As he spun, his arm flicked up. She caught his wrist and snapped it without giving it a thought. He screamed as she took his arm in both hands and bounced the back of his elbow off her knee. She heard it crack. Bell let out a another cry.

She couldn't risk the noise being heard outside the cell so, dropping to her knees, she took Bell's head and whipped it around and back with ease. His neck snapped.

Taking the keys and handcuffs from Bell's belt, she set them on the bed. Then she quickly changed into Bell's uniform, tucking him into her bed and leaving only the top of his dark head showing above the covers.

Once she'd dealt with Bell, she turned her attention to Rodriguez. Monica checked for a pulse. When she found that he had a faint one, she considered her options. She could leave him alive, bound and gagged, or she could kill him and make sure he couldn't raise the alarm. She decided on the latter. Very calmly, she covered his mouth with a towel and applied pressure, then held his nose closed. It only took a few minutes, for the involuntary, self-preservation twitching to come and go, then Rodriguez was gone. She manoeuvred his corpse into a corner, out of view of the door, and briefly wondered whether it had been necessary to kill them both – then agreed with herself that it had.

While Monica sat and waited patiently for the governor to come round, she tidied up her appearance, dragging her hair into a neater style.

As Niamh Dominicali started coming to, Monica pulled her hands behind her back and slipped the handcuffs on her, making sure she could feel it happening.

'It's OK, take a minute, Niamh, there's no need to rush.' She felt like her old self once more. In control.

The governor looked at her, fear written all over her face. 'What have you done?'

'I'm sorry, what do you mean?'

She watched as Niamh frantically looked from Rodriguez's corpse to the lump in the bed that was Bell, then back to Monica.

'You can't possibly think you're going to get away with this.'

With a broad smile and in a calm, hushed voice, Monica said, 'Ah, but that's where you come in, you see. Your phase of our little game is over. Now it's my turn. But my rules are much simpler than yours. You either do exactly as I say, or you die. Simple, really, don't you think? The way this part works is that you're going to help me get out of this hell-hole. And when I say "out", I don't mean out of this cell. I mean *out* out.'

The governor sat in silence for a moment.

'Don't think for too long, or I might change my mind and leave you here with dumb and dumber.'

'Let's say I agree. How on earth are you planning to get from here to the main door and out?'

'It's a straightforward plan – as all the best ones are. All you have to do is play along, smile in the right places and be confident. Which I know you can do. The alternative is, you get cold feet and lose your nerve, then the one thing you can be confident of is that you'll die in front of your staff. I have very little to lose. You, however...'

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