

## **1. Dead Housewife**

There's blood everywhere, and none of it's where it's supposed to be.

On the carpet. On the curtains. All over me. And I know it won't wash out because this shirt is pure silk. If you don't want to ruin silk, never sneeze in a Starbucks with a mouth full of blueberry muffin. As I sit here I keep thinking *if only I could go back to my old life*. I could head into the kitchen and start going through the ironing again, except that the iron is now sticking out of the TV screen.

My name is June Cryer, and I am a dead housewife.

To put it another way, I am a pelmet-vacuuming, Tesco-shopping, voucher-clipping, dishwasher-loading, Radio Heart-loving dead housewife who should have stayed home instead of getting into a fight with the kind of men who feature on crime programmes with blurry boxes over their faces.

I'd like to comb my hair and put on a bit of lippy, make myself presentable, but I can't get up. The man standing guard over me is entirely devoid of manners. He has a foil-wrapped burger in his fist, and takes ruminative lumps out of it while he's deciding where to dump my body. The meat juice is running over his knuckles like blood. My God, we've come a long way from Raffles, the Gentleman Thief.

How the hell did I ever get here?

All I can think is that I must have fallen into a deep sleep the day I got married, like some character from a fairy tale, except Sleeping Beauty was out cold before she met her prince, and he fought a dragon and slashed his way through a forest of poisonous thorns to get to her, whereas Gordon just said 'I suppose I should marry you if you're not going to have a termination', and instead of the Kiss of True Love bringing me to my senses it was his unrepentant affair with the bitch next door.

I look up at the burger-muncher and realise I am *way* out of my depth. By the time my neighbours hear about me I'll be gone. I'll turn up on the news, found in the long grass of a railway embankment, or floating face-down in the Thames, just another unidentified torso sucked along by the tide. My severed head will be

discovered in a freezer bag in the high street, only to be replaced with bunches of lurid garage flowers still wrapped in plastic. Why don't people take the plastic off? When Princess Diana died it looked like several tons of Quality Street had been dumped outside her house. But that's how I'll be found, scattered across the city in half a dozen binliners, recognised by my ankle-chain or the piercings in my ears.

So much for the dignity of death.

I'll probably make the local edition of the six o'clock news. My disapproving neighbours will be interviewed around the corners of their front doors; 'She was a quiet woman, kept herself to herself, never went out much.' My best friend will use my disappearance as an opportunity to impose herself on athletic television cameramen. My mother will telephone my husband and commiserate: 'Well, Gordon, you can't say I didn't warn you. I always said she was a bolter. The signs were there, it's just a shame your name had to be dragged into it.' Eventually, in death as in life, I will be totally forgotten. And I'll only have myself to blame.

As soon as my captor has finished his burger, I'm done for. He still has a quarter left but I can tell he's sizing me up for removal. *Will she go in the lift or do I have to saw her head off first?*

I once had hopes for something better than this. When I was young –

*- when I was young I would kneel on my mother's faded turquoise sofa and watch snowflakes dissolving against the warm lounge windows, I would stare into the frozen streets as white and muffled as the inside of a pillow and think of a distant future when I would become important to someone. Our TV was always showing *The Little Mermaid* or *Sleeping Beauty*, and we always had the colour turned up too bright. I wanted to live in a sunlit glade and find my prince. Was I so wrong for wanting that? I'm not ashamed. But how did I end up so far from those dreams?*

But I can't just forget what's happened because this has been the most memorable weekend I've had since I was seven, when our caravan got wedged under a car park barrier on the Isle of Sheppey. And I can't go back because my

old life has gone forever. The last couple of days have been a, well I wouldn't use the word *nightmare*, because you recover from bad dreams, do you?

Sorry, I know I'm rambling. I think it's shock.

They need some decent curtains on the windows in this room. Heals are having a sale, they could get it out of petty cash and keep the receipt because you never know, the colours might clash. Do professional killers get expenses?

I don't feel well. I think I'm going to be sick.

I don't deserve to be in a situation like this. I can no longer make sense of the world. Nothing is in its right place anymore. There are shadows everywhere. Life can cloud over as fast as a spring morning, and suddenly everything becomes hopeless. It seems unfair, like being told you're seriously ill by a cheerful, harrassed doctor.

Let me start at the - you know.