

Behind every fracture lies  
her freedom.

A woman's face is visible through a cracked glass surface. The cracks radiate from a bright, glowing point in the center, creating a starburst effect. The background is dark with some greenish-blue highlights.

# CAGED

DIARY OF A  
CONTEMPORARY WOMAN TRILOGY

LUCY PUSSETT

# **CAGED**

Diary of a Contemporary  
Woman Trilogy

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# **Diary of a Contemporary Woman Trilogy**

## **Part three: CAGED by Lucy Pussett**

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This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

**ISBN (Paperback): 978-1-9168848-4-7**

**ISBN (Kindle): 978-1-9168848-5-4**

Published by FreeLynx Books, United Kingdom

**[www.lucypussett.com](http://www.lucypussett.com)**

This book is dedicated to anyone who has suffered discrimination,  
bullying and abuse solely due to their sexual orientation.

The power, the love of Angelique Santoro is here to lift you all.

Hold this book close to your heart and know you are loved.

## **Also by Lucy Pussett**

Diary of a Contemporary Woman

(Part one, of Diary of a Contemporary Woman trilogy)

Angelique

(Part two, of Diary of a Contemporary Woman trilogy)

CAGED

(Part three, of Diary of a Contemporary Woman trilogy)

# CHAPTER ONE

## *STICKS AND STONES*

The steel bar struck my back, just above my kidneys, making me cry out as I stumbled forward twisting around to see my attacker. Not one attacker but three. The tallest of them with a nose long and hooked, like a seagull's beak punched me in the face with a force great enough for stars to begin floating before my eyes. I scrambled away as fast as I could on my hands and knees, managing to push myself back on to my feet using the wall for support. The next blow struck my forearms as I managed to get my arms up just in time to protect my face. I kicked the squat woman closest to me in the side of her knee making her drop to the floor, screaming in agony, whilst ducking out of the way from another blow. The iron bar taking part of the brickwork with it as it struck the wall.

I roared, as I grabbed the hair of that lanky bitch, swung her around throwing her into the iron railings of the prison

walkway.

I never saw the screws approaching. I barely heard their yelling above the cries of the women closest to me, my own hearing muffled from that blow to my face. The blood pulsating in my ear drums. Confusion followed choking with my eyes stinging so badly, I thought someone had thrown acid in them. The particles of mace hung heavy in the air.

“All of you, on the fucking floor NOW!!” Someone yelled, “Arms behind your backs.” Dazed, I did as I was told. With the handcuffs, clicked in their fixed position, I was yanked to my feet.

“Welcome to Hardwick bitch.” The heavy set, ugly woman said. The one which had struck me first with the iron bar. The one which I had failed to strike. I spat in her face, glaring at her, remaining silent as we were all dragged away in different directions to the raucous whistling and jeering from the other inmates. My fellow inmates delighting in the latest distraction from their miserable lives.

Having spent the next four hours in solitary confinement, the old steel door opened slowly, creaking heavily on rusted hinges.

“On your feet Santoro. Move to the back of the cell.” The

screw said aggressively.

I did as I was instructed, standing passively with my arms to my side, palms facing upwards.

“It wasn’t my fault.”

“I don’t give two fucks if it was” The officer replied.

“Well, I’m just saying, it wasn’t.”

“Where do you think you are Santoro eh? You think HMP Hardwick is a place where people care if you did the crime or not? Who hit who first?”

I opened my mouth about to speak when he shook his head and said, “Just shut up and follow me. You want to plead your innocence then tell it to Governor Harris, that where I’m taking you.”

The walk from the solitary cells to the governor’s office took about five minutes. My eyes still stinging from the excessive use of mace the screws off loaded into our faces and the pain in my lower back was a likely indicator that I’d be pissing blood later that evening. HMP Hardwick was originally built in the 1700s as a place of correction. It was cold and damp, the corridors echoed eerily under the sound of our boots. Our route took us past cell block F, past the kitchens and outside, finally for the first time in over 48

hours, I felt fresh air upon my face.

I blinked as often as possible. Looking up, letting the wind create fresh tears trying desperately to wash away the last of the pepper spray. I'd done my best to rinse my eyes out in my cell in the tiny metal sink with its lacklustre cold-water flow but unless you rinse your eyes swiftly after exposure you can only do so much.

We entered the main reception area and off to the right down another brightly lit corridor for about thirty yards. I then followed the officer up an old wrought iron spiral staircase, painted white some years ago presumably as it was all flaking off now.

The officer stopped and then knocked at the door with the name Dr. Eric Harris, Governor, written on a bronze plated plaque and waited.

“Enter!” A bold, confident voice with a Scottish accent beckoned us in.

“Got Angelique Santoro as you requested Sir.”

“Right. Thank you, Spencer. You can just wait outside please.”

“With respect Sir, she’s been with us less than a week and already injured two inmates. Perhaps wise if I stay.”

Spencer stated.

“Perhaps wise, eh? You hear that Miss. Santoro? Officer Spencer here thinks you might think to harm me should you and I be left alone.”

“Well, I am Angelique Santoro so he may have a point.” I smirked.

Spencer sighed, “I’ll be right outside, just call out if you need me.” As he dug his hands deeper inside his trousers pockets.

“Thank you, officer Spencer, most kind of you.” The Governor said, flicking his head towards the open door.

Harris was an ordinary man to look upon. Average height, average build, a decent suit, perhaps tailor made I thought and fantastic shoes.

“Italian?” I said, glancing towards his expensive looking loafers.

“Good eye Santoro. Correct, they are.”

He offered me a seat to the left of his desk. A somewhat tatty leather chair which had seen better days. It fitted in perfectly with the somewhat threadbare carpet and walls which hadn’t had a decent lick of paint in a good few years.

“So... You’re settling in well then aye?” Harris said, easing himself back in his recliner.

“Absolutely. Made some new friends. All good.”

It was Harris’s turn to sigh out loud.

“Alright Santoro. Enough of this nonsense. Let’s get down to brass tacts alright?”

I opened both my hands to him and smiled gently.

“I’m all ears Governor.”

“You’ve come here with a huge target on your back as I think you’ve just discovered. Had to play the silly bitch in court, eh? Aye, that you did. Pissed the judge right off you must have done for him to send an offender 400 miles north-east of where they’re from. Very clever.” He said, rolling his eyes.

“With respect, I’m Notorious Angelique Santoro as the media refer to me. It wouldn’t have made fuck all difference how I did or did not behave in court. I have been made an example of, that’s all.” I suggested, looking blankly at him.

“Well, regardless you’re here now and let me tell you what it is to be here alright? This prison is widely accepted as one

of the roughest in the UK, perhaps all of Europe. It's only one of two Cat A prisons for female only offenders in the land, alongside HMP Low Newton. We have more lifers here than I could count if I had 3 pairs of hands."

"The bitches I met today?"

"Aye. All lifers. They are never getting out of here."

"Murderers?" I asked

"Two are, the other close enough. Not for the want of trying." Harris rubbed his hand over the two-day old stubble on his chin.

"So, what exactly happened Santoro?"

"You've seen the CCTV footage. What else is there to say? I was jumped, attacked with an iron bar and outnumbered 3 to 1" I said.

"I've seen so such thing lassie. No CCTC covering that part of the walkway."

"You're shitting me?"

"Sadly not. It's one of three blind spots. Not for much longer but just now it is what it is."

"Brilliant. So, my word against theirs." I sighed.

“Their collective word isn’t worth shit but then neither is yours as far as I’m concerned.” Harris said standing up and calling out to officer Spencer.

“Officer Spencer. Kindly take Miss Santoro to the medical centre for a check over, her back and right forearm have been struck by a metal bar, I’d like to ensure nothing is fractured or broken.”

“Of course, Sir.” Spencer replied, nodding his head and placing his hand on my shoulder to guide me out of the Governor’s office.

I shrugged his hand off me. “Don’t fucking touch me.”

We stared at one another neither of us speaking.

“Her legs appear to be working alright officer, let her follow you out in her own way.” Harris said disinterestedly, his attention turned to a document lying open on his desk.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *EMPTY ROOMS*

Gareth sat on the steps outside our flat drinking a cold beer from the bottle. Absentmindedly peeling the label off the glass, watching the droplets of water slide down towards his hand. “Anxiety” by Doechii was playing on loop. Gareth never fully understood if listening to music which mirrored how you truly felt was a good thing or not. Was it helpful to know the rich, talented and famous struggle with their mental health, struggle so much within themselves? Is this comforting or not? Who the fuck with good mental health craves the adoration of strangers in the first place? Gareth recalled Swifty saying something about herself, being all kinds of fucked up and expressed it this way.

Ralph helped of course. That Spaniel just lay across Gareth’s lap like he’s been on some veterinary grade drugs. Gareth wasn’t himself and Ralph was mirroring him, perhaps partly by means of comfort, partly as he was

struggling with my absence just as much. Dogs like children, pick up on our energy, our vibes far more than we give them credit for. We suffer. They suffer.

A month had passed since my incarceration. It felt like a fucking year Gareth thought. His panic attacks were less severe and less frequent since being left for dead on the streets of Brighton in that brutal, evil, homophobic attack a full year ago. Less severe, he had said to his doctor. They could hardly have gotten worse.

“Is now a good time to discuss options, a different drug or dose perhaps?” The Doctor had asked.

“I find it worrying, this decision is more on me, than you.” Gareth replied.

“It’s meant to feel like a partnership of sorts Gareth. I can’t know how you feel about things unless you share what’s going on.”

“Well, there are good days, bad days, very bad days and fucking horrific days. Taking a pill doesn’t prevent anything and it doesn’t create any kind of probability or help support patterns which you said it would.”

The doctor had listened, nodded his head then suggested they up the dosage rather than change drug because “Well, you know, best fully explore one drug before trying

another.”

Gareth had taken the new prescription to the chemist muttering, “fucking useless prick” under his breath as he left the clinic. Not loud enough for the waiting patients to hear but just enough for that team of gormless, underpaid receptionists to clock.

Aveline had Martin. Lucky man had not only married into the fucked-up Santoro family but had supported my sister alongside me in her battle against cocaine addiction. Just when his career was skyrocketing and looking to make partner at his company, yours truly takes it to the next level and gets sent down, sentenced to three years in the UK’s most hardcore female only prison. Give that man a medal for perseverance or fucking stupidity for staying around.

Aveline’s business start-up, Santoro PR was however flourishing. Looking back over our lives as siblings, it’s seldom been aligned. Either I was killing it, or she was. When she was out getting drunk and coked out of her face, passing out or getting hospitalised for an overdose, I was happily single, enjoying a little minor celebrity fame and getting paid far more than I was worth running the successful recruitment agency, SRS.

Aveline had insisted on becoming my PR officer when I was arrested. I was concerned how the stress of being this

might negatively affect her recovery and wellbeing. I need not have worried. She soared like an eagle on the wind, taking everything thrown at me and cleverly twisting it, presenting a new ideal of who Angelique Santoro was and gaining huge public support in doing so. She attracted Charles Brightstarr, which in turn led me to becoming the face of Notorious energy drinks.

“James Minio has already publicly admitted to the affair. Now the public need reassurance he’s still focused and capable of doing his job.” Aveline stressed to the Newspaper Editor.

“And that’s commendable Aveline but we’ve not yet decided on how we are to progress our coverage of this development.”

“You’re undecided?” Aveline scoffed.

“It’s not as straight forward as you seem to think” Matt Patterson, Editor in Chief replied.

“Oh, I rather think it is Matt! You’re in charge of The Guardian newspaper. In case you’d forgotten, it’s the broad sheet, highly respected left-wing paper you know, pro Government, pro-Labour.”

Patterson sighed over the telephone but didn’t speak so Aveline continued, “We have those pricks in Hungary,

joining Slovakia in voting in a racist, right-wing party whilst at home despite Nigel Farage and his Reform party having but five MPs, they are gaining extensive coverage in MSM promoting their right wing idealism, lead by the BBC since the main fucking people at the top are bloody Tories! Trump is proving he's not only a Russian asset but an outright dictator! It's taken fourteen long years for the British people to wake the fuck up and boot the Tories out of power, we must protect the cabinet from serious damage. He's the Secretary of State for Defence!!”

“Of course, all this is true Aveline. We just need to work out a strategy and stick with it.” Patterson said.

“You're at home now?”

“Just got in, not seen the kids yet but...” He trailed off

“Excellent, I'll be with you within the hour, and we can tie up this exclusive scoop. Your sales are about to go up significantly.” Aveline said and hung up the call.

Martin handed Aveline her car keys. “I'm glad I'm not a client of yours!”

“Well, let's hope you never need my services shall we darling?”

Not everyone was flourishing whilst I sat rotting way in

solitary confinement. Joshua was most certainly not the best version of himself. The trouble with being the boss of a successful, well-known scaffolding & roofing business was that there's no one to give you a bollocking for turning up late, half cut, still pissed or somewhere in between this world and another. He had tried his best to tell himself off on numerous occasions. The problem was he was in no mood for a lecture on how best to keep life going, to stay upbeat and positive when every cell in his body was screaming for reckless abandon and oblivion.

His old Rugby friend and ex-lover of mine, "Posh James" had made a concerted effort to spend time with Joshua and bring him out of himself. I do believe posh James had honourable intentions but let's be honest. Two blokes together, mid-week or not is unlikely to be all tucked up in bed at 9pm stone cold sober now, is it?

"Going to be a long three years mate." James said.

"Longer if she can't keep out of trouble" Joshua sighed, got off the sofa and walked to the kitchen, picked up the 20-year-old single malt whiskey and returned to re-fill their glasses. Joshua had never cared much for any spirits. Right now, they were just numbing agents just like bongela to a mouth ulcer.

"She getting into a lot of bother then?"

“Yup and only her first week James. I think she’s trying to keep out of trouble; you know but trouble just finds her, it always does eh.”

“Or she finds trouble...”James trailed off realising it wasn’t the smartest remark he could have made.

Joshua ignored him, took another gulp of the whiskey, then another, sitting the now empty glass on the coffee table. He used to use a coaster. He didn’t anymore. So fucking what if the coffee table has water rings on it? So what is the house looked like a tip and do with a bloody good clean up?

It was as if James was reading his mind.

“Could do with a cleaner mate.”

Joshua was starting to slur his speech, “Could do with a lot of things no doubt.”

“I know mate, of course” James said “Just gotta keep busy best you can!”

“I can handle the days, well much of the time. It’s the fucking nights which are killing me.”

“You suggesting I’m no substitute for Angelique eh?”

The men laughed together.

“What about you? You aint got nothing better to do than babysit this pathetic prick?” Joshua said, thrusting two thumbs back at himself.

“It appears not.” James said, leaning forward to ruffle Joshua’s hair.

# CHAPTER THREE

## *SOLITARY PART 1*

Solitary confinement is a form of passive brutality. It's fucked up it is allowed in our prison system but allowed it most certainly is and if you have mental health issues, which I'd suggest half of any male or female population does, it's nothing short of barbaric in its level of cruelty. Fucking waterboard me daily for a week the next time you arseholes decide I need punishing for defending myself against a likely death.

Two weeks in prison. One week in solitary. Where did they put you Angelique you cry? I'll tell you where. In the "separate punishment block", as it's referred to. Firstly, I was checked out in the medical centre. A modest sized building with fifteen beds, two consulting rooms adjacent to a separate room with toilets and a shower. Painted lime green with an overwhelming stench of bleach and antiseptic, it was as brightly lit as an interrogation room. I

had to look down as my eyes so sensitive having done such a close dance with the pepper spray.

“Name luv?” the tiny nurse asked me, having shut the door to consulting room one.

“Angelique Santoro” I muttered, sitting down on a surprisingly comfortable, well-padded chair closest to her.

“Right then, just bear with me” she said, tapping my name into the database.

“Ah! There we are. Such a pretty name, where you from hun?”

“Brighton.” I replied.

She laughed. “No! I mean originally. Not from round ‘ere are ya? Not with them exotic looks and an elegant name such as yours!”

“Still Brighton.” I said.

Ordinarily, I’d have perhaps made her feel less of a twat. Letting her know my mother is French and my Father, Italian. I was in no mood for banal conversation, besides which my head was killing me.

“Oh my, you don’t mess around do you luv? Only just arrived and visiting me already.” She smiled joyfully at me.

This one is two bricks short of a house I thought to myself but managed to crack a smile and nod my head.

“Recon’ we’ve got our work cut out for us with this one Sharon!” Officer Spencer said from behind us, standing in front of the door. For a moment I’d forgotten numb nuts was still shadowing me.

“Well, let’s hope not Mr Spencer. Such a pretty face, be a shame to lose those looks whilst staying with us.” She said, looking at me in a strange way.

In that precise moment I had the song by The Eagles, “Hotel California” playing in my head. “You can check out anytime you like but you can never leave.”

I shuddered and explained my right forearm where I’d been struck by an iron bar was hurting a lot now.

“Yes, we’ll be doing an X-Ray presently luv.” She said, “Where else were you struck?”

I explained my lower back and that I rather suspected my kidneys would be swollen as a result.

“Lower back struck with a metal object, patient thinks swelling likely around her kidneys” she spoke out loud, whilst typing the notes into the system.

“Perhaps best we examine first and do the notes later?” I suggested, thinking this woman would struggle to tie her shoelaces if she’d had more than one drink.

The X-Ray showed a fracture to my forearm and the doctor decided the appropriate action was to conduct a closed reduction. Realigning the fractured bones, gently manipulate then immobilise with a cast. Ultrasound did indeed suggest my left kidney was inflamed but due to the amount of muscle tissue I carry as an athlete frequently doing back exercises such as deadlifts for now at least they did not feel any kind of surgery was necessary. The muscle acting well as a buffer to protect my internal organs. A call was put into the Orthopaedic surgeon, and I was booked in for the procedure the next morning.

As waiting on a procedure, it was standard policy regardless of the who why what preceding the harm done, that the inmate would remain in the care of the medical centre. I shrugged my shoulders at the news I was to stay the night, remaining silent.

I was permitted a shower and provided clean dry pyjamas. I had missed the kitchen in all the madness and requested a sandwich and a cup of tea. The tea was proper builders and much welcomed. The sandwich was something that stopped me being hungry. It was food kind of, although to this day I’ve never encountered cheese quite like prison cheese.

I was not restrained, not hand cuffed to the bed. Yes, in the UK if going to an outside hospital for treatment then cuffs are used in the transportation of the prisoner and sometimes in that hospital to safeguard the normal NHS medical staff but it's less common in a prison medical centre. You're locked up in a Cat A prison. Where the fuck are you going to go exactly? Try your hand at free climbing the seventy-foot-high walls in a wild bid for freedom? Perhaps it was different in a male Cat A prison, with so many lifers, raping a nurse would add what exactly to your sentence of "You are never leaving?!"

I went to sleep in the main room with three other women, none of which I knew. Eleven empty beds, four with convicted people only one of which I knew for a fact shouldn't fucking be here at all. Me. Most women getting locked up are placed into Closed or Open prisons. Cat B is closed, Cat C open. Closed means you are considered more of a threat to yourself and more importantly others. Your crimes committed, a bit raw and edgy for the general population to ever want you around. Committing violent deeds was just a part of your make up. Category C might be theft from the national grid, you know enjoying some free electricity or burglary, likely to feed drug addiction. Now, Cat A was closed times five. It was full of murderers, attempted murderers, human traffickers, gang members and those on severe terrorism charges. My personal favourite

however was women which were banged up with not only close ties to serial killers and rapists, child abusers but willing, proactive participants. Remember Rose and Fred West? The couple which kidnapped, raped and tortured at least twelve women in what became known as the house of horrors in Gloucester? Yup, she's here.

Whatever sleep I got was fitful and my dreams invaded with flight or fight scenes so real, I woke up at 3am my body shaking, hair soaked in sweat. The following morning, I had the procedure done to reset my fractured arm and was taken to my cell in the solitary confinement punishment block.

Officer Fairweather had walked with me from the medical centre to my temporary home. A tall, ruggedly handsome man which must have gotten more wolf whistles and crude "fuck me officer come on, you know you want to" from the women in here than he was ever trained to expect. A bunch of horny women prone to violent outbursts and unpredictable behaviour? Perhaps to some men this would be an environment they would pay dearly to spend their days in. I got the impression Fairweather was not enjoying working here at all. Perhaps he was made redundant and just took this job to get by? Plenty end up as prison officers by chance rather than choice. How many of your friends at school told you, "When I grow up, I want to work as a corrections officer in a prison."

It was a typically British, grey autumn day. Mild with high blustery winds, the clouds darkening, heavy with moisture. It took about five minutes to walk to the block. I looked around me at this environment I was to call home for the next three years.

“Out in 18 months to two years on good behaviour, Angelique” my Barrister had advised me after being sentenced.

“Not much beauty here Santoro.” Fairweather said.

“None whatsoever” I replied, looking up to the seventy-foot-high walls, topped with barbed wire. Autumn had done its job well. Any leaves the trees had, were now scattered to the ground, damp and limp due to the absence of a decent frost. It was late October, too early for any winter beauty to be enjoyed. I wasn’t convinced four inches of pure white, virgin snow could make this hell hole attractive to look upon. The prison itself was made up of five separate wings or buildings spanning out from the main reception area. The largest part of the prison, the original building, stood tall and imposing but it wasn’t its height that made you take a breath but rather the large blocks of local stone stacked one upon the other, up and up until it met the lead roof. Over three hundred years of misery held tight within its walls. It was as if the structure itself had been built to crush any thoughts of freedom, of a life existing

before you were incarcerated. You belonged to this place now.

Solitary confinement took place in a small version of this main building. Dark grey blocks of stone covered in green moss with a modern-day steel sliding door to pass through to reach the cells.

Fairweather stopped by the door, took his gloves off and lifted his left index finger to the scanner situated within a stone block. He held his finger there until a red light over the door turned green and the intercom had made a loud buzzing sound.

We walked silently to cell 2. Cell one was occupied but with who and for what alleged wrongdoing, I couldn't tell you. Fairweather entered a code on the keypad outside the cell and the steel door slid opened. In my head I was expecting the more traditional heavy door, groaning and moaning when opened or shut. This was significantly higher tech and opened almost silently other than a gentle whooshing noise.

I was lead inside. A familiar setting to my own cell but even more basic. Metal toilet and sink to the left as one enters, to the right a concrete slab for a bed covered with a thin mattress, pillow and a white sheet alongside it, two charcoal grey blankets. There were no books, no bookshelf even if

there had been. No desk and chair to sit and write or draw. No materials in which to do so if there had been. No Television. Nothing.

“What am I supposed to do in here?” I asked, looking blankly at Fairweather.

“Think. Contemplate what put you in here and what not to do to end up in here again.” He said.

“Oh, right yeah” I scoffed. “Next time I’ll just get battered and die rather than defend myself.”

Fairweather dug his hands into his trouser pockets and looked like he was going to speak but remained silent.

“What about those other women? Why aren’t they in solitary?”

“It was decided it wouldn’t be a good idea to put all four of you in here. Walls are thick but not so much you wouldn’t hear shouting.”

“I wouldn’t hear death threats, you mean.” I said, shaking my head. “Nice. That’s just perfect officer. I get punished. They get nothing.”

“They’re in twenty-four hour lock up, no exercise yard, all privileges removed. No TV, no Internet, no nothing.” He

stated.

It had reached that point where it just became obvious he had other places to be, other duties to carry out.

He explained when meals would be provided, when I might be able to shower and that he'd return later with my basic toiletries such as toothbrush and deodorant. I asked him to bring the red hoodie and black woollen hat both to be found on my bed. He said he would, then turned around and exited the cell. The door whooshing as it shut and I was left alone.

Whilst in the medical centre, I had stolen Sharon's stress ball. Well, I don't know if it was hers or one of her colleagues. It was a vibrant, deep blue colour which I found oddly comforting with plenty of bounce in it. The 1967 film, Cool Hand Luke with the gorgeous Paul Newman was a favourite of my father, Giovanni. Being daddy's girl, meant whatever he liked, I wanted to be a part of. Hence my love of certain bands and genres of music, I suspect. I wanted to like whatever he liked and for much of the time it was an effortless transfer of knowledge.

The whole point of the film, my father taught me was the absurdity of man to want control over another. We are born equal, born free or fucking should be right? Defiance against your oppressor was the message I took away. But also, being a child had meant I took other things away too,

such as the powerful image of Newman sat on the floor of his cell, throwing a ball against the wall and catching it in one hand then repeating time and again.

“No time like the present” I muttered out loud to myself, placing the pillow on the floor and settling down on it, leaning my back up against the steel door. Aiming so that the ball hit the floor first, then up the far wall before arching its way back to my hand. Count to one hundred. Seeing if you can throw and catch perfectly each time using just my left hand became the game. My right arm throbbing painfully away in its cast to my side., then switching to my right hand.

Whilst playing my copy the Hollywood star game, a chaotic mind does what it does best. Playing all kinds of fuckery with itself. Much in the same way one may ache significantly more two days after intense or prolonged exercise compared with the very next day, the mind seemingly requires time to process. Trauma such as being attacked may ultimately present itself as PTSD, as with Gareth. I didn't suffer fear that day, rather a wild fury at being attacked for no good reason and now all I felt was an overwhelming desire for vengeance. I was sick to death of being judged at this point in my life. Judge, fucking jury, journalists, social media influencers which are arguably the biggest, most pointless bunch of wankers to ever walk the

earth, all expressed who Angelique was or must be. Like you fucks ever met me or knew how I thought or felt about anything.

How am I going to survive three years here? Already, I was thinking three years not 18 months out on good behaviour. How could I possibly believe at this point, just a week after arriving at HMP Hardwick that I was a likely candidate for early release? Whilst I may at times have been described as a hugely optimistic and positive person, I believe I stopped short of fucking delusional.

Having bored of the Hollywood game, I decided it was time for another activity to take up some time until the excessively bright lights would be turned off and darkness would take over. Perhaps I might find some peace, some sleep. The new game involved hopping on one foot from one side of the cell to the other, then jumping ten times on the spot, then as swiftly as you could release the stress ball as if a basketball allocating myself one point for the ball hitting inside the sink and two if the ball somehow ended up resting in the bottom of it.

I excelled at the hopping about part but was rubbish at the ball throwing and got increasingly angry and my inability to throw the stupid ball where my eyes were wanting it to go. I'm left-handed so it's not like I could use the excuse that my good arm is all fucked up. I wondered if this is what

golf is like. People spending a lot of money to buy the clubs and the daft clothing, the membership to the club itself, then by and large not successfully get that tiny white ball into the little hole as you had envisaged you would.

I looked at my watch. Two hours had passed since Fairweather had left me alone. Two hours only!? I somehow had it in my mind, I had killed far more time than this. Reality hit me like a tonne of bricks, and I stumbled to the bed, suddenly feeling disorientated and exhausted in equal measure.

Two hours down and one hundred and sixty six to go.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## *MADDY REIGN*

Maddy Reign grew up on the dusty streets of Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia. Youngest of five, her father Marcus had worked at the Zinc mine as did his father before him. Her mother, Jessica was a part time home maker and full-time drinker.

It might have been stated by some in the town, that the children pretty much did as they pleased. If not at first certainly by child number four it had become a somewhat unruly house. Marcus wasn't shy when it came to drinking either and could have easily made it to supervisor or manager even after all the years he had put into that mine, but he wasn't interested.

“Easy life.” He would say, kicking back enjoying another cold beer, listening to his cherished vinyl records on that old vintage record player. He'd spent some money buying new speakers, when in a furious argument that previous

winter with Jessica, he'd put his foot through a speaker, kicking it in a fit of rage.

“How much Eddie!?” Marcus exclaimed.

“I said three hundred bucks and that's mate's rates to you, that is.”

“Mates rates, eh? Jesus. I'd hate to know what you'd charge me if we weren't friends.”

“Klipsche Heresy speakers are the perfect marriage to your vintage Hi-Fi. You'll see.” Eddie said, casually looking over the new stock in his pawn shop.

Marcus stood there, looking like he was thinking about the cost but he wasn't. He was already imagining them on the wall, away from excitable feet at the perfect height to be enjoyed, sitting in his old leather easy boy. He was more used to haggling for cash, over items he'd brought in, rather than being in a buying position.

“What do you think Maddy? You think he's on the up and up or you think he's tasking the piss outta us?” Marcus smiled lovingly at his seven-year-old daughter who was sat behind a drum kit, sticks in hand, about to launch an attack on the poor skins.

“I think he's a player daddy.” Maddy grinned, “It's his job,

he can't help himself. It's a deal at two hundred and eighty dollars and you're taking me out to the blue parrot café for burger, fries and a banana milkshake!"

Both men laughed and smiled at one another and shook hands without another word said. Eddie had been best man at Marcus's wedding to Jessica and had felt honoured to be asked to be their only daughter's godfather.

Maddy was the apple of her father's eye and he'd always find her when a song he really loved came on the radio. He'd stop whatever he was doing, turn the volume right up and move around the kitchen, through into the living room and out into the back yard, with Maddy screaming with delight, clinging to his neck as he spun them around and around.

"Faster daddy, faster!" she'd cry out, as her father spun in ever faster circles until eventually, he'd get dizzy and the two of them would connect with terra ferma, sometimes a bit harder than was ideal. Maddy would never complain or cry. She wasn't like most kids. She was always covered in cuts and bruises, her skin in various stages of recovery with yellow-brown scabs.

Marcus would always gently kiss them better, kissing the top of her head and smile down upon her. Maddy would look up at her father and lie "It's ok daddy. They don't hurt

all at.”

Maddy first had her heart broken at ten years old, when her father suddenly died of a heart attack at just forty-two. Being the youngest of five never had any real relevance to her until after the funeral. Then, the reality of not only being the youngest but also the only girl hit home.

The funeral itself had been a major event in that year’s calendar. When a population just shy of eighteen thousand loses one of its own, another miner whose life is cut short everyone knows about it. Broken Hill was Australia’s oldest mining town, stepped in history reaching back to the colonial days of the 1880’s. The line of Lode miners’ memorial, stood proudly on a high ridge looking over the town. Celebrating the work, the lives of some eight hundred miners which had lost their lives in the mines. Marcus wouldn’t have his name on a glass plaque here as he didn’t die at work, but the miners always feel the loss of one of their own. There’s a deep connection, a bond between men, between families which do a dangerous job. Not unlike the brave fishermen which take to the icy Baltic Sea to catch crab.

The community felt sorry for the family that much was clear to Maddy. She hated it. Pity. Even the collection after the service had made Maddy angry. Pity the poor or pity the kids losing their father. It mattered not how sincere they

were, she hated everything in that moment. The clear blue sky, the bird song in the churchyard. How could the birds be singing on a day like today. A perfect sunny day to say goodbye to the one person which made everything ok.

She recalled being back at home, everything silent. Too quiet, until her mother broke the silence.

“Two thousand dollars kids. That’s what this fucking town thinks of us. Two thousand dollars!” Jessica sat at the kitchen table in a dark vicious mood, filling up her empty glass again with vodka. Maddy had no idea what the collection at the end of the service was meant to bring but two thousand dollars sounded an awful lot of money to a ten-year-old.

The funeral costs themselves had been covered by the mining company, Rino Kabb. The death in service payout was four times Marcus’s salary as was standard practise at that time. Sounds a lot but when a single mother has five kids to feed, a tired old house to maintain it goes surprisingly fast. Had her mother worked part time and not drank full time, it’s possible Maddy’s remaining childhood might have been better.

Her four brothers aged fourteen, sixteen (twins) and eighteen were pretty good to her other than Hayden, the youngest of the boys. Hayden, like her spent the most time

around their mother, as such got knocked about as much as Maddy. Shit runs downhill, right? He felt entitled to dish it out as badly as he got it, so Maddy got beat upon by both her mother and youngest brother. Hayden was a shit. He would have been one without their mother being the way she was, Maddy thought. Darryl turned eighteen and was out of there as if the house was on fire. Moved in with his older girlfriend, Jane who turned out to be pregnant soon after. Darryl was training to become a mechanic. He'd seen enough trauma, work related sickness and injury, loss of limb and Christ knows what else to know for damn sure he wasn't following in his father's footsteps into the mines.

The twins, Gary and Ric both loved Maddy. Ric was close to his sister and did his best to look out for her in and out of the house. That said, neither twin was keen to get into it with their mother when she'd had a few drinks. Jessica would have fought a pack of Dingoes in one of her furious rages and quite possibly won. Ric had a passion for UFC. He taught Maddy various moves and arm locks, choke holds and how to punch. This was done in secrecy, whenever their mother was out shopping or passed out drunk on the back porch or on a date with some random, local towny loser.

Whatever Ric was unable to teach her, Maddy worked out alone. She would study all the fights she could gain access

to, fascinated by this modern-day gladiatorial arena known simply as the octagon. An eight-sided cage allowing the spectators to feel part of the spectacle. Men were more often shown than women on the television or internet. This didn't bother Maddy at all. They were faster and hit harder, it made sense to study the best in her mind. "When I'm older, people will pay to see me fight." She would tell herself looking as tough and mean as she could in her bedroom mirror.

Ric paid for the mixed martial arts lessons at the club from his allowance. Maddy didn't get an allowance. Maddy never got an allowance even when she was older. Jessica wanted her around, wanted her punching bag within easy reach. At school, when she was twelve years old, Maddy's class had been given *Pride and Prejudice* to read. Set in Victorian England, the beauty of the English countryside as described by Jane Austin was delightful escapism from the arid desert she called home. The red dust covered everything, even on the short walk from the bus stop to home, if the wind was strong that day. You learnt to walk with your head down, one hand up shielding your eyes from the dust flying all around you. Other than how beautiful England appeared to be, one other thing stayed with Maddy well after the final page had been turned. One must never end up an unmarried spinster. To end up alone and scared, caring for an unlovable mother in her old age was not to be

her final destiny. An unlikely book one might think to motivate a child to become a global fighting sensation but that's precisely what happened.

Maddy's Fourteenth birthday was rapidly approaching. She'd always dreaded her birthday, as it just made her think more about her father and how life had been since he died. Four years had been and gone yet the pain of her loss remained as raw, as acute as the day they buried him. What was it people were forever telling her? "Time is a great healer Maddy, you'll see." How she wanted to yell back in their faces, "What do you even know about it!? Did you lose your dad when ten years old? Well? Did you!?"

Everything upset Maddy that week. The kind smile of the cashier in the supermarket, whilst she was packing away the goods into large brown paper bags whilst her mother paid the bill. It was the exact same "poor you" smile everyone had given her for the past few years, often accompanied by a gentle lean of the head to one side. Why did such a simple gesture of kindness, bring such anger within her? Was it because these well-meaning folk just didn't get it that their looks of pity stopped her from progressing?

"Why the fuck can't you all just ignore me as you do all the other stupid teenage girls in Broken Hill" she would think. Not like they cared about her before Marcus had died. Maddy was listening to Eminem playing "Whatever you say

I am” staring blankly back at the cashier, hoping this act of utter disinterest would discourage any form of engagement. Perhaps, they’d get the message and just stop.

“Why can’t you just be normal to people, making nice” her mother said, once back in the car park loading the groceries.

“Why do I need to engage every idiot in this town?” Maddy mumbled.

The slap hit Maddy over her right ear and made her head spin. You just never knew which hand was going to be raised against you and how it was going to strike you. Jesscia was ambidextrous and as clever at slapping in a wide variety of ways as she was keen of eye, making sure no one was going to see her do it in public.

Maddy had one friend at school, called Charlene. Well, it was a friendship of sorts she supposed. Charlene was that weird, loner, goth kid but not doing it for show right? Not part of a gang of seven walking about head down, looking like the world was just too heavy for them. That’s nothing more than a bunch of clueless teenagers, seeking acceptance from others, all individually the same, thought Maddy. “Oh, look at me, I’m goth.”

Wankers.

Charlene was different. Whether she was a loner by choice

or by some genetic predisposition to being anti-social, Maddy didn't know and moreover, really didn't care. She had decided shortly after her father's funeral that this weird kid would be the least likely to leave her alone.

"The twins are throwing you a surprise birthday party at the Blue Parrot café." Charlene said, as they unwrapped their packed lunch, sat on a bench in the local park, a couple hundred metres away from the school playing fields.

"Fuck's sake" Maddy groaned.

"I'll be there, of course."

"Amazing. A party where the birthday girl has one friend turn up."

"They'll be other people coming, friends of your brothers and stuff." Charlene said, with her mouth full of a cheese and salad sandwich.

Maddy looked expressionless at her friend. "Why are you smiling?"

"What? I can't enjoy your suffering now and then?" Charlene smirked and dug her friend in the ribs.

"Yours won't be any better, I probably won't even show up!"

“Fuck all chance of me having one. My mum knows better. She knows there’s no one to invite. Can’t have a birthday party without friends.”

“Aren’t I your friend?”

“I tolerate you and you tolerate me. Together we get to slag off the world and all the fucking arseholes living in it. There is no better relationship.” Charlene said, burping up her sandwich.

“Phew! Onion breath” Maddie cried.

“Just for you kiddo.” Charlene grinned. “Wanna bunk off school this afternoon?”

“I’ll get whacked.”

“You get fucking whacked anyways.”

The girls nodded and left the park heading towards Argent Street and the arcades.

The twins had asked Joselyn, the owner of the Blue Parrot café if it would be ok to have a small area put aside for a birthday get together. Gary and Rick thought this sounded more grown up and proper than a birthday party. Maddy was turning fourteen not seven, plus they were pretty sure both the number attending and the atmosphere itself made a

party seem somewhat ambitious.

The day arrived and the twins arrived early with their girlfriends or friends they hung out with which just happened to be girls, to put up balloons. They were in the year above Maddy, and she had no strong opinions about either of them. They were smart enough to know pissing her off was not a smart move to achieving a closer relationship with her two good looking brothers. It wasn't like they didn't have other options. Something about twins, eh? Twin girls, twin boys. Doesn't matter. It's alluring. As with Maddy, the boys were blonde, blue eyed and had prominent high cheekbones.

Charlene arrived an hour later with her younger sister in tow. Sharon was the total opposite of her elder sister. Loud, precocious "notice me" and likely future head cheerleader at the high school. Even though only eleven years old, most of the town saw where she'd be at sixteen. Guess that's what fitting in looked like, Maddy thought. Charlene's mother was also there, mainly because they lived way out in the desert a good drive from Broken Hill. Without a truck to give you a ride back you'd be stuck a while. Buses didn't run often in that direction. Joy didn't drink at all. She'd grown up around folk drinking too often, too much and never saw a single benefit from doing so. You didn't find answers to life's challenges staring disappointedly at the

bottom of another bottle, that much she did know. Regardless, being a single mother to two girls and holding down a job, it's not like she had much opportunity to indulge if she had enjoyed a drink or three.

Joy was a kind woman. Her long black hair flowed gracefully down her back, complementing her tall, slender figure. She looked as good in jeans now at forty-five than she did in her twenties. Joy told the twins they'd done a mighty fine job with the decorations, and they beamed back at her. Balloons in silver, purple, pink and red adorned the walls around the two booths Joselyn had kindly put aside for them. Plain balloons of course. Maddy was grown now. No number fourteen on them. The twins knew their sister right enough.

Maddy had turned up alone a little after everyone else. Not because she was being cool or planned it that way. Her mother had said to meet her outside Chrissie's nail saloon over on West Street and they'd walk together to the mall, see about picking her up a jacket or whatever she wanted for her birthday. Maddy waited. Then she waited some more. After some forty minutes stood outside the saloon, she'd had enough.

"Bitch" she muttered under her breath as she dug her hands deeper into her jean pockets and walked at pace down the sidewalk, in the direction of the Blue Parrot café. What was

worse than a surprise birthday party? Taking yourself to it alone. Pretty disappointing for the twins and beyond embarrassing for Maddy.

“Word got out” Maddy said, as the twins approached her and gave her a loving hug. She just stood there, arms by her sides wishing the ground would just open up and swallow her whole. Joselyn just handed her a banana milkshake and led her over to the jukebox. That polished metallic jukebox she’d stood at so many times with her father, deciding the perfect three or four tracks to be played and in what order.

It was over an hour after Maddy arrived that Jessica made her entrance. She’d leant so heavily on the door that it had swung open, hitting the wall behind and the little bell on top had shrieked. Semi composing herself, she’d run her hand through her hair as she stumbled across the dinner’s floor towards Maddy.

“Happy birthday Maddy” she slurred, throwing her arms around her as Maddy stood motionless, dying of embarrassment.

Beds are burning by Midnight Oil was playing on the jukebox.

“Turn this Abi loving shit off!” She yelled across to Jocelyn, before turning her attention back to her daughter.

“I didn’t raise no Abi loving kids, now did I?!” Jessica snarled. “Well? Did I?!”

“You didn’t much raise me at all!” Maddy screamed. “Dad did!”

“Why, you ungrateful little bitch” Jessica said, reaching past Charlene who had tried to intervene to grab at her daughter’s hair, yanking her so hard that Maddy cried out in pain.

Ric took three long strides to where his mother and sister were standing in the middle of the dinner, but he was too late. Maddy winced following another painful yank of her hair, leant in closer to her mother, twisted her body and unleashed a right upper cut Mike Tyson would have happily claimed his own. Her fist connecting under Jessica’s chin, immediately causing her legs to buckle. She stumbled briefly before losing her balance entirely, landing face down on the polished black and white tiles.

Maddy looked around at the stunned faces, their open mouths and wide eyes and did the only thing she could.

She ran.