

Brian Hughes thinks he has created the perfect life, but one morning it all goes straight to hell. His fiancé is dead and he's the obvious suspect. His only asset is a knack for doing whatever it takes to survive.

Dead Dreams

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DEAD DREAMS



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Chapter 1

I looked at the sun setting in the western sky and considered jumping from the balcony that I was standing on; it would be the appropriate ending to a tragic day. I gazed mesmerized at the beautiful sunset and climbed onto the balcony's ledge.

As I looked down at the street from my view on the twentieth floor, my heart caught in my throat. If I was going to kill myself, I couldn't do it this way. Heights had always given me problems. Since childhood, I couldn't so much as look down from the top bunk of a bunk bed without getting dizzy. I carefully climbed off the ledge and walked over to the half-empty bottle of bourbon lying on the chair next to the sliding glass door. As I picked up my glass from the table, I noticed how badly my hands were shaking. I still hadn't caught my breath as I poured a stiff drink. I swished the whiskey around in my glass, and an unbidden image of Alicia found its way into my mind.

It had been a perfect night, eerily similar to this one. We had spent the day sailing on the ocean, and were lying on a deserted beach making love. When I looked down into her eyes it was like I could see into her soul. She was completely vulnerable and for the first time in my life I knew what it meant to be in love. From that day forward, any time our eyes met my knees would tremble. It could be something as simple as asking me to wash the dishes, or telling me that someone was on the phone. She would give me a certain look, and I would automatically be transported back to that night on the beach.

I shuddered at the memory and quickly swallowed my drink. It burned its way down my throat and into the empty hole in my chest where my heart had been. I felt fairly certain nothing was there now. I had sacrificed my heart along with my soul. Alicia was gone. Nothing I could do would change the facts. She was dead, and I had killed her.

My name is Brian Hughes, and up until this morning I've lived a perfectly normal life. Well, maybe it hasn't been completely normal,

but if you asked a sociopathic killer about his life, he would probably tell you it was ordinary. He would say that there are times when life gets completely out of hand and the only way to get things back in order is to *act*. He would insist that you are the one who is crazy. After all, the impulses he has are the same as your own. The only difference is that he does the very thing you are afraid to do.

The day I killed Alicia started off in very ordinary fashion. My alarm went off at 6:30 and I was awakened to the smell of coffee brewing. Alicia and I had moved in together nine months earlier, and every day since then I could count on coffee being made when I woke up. Alicia was a notoriously early riser. In the beginning, that had been a major source of irritation. I was never a morning person and her monotonously cheery attitude early in the morning always set me off. It wasn't so much her attitude as it was her expectation that I be happy, too. She soon learned there was no hope of converting me, and went about trying to make my mornings as pleasant as possible.

I rolled out of bed and turned off my alarm. Alicia and I had drunk two bottles of red wine the night before and my body reminded me of what happens when I drink more than a glass or two. The consequences for drinking a bottle of wine were now considerably higher than they had been ten years earlier. I staggered to the bathroom and turned on the water in the sink. I stuck as much of my head under the faucet as I could. The cold water felt like a slap in the face, and I swallowed some of it the wrong way as I tried to catch my breath. I sputtered and coughed while I blinked the water from my eyes. I grabbed a towel and was wiping my face when I heard the bathroom door slam shut. Startled, I looked up into the mirror and saw Alicia was standing in the doorway. The first thing I thought any time I saw her was that she was breathtaking; long, dark hair, eyes the color of Dutch chocolate, and a body like Venus.

"Brian, we have to talk," she said, her sensual lower lip in its customary pout.

"Can it wait until we get in the car?"

"No, it can't wait," she said, a little urgency in her voice.

"Fine," I sighed, throwing the towel over the door and walking into the kitchen. It wasn't until I started pouring my coffee that I

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noticed she was still standing in the bathroom doorway. “Hey, what’s wrong?” I asked.

She walked into the kitchen slowly. “You know I care about you,” she began, and I felt a knot start to form in my stomach. She paused, as if searching for the right words. “You’re the only man I can picture growing old with. It’s just, well; I’m not in love with you any more. I think we need to spend some time apart.”

I stood in shocked silence. It felt like everything was going in slow motion, but fast-forward at the same time. “I don’t know what to say,” I said finally. I tried to look into her eyes, but she refused to look up from the floor.

“I’ll have my stuff packed up and I’ll be out of here by the time you get back from your trip,” she told me.

The bank I worked for had acquired a bank in Milwaukee, and I was scheduled to fly out to meet with the board of directors at 4 p.m. that day. “Is that the reason?” I asked. “Is it my travel schedule?”

She finally looked up. “I don’t know. I guess maybe that’s part of it. We’ve just been drifting apart lately. I need something more. I want to see things, experience things. I’m too young for this kind of relationship. I want to have some fun.”

It finally dawned on me. “There’s another guy,” I said, more as a statement than a question.

She hesitated. “I wouldn’t break up with you just to be with another guy.”

“I can’t believe this, Alicia,” I said. “You’re leaving me for someone else?”

“You know it’s not like that. It’s just that I know I wouldn’t feel the way I do about Mark if things were right between us.”

“Mark? Mark who?” I paused, and then it dawned on me.

“You mean that little piece-of-shit janitor?” I asked.

She looked out the window without saying anything.

“My God, Alicia, the little punk who wears his pants halfway down his ass?”

“You don’t know him,” she said. “He’s sensitive.”

“I don’t know him? I’ve seen him practically every day for the last two years, so I don’t think I could know him much better. He’s a

little punk.”

“Well, at least he listens to me.”

“Listens to you? No, sweetheart,” I said. “I got news for you. He isn’t listening to you. He’s just too stoned to move. You know what his nickname is at work?”

She shook her head. “It’s Bernie, like the guy from the movie ‘Weekend At Bernie’s,’” I said. “He sits there with the same expression on his face all the time. Sometimes I stick a mirror under his nose to make sure he’s still alive.”

“He thinks I’m smart,” she said, a little edge to her voice.

“Wouldn’t you say that proves my point?”

She slapped me across the face. “Fuck you!”

As she turned and walked away, I quickly followed after her.

“That came out wrong,” I said, trying to think of something that would keep her from walking out the door. “Can’t we talk about this? I’m in love with you.”

She stopped walking, but didn’t turn around. “Don’t you get it, Brian? It’s over. Just give it up.”

I felt the anger build inside me. “Last night we make love and you’re telling me how much you love me, and now you want me to just give it up?”

“You’re going to be late for work,” she said as she walked out onto the balcony.

I balled up my fists and started to go after her, but I made myself stop. Feeling numb, I turned, walked to the bathroom and got into the shower. As the water hit my body, I couldn’t feel whether it was hot or cold. The only thing I could feel was rage. My life was built on structure, and now things were spiraling out of control. I got out of the shower and was toweling off when I heard a door slam. I wrapped the towel around my waist and hurried down the stairs to the front door. Opening it, I ran quickly down the hall and to the elevator. Alicia was still waiting when I got there.

“Hold it for a second,” I said, out of breath. “There are some things we still need to sort out.” I was surprised how calm I sounded considering the rage that was burning inside me. “Come inside for a few minutes so we can talk about who gets what. It will save us a lot

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of time in the long run.”

She looked at me hesitantly. “Have I ever laid a hand on you before?” I asked.

“Okay,” she said, still sounding a little uncertain. “But the second you touch me, I’m out the door.”

I tried to do some breathing exercises to keep from hyperventilating as we walked back to the apartment. Every part of me wanted to grab and shake her until she returned to her senses. I had taken care of her for over a year, and this was the way she repaid me.

“Look, Brian. I’ve told you what I had to say,” she said with an air of finality. “I’m done talking to you about it.”

“I think I got the point, Alicia. But you and I have lived together for a year,” I said, sensing the condescension coming into my voice. “During that year, we’ve accumulated a lot of things.”

“You know I hate it when you use big words,” she said.

“Fine, Alicia” I said. “We got a lot of stuff.”

“Why do you always treat me like I’m stupid?”

“Are you listening to yourself?” I asked. “I’m sorry if it sounds like I’m talking down to you, but if you leave me for him, you’re just as stupid as he is.”

“I didn’t come back to be insulted,” she said as she stood to leave.

I decided to take a different approach. “Whatever you say,” I called after her. “I thought it would be better to split things up before I change the locks. I’ll have the super do it while I’m at work. Make sure to grab whatever it is you want now, because whatever’s left I’ll donate to the mission.”

She stopped. “You wouldn’t do that.”

“No? Wait and see.”

“I thought you would handle this maturely.”

“And I thought you were smart enough not to leave me for a janitor,” I said, getting to my feet and walking toward her. “Get whatever it is you want right now and I’ll take you to your mom’s. We can decide how to split up the rest of it when I get back from Milwaukee.”

I snapped my fingers. "Oh yeah, I almost forgot. I'm going to need the keys to the car I got you."

"No way," she protested. "That's my car."

"No, it's not. My name's on the title. Keys," I said, extending my hand.

She stared at me for a moment, and then reached into her purse. Taking her key chain out, she pulled a key off and handed it to me. "You're just proving I made the right decision."

I ignored her remark. "I'm going to get dressed. Get whatever you need and be ready in five minutes."

I walked into the bedroom and picked out my gray suit. It was my favorite, and I needed anything I could find to feel better about myself.

As I was getting dressed, it hit me. Alicia was leaving. There was nothing I could do to change her mind. She didn't want to be with me any more. I sat on the edge of the bed, feeling completely abandoned. I tried to cry, but for some reason the tears wouldn't flow. Taking a deep breath, I got up and willed myself to put on my clothes. It almost felt like my hands belonged to someone else. I tried to put on my tie, but my hands couldn't perform even the simplest function. Finally giving up, I looped it around my neck and walked out into the living room. Alicia was standing next to the couch.

"There's nothing here you want?"

"It's already in the trunk."

"I figure we can take your car," I said. "Give you one more chance to sit in it before I sell it."

"I don't care what you do with it," she said, all attitude. "I'm sick of the damn thing anyway."

"I'm sure Mark will let you borrow his moped if you need to go anywhere," I said. "You should enjoy cruising around on that. I'll bet if the two of you save for about two years, you'll have enough to afford a matching set."

"Just take me to my mom's."

"Speaking of your mom's, that's probably where the two of you will have to live," I said, pushing things a little. "I'm sure, though, that living with Mark will have its perks. Considering his line of

work, you'll never have to worry about running out of toilet paper or paper towels."

"Leave Mark out of it. This doesn't have anything to do with him. I'm breaking up with you because you're such an asshole," she said, turning. I could feel myself on the edge of losing control. There was no reasoning with her. My head felt like it was about to explode.

"Alicia, if you want to take some time to think, I'm fine with that," I said. "But this is a pretty big step. I don't want you to throw away our relationship without first doing some serious soul-searching."

"I've already thought about it," she said in a monotone voice. "I don't love you anymore."

"That's not what you said last night," I countered.

She turned, and looked at me with an expression that might have been considered satisfaction. "Remember when you went out of town last weekend?"

I didn't say anything. "Me and Mark spent the weekend together."

"Did you...?"

She nodded.

"Where did you go?" I asked, a numbing feeling coming over me.

She hesitated, and I knew the answer before she said it. "Our place."

"Our place?"

"Well, I live here, too," she said defensively.

"You fucked him on my bed," I said, feeling my blood start to chill. "A whore like you, I guess I shouldn't be too surprised. He leave his paycheck on the nightstand on his way out the door?"

She took two steps toward me and slapped me hard across the face. "Everything's about money for you, isn't it? Mark doesn't have shit, but at least he knows how to get the job done."

"Slut for him, whore for me, is that it?"

She gave me what might have been a smile. "If that's what you need to tell yourself."

"How much do I owe you?" I asked, taking my wallet from my

inside suit pocket. I looked through it and took out a few bills. “I think you were a little off your game last night, probably used it all up over the weekend. I figure fifty should do it.”

This time she spit on me. I tried to duck away as I put my wallet back in my pocket, but she spit on me again. I rose to my full height, and she took a small step backward. Alicia was tall; almost five-feet ten, but I still had her by six inches. I grabbed her around the ribcage with both hands and lifted her off the ground. There was a look of complete terror in her eyes as I held her at arms length, feet dangling, for a brief moment. She looked like she was about to say something as I flung her away. The stairs leading down to the foyer were only a few paces to my left. I’m not sure if I was throwing her in that direction or just trying to keep her from spitting on me anymore, but she went down the steps head-first. I heard a scream at the beginning, but by the time I could get to her she wasn’t making any sound. She was lying against the door with her head at an awkward angle. Her eyes were open, but she obviously couldn’t see me. I felt her neck for a pulse, but got nothing. She was dead.

I felt like I was out of my body as I thought about what would happen next. If I called the police, there was no doubt I’d go to jail for murder. People don’t just trip and break their neck falling down a set of stairs. My mind was like ice as I picked her up and carried her out the front door. The express elevator was only ten or so feet from the front door. It took what seemed like forever for it to reach my floor, and I had her in my arms as I carried her to the parking garage. Alicia’s Honda Civic was parked in the space right next to mine. I hit the remote to unlock the door and put her in. It took maybe three seconds to circle around to the driver’s side and start the car. I pulled out of the garage trying to think of places where I could run the car off the road without hitting a guardrail. There was a road about two miles away with a long drop-off that ran down to a small creek.

My tires were squealing as I pulled onto the main road. I ran a stop sign and a red light, and made a hard right onto Langley Drive. I looked down at my Rolex because every second was precious. It had been less than five minutes since Alicia tumbled down the stairs.

Everything seemed to be in slow motion as I sped up to about

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fifty-five miles an hour, and I had a feeling that can only be described as absolute clarity. There was a drop-off of about twenty feet into a cluster of trees, and I turned the wheel as hard as I could to the right. My seatbelt was fastened and I leaned into the steering wheel as the car went airborne. There was a jolt as my whole body lurched upward into the airbag. It must have knocked me unconscious, because when I opened my eyes there was a man pulling me out of the car and I could hear sirens in the distance. I looked over at the passenger seat, and Alicia was still there, her head pressed against the side of the door.

“What happened to my girlfriend?” I asked the man who was holding my arms.

He looked over at the woman who seemed to be with him. “The ambulance will be here in a minute and they’ll check you out.”

I pushed his arms away. “I asked about my girlfriend.” I repeated. “Is she okay?”

He hesitated for a few seconds. “Son, she’s dead,” he said finally. “If it’s any consolation, it looks like she died on impact.”

I sat down hard on the ground and covered my face with my arms. For the first time in my adult life, I started to cry. “I killed her,” I said over and over again.

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