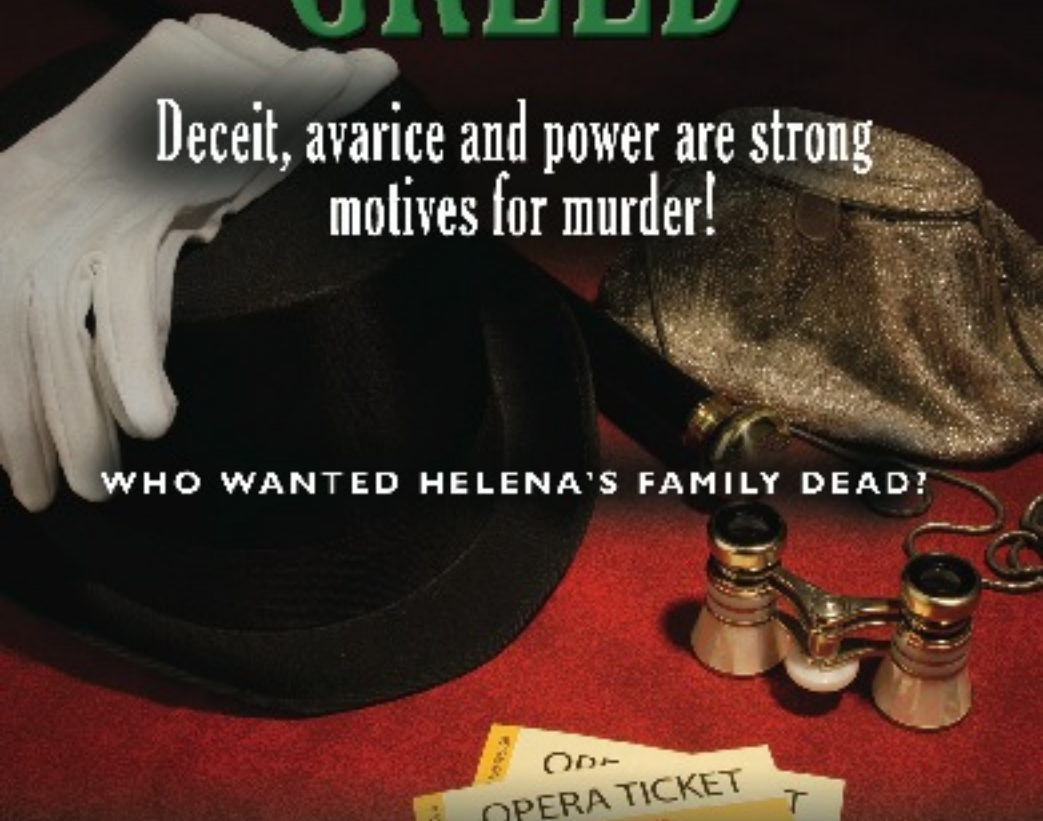


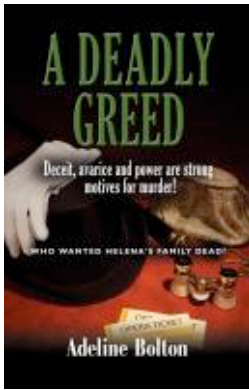
# A DEADLY GREED

Deceit, avarice and power are strong  
motives for murder!

WHO WANTED HELENA'S FAMILY DEAD?



Adeline Bolton



*Helena is delighted when she is asked to replace a soprano at short notice. Her debut as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* is successful. But her husband and son are in a fatal car crash caused by an unknown person while she's on stage. Putting her career on hold, she sets out to find the killer or killers, and uncovers a web of deceit, greed and hatred.*

## **A Deadly Greed**

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# **A DEADLY GREED**

**Adeline Bolton**

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## ONE

Applause erupted just as she had dreamed it would. Helena smiled. Glad the Thursday night performance was over. Being a last minute replacement was nerve-racking.

The curtain dropped. There were hugs and well wishes from the cast for stepping in so successfully. Figaro, Michael Basel, put an arm around her shoulders.

“Well done, darling, not everyone could have done such a tremendous job at such short notice.”

“Thank you.”

A stagehand clapped as she walked past.

Her Italian vocal teacher, Renata, was waiting in the wings; a tall woman with dark eyes and black hair dramatically streaked with grey.

“You were a brilliant, captivating Susanna,” she cried joyfully, every bit as excited as her pupil.

“I can’t believe I’ve just been Susanna, I really can’t. It was so wonderful, Renata, thank you.” She kissed the older woman on the cheek. Her grin was replaced by a frown. “But I didn’t see Silvio in the auditorium, did you?”

“No, my dear, I did not.”

“He said he’d come once he dropped Paolo off at John’s.”

“He could be waiting in the dressing room.”

Outside the makeshift dressing room a female Garda was standing. A chill ran up her spine.

“Mrs Helena Savioni?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve some bad news for you.” The Garda’s face was expressionless. “There’s been a car accident. I’m afraid your husband and son are in St Vincent’s Hospital in Dublin.”

It took a few seconds for the words to penetrate. An accident? It couldn’t be her Silvio and Paolo. “There must be

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some mistake. He was driving a red Toyota.” She looked around, expecting to see Silvio walk in.

“I’m sorry, Mrs Savioni, there’s no mistake.”

The compassionate gleam in her eyes chilled Helena to the bone. Not a mistake? Her brain grappled with the words before they finally penetrated.

“Oh my God! Are they hurt?”

“I believe their injuries are severe. You need to go to St Vincent’s Hospital immediately. Have you anyone with you?”

“Renata.” Fingers of ice gripped her heart. “How seriously are they injured? For God’s sake tell me!” she screamed.

“All I know is that they were severely injured in the crash and that you have to go to the hospital immediately.” The gleam of compassion deepened. “We’ve a patrol car outside.”

Renata put an arm around Helena’s shoulder. “My car will take us. Come, we will get our belongings and go.”

“The patrol car will escort you to Dublin.”

This isn’t happening, not her husband and baby. No, it’s all a mistake. It’s someone else’s husband and son. It couldn’t be Silvio and Paolo.

She didn’t know how she got to the silver Fiesta. Once they belted up, the car shot out of the car park behind the Garda car. As they left Wicklow town behind and entered the slip road for the N11, Helena cried, “Faster, Renata, faster. Please!”

“We have to stay behind the Garda car.” She touched Helena’s knee briefly. “Try not to think about it. They may not be injured; only taken to the hospital as a precaution.”

“Do you think so? Oh do you really think so?”

“Indeed, I do.”

“Oh God, I hope you’re right. You’re right. It’s probably only to check them out after the accident. I couldn’t bear... If

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anything's happened to them - if they're injured - I'll never forgive myself for accepting the offer to sing Susanna. Never."

"Shush, my dear, do not talk like that."

## TWO

She saw them as soon as she entered A&E. Her heart started to thump. John's grin was missing, her younger brother looked... her father's face deathly white, her mother's eyes anxious.

"Where are they?"

"Helena..." Her father put an arm around her. "It's bad. They didn't stand a chance. The car's a write-off."

"A write-off?" Helena pushed her father away so she could look into his sherry-brown eyes. "A write-off," she repeated. "What do you mean?"

She heard his swift intake of breath.

"They're dead, Helena. Silvio and Paolo are dead."

"Dead! They can't be dead. How can they be dead? I talked to them just before I left the house."

"Silvio and Paolo are dead, Helena."

Her mother patted her hair. "Darling, I'm so sorry."

They couldn't be dead, they.... How could they be dead? She broke free and grabbed a nurse by the arm. "Where's my husband...my baby?"

John moved swiftly and took her hand. "Sis, don't."

"Where's Silvio. I want my baby. Where's my baby? I want my baby! I want..."

She came to lying on a bed in a cubicle; her mother was stroking her hair.

"Are you feeling better?" a doctor asked compassionately.

Helena put a hand to her forehead. She shook her head from side to side to clear the mist from her brain. John and her parents were standing at the foot of the bed, ashen-faced.

"Am I dreaming?"

Bill's eyes didn't waver. "No, you're not."

"Where are they? I want... to see them."



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The doctor stared at her for a moment. “Are you sure you’re up to it?”

Nodding, she followed the doctor through endless corridors until they stopped outside a door with the word Mortuary written on it. Mortuary? No. Nooo!

Once inside, the doctor indicated chairs.

A Garda had followed them in. “Is this your husband and child, Mrs Savioni?” he asked gently.

Helena stared at the tiny body lying... It couldn’t be Paolo? Not her baby? She rushed forward. It looked like Paolo; no it didn’t. Oh, it... She picked him up and cradled him in her arms, touched his bruised forehead.

“Mama is here now, Paolo. Mama is here.” Her breath stopped in her throat. She grabbed her mother’s arm. “Look, his eyelids fluttered! He’s all right. Look!”

Bill’s face was sickly green. “They didn’t, Helena,” he said, quietly but firmly.

“They did, didn’t they, Mum?” She put her ear to his mouth. “He’s breathing!” He had to breathe. He had to breathe. “Come on, Paolo,” she cried, “breathe for Mama.” She put the back of her hand to his mouth, “Breathe, Paolo, breathe,” she shouted. “Paolo, you must breathe!” she screamed. Make him breathe. Please make him breathe. Please, please, please...

The sheet fell away from Paolo’s body.

“Oh my God!” her mother exclaimed.

Helena screamed. She couldn’t stop screaming as she stared at his small broken body.

Her father took Paolo from her, put him back on the bed and pulled the sheet up to his chin.

“Daddy... Mum... My baby’s...” She patted Paolo’s bruised face and then pushed his hair back from his forehead. “There now, Paolo, there.” Tears spilled down her cheeks and splashed

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onto his face. She wiped them away with the corner of the sheet. “Mama didn’t mean to wet you,” she whispered.

Her mother, Maura Gahan, gathered her close and patted her head.

John moved forward, awkwardly, clumsily, put a hand on her shoulder. “Sis,” he said, hoarsely. “Why don’t we go outside – get some tea or something.”

“He’s my baby, John, my baby...”

Helena’s breath caught in her throat. Silvio was on the other bed. Going to him, she grabbed his shoulders.

“You killed our baby. You killed our baby. You killed...” She collapsed on top of him and cried, “I can’t live without you, Silvio! I can’t. I can’t. I don’t want to.”

Someone was pulling her away, she fought them. Bill’s grip was firm. He took a white handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the tears from her cheeks. Helena opened her eyes, stared at Silvio’s bandaged head, the swollen left eye, the terrible gash on his right cheek. With the tip of her index finger she touched the torn and bruised cheek.

“Oh, Silvio, please don’t die on me, please. I love you so much. I can’t live without you. Wake up, Silvio, please wake up,” she begged.

She broke free and took his face between her hands, kissed his forehead, cupped the back of his bandaged head with her left hand. It was... mushy. A black cloud overwhelmed her.

There was a knock on the door. It sounded overloud in the quiet room and startled everyone. Her father made a visible effort to pull himself together; he walked over and opened it. John’s partner, Lorna, stood outside.

The thin, elfin face of the twenty-three year old art graduate was white and pinched. She pushed back her long, straight red

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hair behind her ears with a hand that was shaking before entering the room.

“Oh, Helena, I don’t know what to say...”

Lorna moved nearer, as if to embrace her, but Helena cringed away. There was nothing anyone could say, do... to change...

“Let’s go home,” Bill said to no one in particular.

Helena shook her head. “I’m not going; I want to stay with Silvio, with my baby.”

“Daddy is right, darling. We need to go home.”

Tears filled John’s eyes as he stared at his sister.

Bill took Helena’s hand. “There’s nothing we can do here, pet.”

“You go. I’m not leaving Silvio and Paolo.”

She hadn’t heard the door open again. It was Renata.

“My dear,” was all she said, but with such compassion Helena started to cry again. Renata put a motherly arm around her and patted her back gently, as if she was soothing a child. “I did not want to intrude earlier, but your father is right, it is time to leave this place.”

“Oh, Renata, what am I going to do without Silvio? Without my baby ...”

“There, there, my dear, let us go.”

She allowed Renata to steer her from the room, through the long, long corridors; to the entrance; to the car park; to her father’s black Lexus.

### THREE

The dawn light bathed the four-bedroom red brick in an unearthly glow as her father opened the navy hall door and shepherded them into the black oak kitchen with dramatic touches of white. Even though the kitchen was warm, Helena shivered. She couldn't stop shivering.

Renata took charge. "Sit down everyone. I will put the kettle on."

"Not for me," Helena said, quickly. She would choke if she tried to swallow anything.

Her father pushed her gently down onto a chair and her mother onto another. "Something warm would do us all good. Try to drink something," he pleaded, when Helena shook her head.

"I couldn't..." She stared at his white face, changed her mind. "Coffee, please."

"I'll phone Darren and Izzy," John offered, needing action - any action - to break out of the nightmarish atmosphere. "I'll use your office, Dad." He left, using the kitchen entrance to the garage-converted office.

"I'll come with you," said Lorna, and followed him out.

Renata filled the kettle and switched it on. Took out cups and saucers and set them on the black oak table. She turned to Bill and Maura, "Would you like something to eat?"

Maura shook her head.

"No. Yes. I don't know," Bill said, in an unusually indecisive voice.

The kettle boiled. She put a hot cup of instant decaf in front of her pupil. "Your father is right, my dear, you need something warm to drink."

Helena raised the cup of hot coffee to her lips. It was sweet, too sweet. She put it back on the table.

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Maura Gahan picked up the cup and put it between her daughter's hands again, making sure her fingers were curled around its warmth before letting go.

"Darling, you need it."

Renata looked from Bill to Maura. "What about you both?" she asked in her accented English. "Would you prefer brandy?"

Bill, who was sitting opposite Helena, jumped to his feet. "No, but maybe Helena would?"

Why were they talking about coffee and brandy when Silvio and Paolo...?

Her father went to the drinks' cabinet in the sitting room and brought back a bottle of Hennessy. "John or Lorna might like a shot."

"You should take a small measure, Bill, Maura. You have had a terrible shock."

She opened a few units before finding glasses, poured a measure of brandy into two and handed one to Bill, the other to Maura. Bill picked it up and threw it back in one gulp.

Helena felt as if she was in the theatre watching a scene from an opera... a tragedy; but it wasn't an opera, it was a tragedy taking place in her parents' kitchen. Was it really only twenty-four hours ago she had received the call to replace the sick soprano? If only she hadn't agreed to play Susanna ... If only she hadn't accepted... none of this would have happened. The call from Wicklow Opera Society was just the break she had needed. *The Marriage of Figaro* was one of her favourites, she had studied it, knew it. Silvio had been thrilled for her. How terrible she'd never get to tell him how wonderful it was; never to kiss him again... or be kissed by him again.

What happened on the drive to John's? She didn't understand, couldn't understand. Silvio was such a careful driver, ridiculously so. They had often made a joke about how

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cautious he was; something she'd assumed stemmed from driving on the right-hand side of the road.

Her mother leaned across the black oak table and took the cup from her hands. "Why don't you go to bed, darling, lie down?"

She rose from the chair and climbed the stairs to the front bedroom she used to share with Izzy. She lay on the mattress and pulled the duvet up to her chin. A wave of exhaustion hit her. All she wanted to do was sleep; to sleep and never wake up again.

But she couldn't sleep. She tossed and turned as the image of their bodies lying in the mortuary kept flashing before her eyes. Paolo's twisted and broken like a rag doll's; the hollow at the back of Silvio's head where his skull should have been. This nightmare was hers, would always be hers, it would never go away. She started to scream, couldn't stop. The door burst open. Her parents cradled her in their arms until the screams subsided.

"Oh God!" She clutched her father's arm. "I keep seeing them lying there, alone, terribly injured. I wasn't there for them; I wasn't with them. Why wasn't I with them?"

"I know," he murmured soothingly. "I know."

"Oh, darling..." Tears flowed down her mother's cheeks.

"Why did it happen to me, to us? Why now when all the sacrifices we made were beginning to pay off? Silvio's hard work... he was starting to make a name for himself. Why Paolo? He's only a baby. I keep thinking I'm having a nightmare; that I'll wake up in our bed on Peter's Road."

"I don't know why, pet."

Her mother patted her hair. "Darling, nobody finds it easy to accept death, least of all sudden death. It's harder when a healthy adult or child is whipped away without any warning, harder to come to terms with. Paolo was your son, he was also

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our grandson.” Maura’s lips trembled with suppressed emotions.

“Whyyyy?”

No one answered. They stayed like that for a long time. In the distance, she heard the telephone ring, the sound of John’s voice.

He called out as he climbed the stairs, “Sis, it’s Izzy ringing back.”

Her big sister! She scrambled off the bed, noticed the relieved expression on her mother’s face. John handed her the cordless on the landing.

“Hello... “

“Oh, honey, I just got John’s message from the machine. Oh my God,” she stopped, incapable of continuing. “I don’t know what to say. To think...” There was another pause. “I’m coming home.”

“Izzy, what am I going to do?”

“Don’t think, honey, just don’t think. I’ll be with you as soon as possible. Harold is staying behind to look after the kids, so I’ve nothing to do except throw a few things into a bag. Are you still there?”

“What did you say?”

“What happened? Mum rang me about the call from Wicklow Opera Society. But I thought Silvio was travelling to Germany yesterday, and taking Paolo with him, or did I get it wrong? If he was supposed to be in Munich, what was he doing on the Enniskerry Road?” Izzy was gabbing to hide her shock, to fill the silence. “Wasn’t his mother meeting him in Munich... to babysit or something while he was conducting?”

It was a second or two before Helena’s brain unscrambled the words. “Yes, yes, but Silvio must have given the travel firm the wrong date. They had him booked on the flight leaving this morning, not yesterday morning; that’s why he was able to

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come to my debut. Oh, Izzy, I can't believe it. I can't believe this is happening to me." Tears rolled down her cheeks again. "I'm disintegrating, Izzy, falling apart."

"Oh, honey, I would, too, if it were me. But hold on, I'll be home soon, promise... Is Mum there? Can I speak to her?"

Her parents had joined her on the landing. Helena handed her mother the phone.

"Izzy wants to talk to you."

John took her hand. "Lorna made some lunch. She's in the kitchen. Come down when you're ready."

"I don't want..."

She couldn't face Lorna right now. She wanted to go home to Peter's Road. Lorna was nice, but it would be agony to see John and Lorna together, an unbearable reminder of... Don't think about it... It has to be a dream... How could you have a husband and child one minute and then the next...? She felt as if she was falling, falling into an abyss. Had to be a nightmare. Was she still asleep? She pinched her arm hard to see if she was awake, felt the pain.

Her mother handed the phone to Bill.

Helena looked at her. "Where's my bag?"

"It's in the hall, near the table. Why?" Maura asked, as she walked down the beige carpeted stairs behind her.

"I want the keys to my house."

Maura stopped in the middle of the stairs. "Darling, you're not going home? You can't go to that... house alone," she exclaimed, visibly shocked. After a quick look at her face, she said quickly, "I'll come with you."

"I want to go alone." At her mother's stunned look, she relented. "Come over later, with Daddy."

"You're not thinking of staying there?"



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“I don’t know, I don’t know. I just want to be on my own for a while.” She put a hand to her forehead. Half of her was missing and the other half was in agony.

John looked up from the bottom of the stairs. “What’s going on?”

“Your sister wants to go home.” Bill replied from behind them in a voice so unlike his own, his son frowned.

“Is that wise, Sis?”

“Wise? How do I know what’s wise,” she cried. “I just want to go home. Have things the way they were. I’ll walk, it isn’t far.”

“No need to, Sis, I’ll drive you.” His eyes shifted to his parents. “Why don’t you go upstairs and lie down, Dad, Mum, you’re both exhausted. Lorna will bring you up a tray.”

“Darling, if you really want to go, we’ll come with you.”

“No! I want to be alone.” Her mother’s lips trembled. At her shocked expression, she relented. “Just for now, Mum.”

John picked up her bag resting against the Victorian Burr walnut card table her parents used as a hall table.

“OK. Lorna,” he called over his shoulder as they left the house. “I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

John opened the passenger door of the black Lexus, threw Helena’s bag in the boot. He looked at Bill. “I won’t be long.”

## FOUR

Helena wouldn't let him come in. She waited until the car drove out of sight before opening the red hall door, shivered as she stepped into the small, dark hall. The house had a listening quality, she fancied, as she climbed the stairs. It was a dream. Paolo was playing in his room.

Turning the handle, she pushed the bedroom door open. It was empty, silent. Oh God, no! Noooo...

"Silvio, where are you? Paolo, Mama's home." He must be playing in the small sitting room. "Come on, Paolo, stop hiding, Mama's home."

The answering silence filled her with terror. Scared, she ran down the stairs, pushed open all the doors. The rooms were empty. It was real.

"Don't do this to me! Don't... I can't bear it. I can't..."

She came to lying on the kitchen floor. Sitting up, she leaned against the fridge. Sometime later, she climbed the stairs again and went into Paolo's bedroom.

The room had the appearance of hasty packing. Drawers were open; she touched the tiny underpants, pyjamas, socks. His toys were strewn on the pale blue carpet. Automatically, she bent down and picked them up one by one and threw them into the blue plastic bin. The train her parents had given him was on the small table near the window. When she pressed the start button, the train moved slowly out of the miniature railway station. Opening the wardrobe door, she stroked the tiny trousers, shirts and anoraks hanging on miniature hangers.

Picking up the little black boot lying on its side, she hurled it against the blue and white papered wall; ran back to the table, picked up the train engine and smashed it against the wall. With

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frenzied fingers she picked up the tracks, tore them violently apart and hurled them after the train.

“Silvio, how could you let this happen? How could you have been so careless? How could you leave me? How could you die on me just when everything was going right? You... our baby...” She flung everything not nailed down after the boot, train and tracks. “How dare you die on me! How dare you! How dare you!”

Who was making that terrible sound? It took her a minute to realise she was. One -eyed teddy was staring at her from the far corner. She went over and picked up the battered toy and hugged it to her breast. Her eyes skimmed the room. Was it only three years ago they had moved in here?

They had wanted a house with a garden when they knew Paolo was on the way. It was all they could afford and still save for their own. They had only decorated this room and their own bedroom because they hoped it was only a stopgap.

Their shared laughter as they painted and papered echoed in her brain: the hastily patched holes when they put a finger or a hand through soggy wallpaper. In another few years they would have been in a position to buy their own house and possibly engage a nanny for Paolo.

In their peach and white bedroom, the bed was unmade; a pair of black trousers and a white shirt lay in a heap on the floor. She picked up the shirt, bunched it between her hands and rested her cheek on it. The smell of Silvio’s aftershave filled her nostrils.

“Oh, Silvio, I can’t do it without you. I can’t. I just can’t.”

Still clutching his shirt, she walked over to the dressing table, pulled out the top drawer and reached for the bottle at the back, unscrewed the lid and spilled the contents onto the palm

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of her hand. In the bathroom, she took a glass from the cabinet and filled it with water.

Maura Gahan stared at her youngest child, shocked.

“You should have stayed with her! She’s going through something nobody should ever have to go through – burying a child, never mind a young husband – it’s... Bill, where’s that G&T?”

She ran her fingers through her short, blonde/grey hair; pushed away the empty soup bowl. Her husband entered the kitchen and handed her a tall glass with plenty of ice just as she liked it. It was her habit to sip a G&T while cooking dinner but today was such a terrible day she broke her own rule about drinking during the day.

“Bill, he left Helena alone in that awful house.”

“I wanted to stay, but she wouldn’t even go inside until I drove away.”

Lorna, quietly moving from the stove to table, put a bowl of hot vegetable soup in front of her partner and handed him the basket of rolls she had bought earlier.

“Look at my hair! I can’t go to the boutique looking like this.”

“Maura, I’ll go with John. Is there anything in particular you need us to do?”

“Thanks, Lorna. I just can’t face it. It’s all so upsetting.”

“We’ll head as soon as I’ve finished the soup,” John said, glad of any excuse to leave the house.

His father looked at him gratefully. “Thanks, son.”

John got to his feet.

“Finish your soup first, son. Eat a roll.”

He swallowed the rest of the soup, jammed a roll into his mouth, caught Lorna’s eye as she was stacking the dishwasher. “Let’s go.”

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“Don’t take your father’s car, John. He’ll need it.”

The front door banged shut. They heard his Honda Civic start and blast down the road.

“Oh, Bill, what are we going to do?”

“Shush, love. Why don’t you go for a nap? You’ve been up all night.”

She ran a hand wearily over her unmade up face. “We can’t leave her in that house. You have to bring her back.”

“I intend to. Just give her a couple of hours alone. Then I’ll go.”

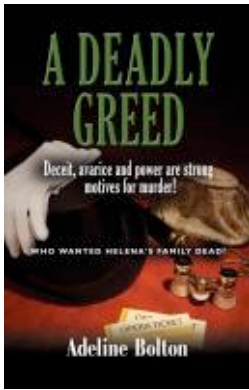
Maura started to cry. “What are we going to do? The banking crisis and recession are bad enough. Trying to keep the business afloat is difficult. But nothing compared to this; I can’t bear it!”

Bill put his arm around her shoulders, pressed her head into his neck. “Shush, love.”

“We’ve lost beautiful Paolo, Bill, our grandson. I wish it had been me. It’s not natural to bury a child.”

“We still have Helena,” he said, soothingly.

“Thank God she wasn’t in that car! I’d have lost my reason.” Maura Gahan reached for a tissue from the box on the white marble countertop and blew her nose, wiped her eyes. “Life is so cruel, Bill, so cruel.”



*Helena is delighted when she is asked to replace a soprano at short notice. Her debut as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* is successful. But her husband and son are in a fatal car crash caused by an unknown person while she's on stage. Putting her career on hold, she sets out to find the killer or killers, and uncovers a web of deceit, greed and hatred.*

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