

LBRIS

We know
books

The Fury

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Prologue

Never open a book with the weather.

Who was it who said that? I can't remember – some famous writer, I expect.

Whoever it was, they were right. Weather is boring. Nobody wants to read about weather, particularly in England, where we have so much of it. People want to read about *people* – and they generally skip descriptive paragraphs, in my experience.

Avoiding the weather is good advice – which I now disregard at my peril. An exception to prove the rule, I hope. Don't worry, my story isn't set in England, so I'm not talking about rain, here. I draw the line at rain – no book should start with rain, ever. No exceptions.

I'm talking about wind. The wind that whirls around the Greek islands. Wild, unpredictable Greek wind. Wind that drives you mad.

The wind was fierce that night – the night of the murder. It was ferocious, furious – crashing through trees, tearing along pathways, whistling, wailing, snatching all other sound and racing off with it.

Leo was outside when he heard the gunshots. He was on his hands and knees, at the back of the house, being sick in the vegetable garden. He wasn't drunk, just stoned. (*Mea culpa*, I'm afraid. He'd never smoked

weed before; I probably shouldn't have given him any.) After an initial semi-ecstatic experience – apparently involving a supernatural vision – he felt nauseous, and started throwing up.

Just then, the wind sped towards him – hurling the sound straight at him: *bang, bang, bang*. Three gunshots, in quick succession.

Leo pulled himself up. As steadily as he could, he battled his way against the gale, in the direction of the gunfire – away from the house, along the path, through the olive grove, towards the ruin.

And there, in the clearing, sprawled on the ground . . . was a body.

The body lay in a widening pool of blood, surrounded by the semi circle of ruined marble columns, casting it partially in shadow. Leo cautiously approached it, peering at the face. Then he staggered backwards, his expression contorted in horror – opening his mouth to scream.

I arrived at that moment, along with the others – in time to hear the beginnings of Leo's howl, before the wind grabbed the sound from his lips and ran off with it, disappearing into the dark.

We all stood still for a second, silent. It was a horrifying moment, terrifying – like the climactic scene in a Greek tragedy.

But the tragedy didn't end there.

It was just beginning.

Act One

This is the saddest story I have ever heard.

—Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier*

I

This is a tale of murder.

Or maybe that's not quite true. At its heart, it's a love story, isn't it? The saddest kind of love story – about the end of love; the death of love.

So I guess I was right the first time.

You may think you know this story. You probably read about it at the time – the tabloids loved it, if you recall: 'MURDER ISLAND' was a popular headline. Unsurprising, really, as it had all the perfect ingredients for a press sensation: a reclusive ex-movie star, a private Greek island cut off by the wind . . . and, of course, a murder.

There was a lot of rubbish written about that night. All kinds of wild, inaccurate theories about what may or may not have taken place. I avoided all of it. I had no interest in reading misinformed speculation about what might have happened on the island.

I knew what happened. I was there.

Who am I? Well, I am the narrator of this tale – and also a character in it.

There were seven of us, in all, trapped on the island.

One of us was a murderer.

But before you start laying bets on which of us did it, I feel duty-bound to inform you that this is not a *whodunnit*. Thanks to Agatha Christie, we all know how this kind of

story is meant to play out: a baffling crime, followed by dogged investigation, an ingenious solution – then, if you're lucky, a twist in the tail. But this is a true story, not a work of fiction. It's about real people, in a real place. If anything, it's a *whydunnit* – a character study, an examination of who we are, and why we do the things we do.

What follows is my sincere and heartfelt attempt to reconstruct the events of that terrible night – the murder itself, and everything that led up to it. I pledge to present you with the plain unvarnished truth – or as near to it as I can get. Everything we did, said and thought.

But how? I hear you ask. *How is it possible?* How can I possibly know it *all*? Not just every action taken, everything said and done – but everything *undone*, *unsaid*, all the private thoughts in each other's minds?

For the most part, I am relying on the conversations we had, before the murder, and afterwards – those of us who survived, that is. As for the dead, I trust you'll grant me artistic licence regarding their interior life. Given I am a playwright by trade, I am perhaps better qualified than most for this particular task.

My account is also based on my notes – taken both before and after the murder. A word of explanation regarding this. I have been in the habit of keeping notebooks for some years now. I wouldn't call them diaries, they're not as structured as that. Just a record of my thoughts, ideas, dreams, snatches of conversations I overhear, my observations of the world. The notebooks themselves are nothing fancy, just plain

black Moleskines. I have the relevant notebook from that year open now, by my side – and will no doubt consult it as we proceed.

I stress all this so that, if at any point during this narrative I mislead you, you will understand that it is by accident, not design – because I am clumsily skewing the events too much from my own point of view. An occupational hazard, perhaps, when one narrates a story in which one happens to play a minor role.

Nonetheless, I'll do my best not to hijack the narrative too often. Even so, I hope you'll indulge me the odd digression, here and there. And before you accuse me of telling my story in a labyrinthine manner, let me remind you this is a true story – and in real life, that's how we communicate, isn't it? We're all over the place: we jump back and forth in time; slow down and expand on some moments; fast-forward through others, editing as we go, minimizing flaws and maximizing assets. We are all the unreliable narrators of our own lives.

It's funny, I feel that you and I should be sitting together on a couple of bar stools, right now, as I tell you this tale – like two old friends, drinking at the bar.

This is a story for anyone who has ever loved, I say, sliding a drink in your direction – a large one, you'll need it – as you settle down, and I begin.

I ask you not to interrupt too much, at least not at first. There will be plenty of opportunity for debate afterwards. For now, I request you politely hear me out – as you might indulge a good friend's rather lengthy anecdote.

It's time to meet our cast of suspects – in order of importance. And therefore, for the moment, I must reluctantly remain offstage. I'll hover in the wings, waiting for my cue.

Let us begin – as we should – with the star.

Let's begin with Lana.

2

Lana Farrar was a movie star.

Lana was a big star. She became a star when she was very young, back in the days when stardom still meant something – before anyone with an internet connection could become a celebrity.

No doubt many of you will know her name, or have seen her movies. She made too many to mention. If you're anything like me, one or two of them are very dear to your heart.

Despite retiring a decade before our story begins, Lana's fame endured – and no doubt long after I am dead and forgotten, as though I never existed, Lana Farrar will be remembered, and rightly so. As Shakespeare wrote about Cleopatra, she has earned her 'place i' the story'.

Lana was discovered at the age of nineteen, by the fabled, Oscar-winning Hollywood producer, Otto Krantz – whom she later married. And until his untimely death, Otto dedicated his considerable energy and clout to furthering Lana's career, designing entire movies as showcases for her talents. But Lana was destined to be a star, with or without Otto.

It wasn't just her flawless face, the sheer, luminous beauty of a Botticelli angel – those eyes of endless blue – or the way she held herself, or spoke, or

her famous smile. No, there was some *other* quality about Lana – something intangible, the trace of a demi-goddess; something mythical, magical – it made her endlessly, compulsively watchable. In the presence of such beauty, all you wanted to do was gaze.

Lana made a lot of movies when she was very young – and there was, to be honest, a slight sense of mud being slung at a wall, to see what would stick. And while her romantic comedies were hit or miss, in my opinion, and her thrillers came and went, gold was finally struck when Lana played her first tragedy. She was Ophelia in a modern-day adaptation of *Hamlet*, and received her first Oscar nomination. From then on, suffering nobly became Lana's speciality. Call them tear-jerkers or weepies, Lana excelled as every doomed romantic heroine from Anna Karenina to Joan of Arc. She never got the guy; she rarely made it out alive – and we loved her for it.

As you can imagine, Lana made an enormous amount of money for a lot of people. When she was thirty-five, during an otherwise financially catastrophic couple of years for Paramount, the profits from one of her biggest successes kept the studio afloat. Which is why there was a sizeable ripple of shock within the industry when Lana suddenly announced her retirement – at the height of her fame and beauty, at the tender age of forty.

It was a mystery why she had decided to quit – and destined to remain one, for Lana offered no explanation. Not then, nor in the years to come. She never spoke about it publicly.

She told me, though, one wintry night in London, as we drank whisky by the fire, watching snowflakes drift past the window. She told me the whole story, and I told her about the –

Damn. There I go again – already worming my way back into the narrative. It seems that, despite my best intentions, I'm failing to keep myself out of Lana's story. Perhaps I should admit defeat – accept we are inseparably intertwined, she and I, knotted up like a ball of matted string, impossible to tell apart or disentangle.

Even if that's true, however, our friendship came later. At this point in the story, we hadn't met. In those days, I was living with Barbara West in London. And Lana, of course, was in Los Angeles.

Lana was a Californian, born and bred. She lived there, worked there, made the majority of her movies there. However, once Otto died, and she had retired, Lana decided to leave Los Angeles, for a fresh start.

But where to go?

Tennessee Williams famously said there is nowhere to go, when you retire from the movies – unless you go to the moon.

But Lana didn't go to the moon. She went to England instead.

She moved to London with her young son, Leo. She bought them a massive house in Mayfair, six storeys high. She didn't intend to stay for long – certainly not forever: it was a temporary experiment in a new style of living, while Lana worked out what to do with the rest of her life.

The problem was, without her all-consuming career