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SNOW KILLS

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THE
DOME
PRESS

The DI Dylan Books

Poetic Justice
Deadly Focus
Consequences
White Lilies

PREFACE

'Who am I?' Jack Dylan mused as he smiled down at his baby daughter. He put his finger to her rosy red cheek and was rewarded by a lopsided grin. She was laid in her pram, snug, warm and sleepy. Dylan looked over his shoulder to where he saw Jen admiring snowdrops in flower at the foot of a tree. Sensing his gaze, his wife looked up, smiled, stood and started towards him, walking clumsily in her rubber boots. Dylan stifled a chuckle.

'We really will have to get you some boots that fit.'

'There didn't seem much point, I guess, buying new wellingtons on the Isle of Wight. I hardly wore them there so I always got the hand-me-downs.' Jen's smile turned serious as she looked back to the flowers. 'It never ceases to amaze me how something so delicate survives outside in this weather,' she said, breathing out a mist of warm air. An involuntary shiver went through her, even though she was wrapped up in her winter clothing. 'We didn't see much of this where I come from either,' she said, pointing her gloved hands to the snow-filled sky. For a moment, the couple looked to the heavens. Jen watched Dylan close his eyes and screw his nose up as little pinpricks of snow fell on his face. She laughed, put her arm through his and together they watched the snow flurry cross the Yorkshire valley in silence.

As they walked through Sibden a strong northerly wind blew damp snow and sleet down the steep hillside. Dylan took a deep breath and put his head down, feeling the cold burning in his lungs as they fought to walk in the rapidly worsening conditions. Jen buried her face into his upper arm, closed her eyes and held on tightly, walking blind.

The sky was full, but the snowstorm passed quickly. Dylan looked down, noticing his wife's blonde hair was covered in soft, white snowflakes. Unperturbed by the weather, Max, their golden retriever, bounced back and forth; a light coating of snow on an ice-crusting bank was heaven to him. He barked at the top of the bank, as though declaring he was king of the castle, and Dylan put his finger swiftly to his lips. Maisy's eyes flew open and then shut again.

'Shush,' Jen said, crossly. Nevertheless, Max crouched down in play and barked again. Jen threw a snowball for him to chase and seconds later he was back with more than a dusting of snow on his nose.

'Who'd have thought that my life would turn out like this? Five years ago I was living on the Isle of Wight and taking in the news that I'd never have children? Look at me now, three hundred miles away, married, and we have Maisy,' she said, with a contented sigh.

'And who'd have thought I'd be so ... blessed?' Dylan said. 'I'm not much of a husband when I'm absorbed in an incident though, am I?' he added, as he reached for her and held her tight.

Jen tilted her head up to him, stood on tiptoes and kissed his cheek.

'I miss you, now I don't see you at work,' she said. 'At least when I was at the station and you had a job running, I'd see you there ... And there is no one else to talk to with Mum gone and Dad so far away,' she mumbled into the breast of his coat. 'Sometimes I do feel alone.'

'Alone? With Maisy?'

Jen cocked her head and gave him a crooked smile.

'When you coming back to work, then?'

Jen pulled a face. 'Well, I guess since Maisy is nearly eight months old, I'd better come in and have a chat with Avril Summerfield-Preston soon about my return.'

Max barked louder and the two looked at him in dismay. Then Dylan's phone rang. Maisy woke and started to cry. Jen rolled her eyes, and stepped back from their embrace, taking the pram from Dylan and briskly pushing it away. He turned from the force of the wind to take the call. It took him a second to remember who he was in his other life, outside his happy little family.

He was DI Jack Dylan, the officer in charge of Harrowfield CID.

CHAPTER ONE

Didn't the whole town know it by now? Kayleigh tutted, then sighed, raising her eyes to the ceiling. Yet another severe weather warning was being broadcast.

Two o'clock prompt – and, as always on a Wednesday, the salon door handle turned. This time, though, the door juddered over the cardboard put on the floor to soak up the wet footprints. As if in slow motion, a snow-covered figure, carrying a suitcase, fell headfirst into the salon. Mavis Beanland lay spread-eagled on the lino.

'I don't know why I'm bothering,' she said, as Kayleigh dashed over. Mavis brushed her away, struggled on to her hands and knees, paused for a moment to untie the Rain Mate that had fallen over her eyes, and pick up a penny. 'See a penny pick it up and all the day you'll have good luck,' she said. 'My hair'll be none the better for doing, you know, by the time I get to my sister's,' she added, puffing and blowing.

Kayleigh smiled at her customer and gave a fleeting glance over her shoulder at the busy Harrowfield high street through the open door. Closing it, she could see the large snowflakes lazily drifting past.

'But, I'm here now. Quite a trek from them there moors today it was,' said Mavis, popping the found penny into the charity box on the counter next to the till.

'You'll feel better for having it washed,' Kayleigh said, taking the old lady's scarf and gloves as she watched a puddle appear on the floor at Mavis's feet. Mavis took off her coat and hung it up. Unaware of the mess she had made, she padded across the floor towards the basins. With a flick of her plump wrist, she flung her wet fringe out of her eyes and looked at Kayleigh.

'My goodness, girl, look at you in them high-heeled boots,' she said in mock horror. Kayleigh draped a gown in front of her and Mrs Beanland turned to allow her to tie it. 'They'll be less use than a glass hammer in this weather,' she said, pointing to Kayleigh's footwear. 'And I'll be darned if you don't end up with frostbite on y' ... y' bits,' she added, pointing the same finger a bit higher at a short skirt. 'I wear more in bed,' she said, turning around to sit with a thud on the chair. 'Don't you young 'uns listen to the weather forecast?' she added, shaking her head.

'I wish we could avoid them,' said Kayleigh, turning to the radio sitting on a shelf, as right on cue another severe weather warning rang out, this time with school closures and cancelled public transport notifications. 'And, I'll have you know these boots cost me a week's wages, Mavis,' she said, as she placed a towel around her client's shoulders and turned on the taps.

'They did?' Mavis said, pulling a face as her hairdresser's hand expertly guided her head towards the wash basin. 'You were robbed. Aren't you worried about getting home? We don't want you breaking a leg now, do we? Who'd do my hair, then?' Kayleigh pumped the shampoo into her hand from the bottle at the side of the sink and started massaging Mavis's scalp to form a soapy lather. Kayleigh's favourite client gripped her towel tight to her chest. 'Ooooo, you are a good scrubber,' she said with delight.

'Don't go saying stuff like that; you'll get me a right reputation,' Kayleigh said, laughing. 'People already think that because I'm a blonde and a hairdresser I've nothing between my ears. Aren't you worried about getting to your sister's, Mave?'

'No,' laughed the old lady. 'If the bleeding Germans didn't stop me in the war, a few snowflakes won't.'

'You are a one,' Kayleigh said with a chuckle.

The salon was hot and humid, with condensation running down the windows, and Kayleigh could feel sweat beads forming on her top lip. 'Why does everybody want to talk about the weather today?' she said with a sigh, wiping her brow with her forearm.

Unhearing, Mavis went on. 'I hope you aren't wearing those tongue things that I've read about. Kayleigh raised her eyebrows and stifled a giggle. 'If you are, you'll know about it if you go down on your backside, my girl.'

'You mean a thong, Mavis. They're called thongs,' laughed Kayleigh, bringing the old lady up from the basin. She patted her wet hair with the towel.

'Call them what you like, love, but what you need in this weather is a pair of them there knickers that gathers it all in,' she said. 'Harvest knickers we used to call them. Not particularly appealing to look at, I grant you that, but ...' she said with a nod, looking at Kayleigh through the mirror. 'I tell you what, I'll get you a pair next time I go to the market.'

'No, you're alright. They don't sound very ... attractive,' Kayleigh said, screwing up her nose.

'Too bloody cold to be thinking what they look like my girl. Common sense's got to apply on days like these; it's not the middle of summer, you know. Eee ... you'll learn when you get a bit older,' Mavis said, shaking her head.

'You sound like me mum. Don't cast a clout till May passes out, she always says,' Kayleigh mimicked her mother's voice. 'She'd still have me wearing liberty bodices if she had her way.'

'She sounds like a sensible woman, your mum ... Ouch!'

Mavis flinched as Kayleigh snagged a knot in her hair.

'Concentrate please, Kayleigh, tips to roots. How many more times do I have to tell you?' Marlene, Kayleigh's boss said as she walked past, her quick, small feet making a tapping noise on the floor. Kayleigh raised her eyebrows at Mavis in the mirror and the two sniggered like children.

Ten minutes later, Mavis was settled under the dryer with a cup of tea, her hair neatly set in curls.

'Look at them and you'll see where I get my ideas from,' Kayleigh said pointing to a page in a magazine. The headline read 'Today's Fashion on a Shoestring'.

Mavis smiled as she took the magazine offered. She visibly relaxed with the soothing noise of the dryer blowing the warm, dry air down on her and for a minute Kayleigh watched her client close her eyes and thought she might fall asleep, as she often did. But within seconds Mavis's eyes flew open and she started to flip through the pages. Kayleigh could hear Mavis humming to herself and couldn't help but smile as she tidied her work station. Gathering an armful of wet towels from the bin, Kayleigh headed for the utility room.

'Kayleigh,' Mavis's shrill voice shouted.

Kayleigh stopped abruptly and pivoted on one foot towards the dryers. 'Shh ... You don't have to shout, I can hear you,' she said, a mischievous smile on her lips as she brought her finger to her mouth.

'What did you say, love?' Mavis shouted even louder, with her hand

cupped to her netted, sponge earmuffs. 'I don't appear to have a biscuit dear,' she said, looking down at the empty saucer on the wooden arm of her seat. 'Tea without a biscuit is like salt without vinegar on me fish'n'chips,' she said. 'Pass us one from that box on the counter.'

'You don't miss a trick, Mavis Beanland, do you?' Kayleigh laughed. Picking a ginger snap, she passed it to her client.

'Splendid! These look like good dunkers,' Mavis said, nodding to the lady sat next to her, who nodded back in agreement. 'Get one, love, I'll pay you for it later.'

Kayleigh smiled fondly at Mavis. 'Thank you, I will,' she said, throwing one into her handbag behind the reception desk.

Thirty minutes later, Kayleigh gently combed Mavis's warm, dry hair round her fingers into little curls, just as she liked it. There was no need for Marlene's expertise with the old lady's coiffure. She held the hand mirror up behind her client's head proudly so that she could also see the rear of her hair. Mavis nodded approvingly and smiled.

'Lovely, dear,' she said, as Kayleigh squeezed a pea-sized bit of cream out of the tube of Vitapointe and gently patted it on Mavis's hair. Mavis rose out of her chair with a groan before hobbling to the reception desk. She picked up her wet weather gear and ceremoniously wrapped her scarf around her neck twice before she shrugged into her coat.

'Best thing I ever did was knit this scarf,' she said. 'Do you knit?' she asked Kayleigh, who shook her head.

'Once I start, I can't stop,' Mavis said.

'That explains the length of it,' Kayleigh laughed.

'I'll be doing a lot of knitting at my sister's; she doesn't have a telly,'

Mavis said with a frown. 'She likes reading. So there's no chance of me keeping up with the soaps for a few weeks,' she added. 'I'll give you a ring to book another appointment when I get back.'

Mavis paid and put a two-pound tip into the palm of Kayleigh's hand. 'You're a good kid,' she said with a wink. 'I'll try get you a pair of them Harvest knickers while I'm at my sister's.'

'Thank you, that's very kind,' said Kayleigh, tutting softly, because she knew Mavis would not take no for an answer. 'What would I do without you to look after me?' Mavis squeezed Kayleigh's hand tightly.

'And put that money towards some wellies, never mind that there fashion.' Mavis held Kayleigh's hand in her worn arthritic grasp for a moment, fleetingly closing her eyes. Then she smiled at the young girl kindly. 'Take care, my love.'

'You take care. I'll see you soon,' Kayleigh said.

She walked in front of Mavis to the door, opened it and held her hand once again as the old lady precariously negotiated the steps. She watched her tread with trepidation out onto the icy flagstones, which looked treacherous because yet again, the powers-that-be at Harrowfield Council had failed to prepare for the long-forecast weather.

The wind was stirring the snow into the salon doorway and it was beginning to create snowdrifts that resembled sand dunes against the walls and the door jamb in the porch. The cool air was welcome after the humidity of the salon and for a moment Kayleigh stood, arms crossed, leaning on the window frame and watching the world go by. It started to snow more heavily and she stared at snowflakes like upturned petals floating to the ground. Her eyes lingered on the vehicles at a standstill in the traffic. She looked up at the moving white snow in the grey sky and felt its feather-light cold touch on her forehead. The phone rang and broke her reverie.

'Kayleigh, will you come inside and close that flaming door, or you'll have us all catching our death,' Marlene called. 'The last appointment cancelled and according to the radio the buses are either stuck en route or suspended until further notice.' Kayleigh hoped and prayed that Mavis would make it to her sister's safely. She knew her friend's bravado hid a fragility she wouldn't dream of admitting to.

'Run the mop quickly over the floor, will you, while I cash up? Then you can get off home, otherwise we'll both be spending the night here,' said Marlene. Kayleigh scowled behind her boss's back and shuddered at the thought.

'If it's bad tomorrow, I won't be opening up,' Marlene said, crossing the salon floor with the till drawer in her arms. She headed to the staffroom to count the day's takings and deposit them in the safe.

Kayleigh didn't need telling twice. Within five minutes she had her little white fur jacket on and was heading for the door. 'Bye,' she called out to her boss, without waiting for a reply.

She negotiated her first few steps on the compacted snow by holding on to the walls of the building, then slid across the iced pathway and hung on to a lamp post. The surface of the pavement was uneven and she could see parts of it were like a sheet of glass. With a lot of respect, she watched those brave enough to walk on it, although they looked as if they were unwitting contestants from a TV show – falling and slipping around in an undignified manner. She negotiated her route via a telegraph pole and a signpost – anything that would help her make it to her car unscathed. Looking back at the salon through the blizzard, she could see a couple of people who looked to be helping Marlene down the steps. She tutted. And Mavis said *her* boots weren't suitable! She obviously hadn't clapped eyes on Marlene's stilettos.

Walking like an octogenarian, Kayleigh became fascinated by the puzzle of the ice. In the near white-out conditions threatening to paralyse the town, she saw the outline of her car – and, as her footsteps eventually cut tracks into the virgin snow around it, she was thankful to spot the orange light mounted high on the roof of a snow plough coming her way. She looked up at the driver, whose face held no expression, but to her surprise she saw Mavis sat alongside him, chattering away. Mavis was highly delighted to see her, and waved as the gritter came to a standstill.

As Kayleigh waited for the line of traffic to move, the window of the gritter wagon opened, 'Hey, Blondie!' the driver shouted. 'You're going up towards the Manchester Road in that little pink monster, Mave here tells me.'

'I'm gonna try,' she shouted back.

'I'm going your way after I've dropped her off at the train station,' he said. 'Follow me and I'll show you the world and anything else you want.' She could hear Mavis chuckling and could only guess at her retort.

It must be dead boring gritting the roads, Kayleigh thought, but he had a point, she might have more chance of getting home following in his tracks. Looking down at the driver's side door of her car, her hopes were soon dashed. She leaned against the car and moaned; all she had to do now was clear the snow that her knight in shining armour had pushed against it. Her feet were wet and her toes were numb.

Downhearted, she trudged around the car, scraping off the snow with her hands. She looked down at her new boots with despair, for they were surely ruined. Mavis, bless her, had been right and she would tell her so when she next saw her. In future, she vowed to keep

a pair of rubber boots on hand for days like these. Parked behind her car was a scooter, no doubt Donny Longbottom's. Where was her tormenter when she needed him? Probably at home if he had any sense. He might have a screw or two loose, but even he wouldn't risk riding his bike in these conditions.

Red hands that had been numb began to feel painful at the knuckles as she attempted to rub life back into them. Kayleigh sat for a moment, cold and tired with the exertion.

She picked up her mobile phone. '*Can I come to yours, Matt?*' she texted.

'It's Wednesday. I'm at me mate's, but you've got a key,' her boyfriend texted back.

'Damn!' she said, crossly. Why had she even considered anything would come between him and the boys' games night.

Kayleigh rang her mum, but the phone went straight to answer machine. 'I'm heading for Matt's, Mum,' she said. 'Don't worry about me. Love you.'

Sighing deeply, Kayleigh threw her phone on to the passenger seat. Surprisingly the little car's engine roared into action and as she waited for the windows to clear she turned on the radio to hear the next weather alert. She set the heater to blow warm air down to her feet, and wiped the inside of the car windows with a leatherette. Kayleigh hadn't been driving for long and had never driven in snow, but she adored her bright-pink Ka and she was looking forward to the challenge now she felt a little warmer.

The roads were congested. The daylight was beginning to disappear rapidly and the night was drawing in sooner than expected, due to the low, grey snow clouds. Kayleigh sat patiently in the queue at the start of the Manchester Road. Her windscreen wipers were going ten to the

dozen just to clear the driving snow but at least she was heading in the right direction. One minute she was sitting in the queue and the next her car slid into the curb as she attempted a corner on a slight incline.

'Flaming hell,' she said out loud, feeling a thread of fear. She gripped the steering wheel tighter, pursing her lips together tightly as if trying to whistle, and blew out slowly. 'Thank God it's only six more miles to Matt's.'

Traffic was at a snail's pace. Impatiently she leaned to her right to try to see around the vehicle in front, but all she could spot were brake lights. Moments later the traffic came to a standstill, but Kayleigh wasn't too worried, she kept telling herself that at least she was warm and safe. She shuffled in her seat in an attempt to make herself comfortable. She sang along to the radio and tapped the steering wheel rhythmically with her fingertips, but the snow didn't abate and after a while she could feel panic starting to rise in her throat. Ironically, she now willed the broadcast to give the next weather update. Ahead, all she could see were red lights like on an airport runway. She looked at her watch. Fifteen minutes went by. The snow continued to fall.

'Beep,' went the radio, followed by an announcement. 'The police report that a wagon has jack-knifed on Manchester Road, causing a collision with a bus. Emergency services are at the scene and ask for your patience,' said the presenter. 'Police advise all motorists only to travel if it is absolutely necessary. If you're already out on the road, please drive with the utmost care and don't abandon your vehicle unless it is safe to do so – the gritters and snow ploughs need to get through.'

Kayleigh groaned. 'That's all I need,' she said. But the fact that the gritters were out in force gave her hope.

An hour passed and still there was no movement. Kayleigh looked at her watch again. Cars around her were being abandoned. More and more people appeared to be parking up and risking finishing their journey on foot. According to the radio, community centres and churches were being opened to accommodate those in trouble. But that was only for old people, she told herself. *'I'm stuck on Manchester Road, listening to the radio updates,'* she texted Matt. Her phone bleeped. The battery was low. Kayleigh fumbled around in her bag before she remembered where her charger was ... It was secure in the plug socket under her worktop in the salon. That was annoying, she thought, but was immediately encouraged by an incoming text notification. However, her hopes of Matt coming to rescue her were soon dashed.

'I'm at Dave's ...'

'Great,' she sighed. *'I might as well try and get home if you're not going to be there,'* she texted.

'Whatever,' he texted back.

Tears welled up in her eyes. Wasn't she more important than his stupid friend and the childish computer games she knew they would be enjoying, sat in a nice warm flat?

The snow was relentless. Her mind was set, she would stay put, even if that meant sleeping in her car. She watched another stream of people walk past after abandoning their vehicles. As time went by, the amount of people passing dwindled and it was only the occasional lonely, snowman-like figure that she saw. She began to question her earlier decision. Maybe she should have tagged along with the crowd? The stretch of road she was on had no street lighting and the snow made the night feel eerie as evening quickly turned to dark. There were no houses nearby, but she had passed a couple of cottages set

back from the road, close to where she had once dropped off Mavis Beanland. All but one had been in darkness. Probably the occupants of the others were stranded elsewhere. Maybe the house with the light on was Mavis's home and she had decided to not attempt the train journey to her sister's after all and the gritter man had dropped her off at home?

Kayleigh's spirits rose for a moment, but a sudden bang on the passenger door made her jump. She could see a face squashed up against the window and she quickly hit the button to lock the doors. She grabbed her phone and turned the radio down. She could hear a man's voice laughing, shouting and singing.

'You in there, Kay? It's Donny. No mistaking your car, love,' he said. Her heart missed a beat, but she sighed with relief. She opened the window a little, and the strong smell of whisky on his breath hit her. She could see a young lad behind him, who took a quick swig out of a bottle and grimaced before passing it back over Donny's shoulder.

'What the hell are you doing here?' she said, through clenched teeth.

'Had to abandon the scooter in town,' he said, shouting against the wind.

'Yes, I saw it.'

'Come with us. We'll see you get home, won't we, mate?' he said.

'I'd rather stick pins in my eyes,' she said quietly. 'Go away.'

'What did you say?' he yelled, bending down closer.

'I'll chance my luck in my nice warm car, thank you,' she smiled sweetly.

'Whatever,' he said, swaying in the wind.

'Is that all men can say? Whatever?' she said, reaching to put the

window up. She heard what sounded like a man's gruff warning bellow in the distance and Donny shrugged his shoulders at her. 'Fuck off!' he called over his shoulder. His friend scarpered.

'Are you lonesome tonight ...' she heard Donny singing at the top of his voice as he wandered off into the night, laughing like a hyena, oblivious to the cold in his drunken state.

The radio presenter reiterated the advice to motorists to stay in their cars. It was as though he was warning her personally, so isolated did she feel. Her fuel gauge was into the red and her phone beeped low battery for the final time. She fumbled with it in her lap, but it was dead. Mindful of her predicament, she steered her car into the side of the road and it slid sideways into the kerb and jolted to a standstill. She turned off the ignition and sighed heavily.

Inside, the car was almost pitch-black. It was already blanketed by snow that was getting thicker by the minute. All was silent. Kayleigh flicked on the internal light and scrabbled in her handbag for something to eat, anything. She was starving. 'Ginger dunkers,' she said, peeling off the wrapper frenziedly and biting into the grainy biscuit. 'Thank you, Mavis.'

As she watched the snow continue to build, a wave of panic washed over her. Kayleigh opened the window and gulped a breath of fresh air. She rattled the door, trying to open it more than the few inches the snow would allow. She wanted to run, to escape, to be free from this nightmare. Her heart beat so rapidly she thought it would never again be steady. She closed the window to keep out the cold, closed her eyes and tried to control her breathing. Time passed and she felt as if she was going to die, but then the panic began to subside. She looked again at her watch – she was alone, and now she was beginning to feel very frightened, too.