

CELL 7

ALSO BY KERRY DREWERY

A Brighter Fear
A Dream of Lights

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*To Rebecca Mascull and Emma Pass,
who know the journey*

There is a higher court than courts of
justice and that is the court of conscience.
It supersedes all other courts.

Gandhi

Prologue

There are two sounds in my head.

The bang of the gun through silence.

And my own voice shouting, 'Go!'

They both echo loud.

There's tightness in my chest. Hotness. Like nerves walking in the dark at night, or a knock at the door when I'm home alone. That tip in my stomach.

I'm dizzy but I'm breathing. I'm conscious. Alive.

What have I done?

Those words repeat over again.

Same, same, same.

The darkness is crushing.

My breath screeches through it; my heart thuds.

I hear a siren in the distance; see headlights, dim.

You could run, I think.

'No point,' I reply out loud. '*This* is the chance to do something. Change things. Have to.'

Siren's louder now, brighter headlights too.

The headlights turn, drowning me in white. I lift the hand holding the gun and shield my eyes. Blue lights flash on my skin.

On, off, on, off, on . . .

And flash on the body at my feet. Show me red pouring from him.

What have I done?

Still that echo in my head.

'What you had to,' I tell it. 'It was the only choice. Only chance.'

Headlights dip. Dark uniforms pour from cars, talking, ordering. I'm not listening.

I drop the gun, rest my hands on my head.

'I did it!' I shout. 'I shot him! I killed Jackson Paige.' I can't tell their reply.

Their eyes on me are full of disgust, handcuffs on my wrists cold as their hearts.

They live in the bubble of the Avenues and the City, let the gloss reflect and not wonder what's outside.

I'll die in seven days because I have to, but after that, their bubbles will burst and everyone will know the truth.

CELL 1

News

'The breaking news this morning is the shocking murder of celebrity Jackson Paige. Paige, who won the nation's hearts with his appearances on reality TV and his tireless charity work, was shot just metres from where I'm standing here on Crocus Street, in the area of the city known as the High Rises. In a bizarre twist, the culprit, who stayed on the scene following the shooting, has already confessed her guilt and been named by police as sixteen-year-old Martha Honeydew.

'Honeydew has since been arrested and, in accordance with the Seven Days of Justice law, was this morning placed in Cell 1 of death row. This will be a landmark case – Honeydew, at sixteen years of age, is both the first teenage girl to face the death penalty *and* the first to be tried by our country's unique Votes for All system, the most democratic justice system in the world, where you, the viewer, decide on the fate of the accused.

'We'll certainly be following what is most likely to be her final seven days very closely indeed. You can keep up to date via all our usual social media portals, as well as our dedicated twenty-four-hour TV channel, *An Eye For An Eye*. Our show *Death is Justice* – on air every evening from 6.30 p.m. – will be analysing the details of this truly horrendous crime and the life of the accused, asking what could have led her to become such a cold-hearted killer.

'Her willingness to admit her crime may have already reserved her a place in that electric chair when public voting is calibrated and results are given in seven days but, viewers, do not miss your chance to vote on this historic case.

'This is Joshua Decker signing off and handing you back to Kristina in the studio.'

Counselling

Martha sits at a table in the centre of a room in half light. Her long hair has been shaved to her scalp and her clothes have been replaced by white overalls.

She glances to the wall, watching the second-hand of the oversized clock tick loudly on to 9.05 then, puffing out her cheeks and sighing heavily, she turns and stares out of the barred window to where a sparrow is perched in a tree, next to leaves curling and turning orange and red. The sparrow opens its beak and closes it again; Martha knows what it should sound like, but she can't hear its song.

The chains around her wrists and ankles clank as she shuffles in her seat and looks to the middle-aged woman with thin blonde hair and watery blue eyes sitting opposite her.

'Did the guard explain to you who I am?' the woman says, her voice warm and smooth against the chill of the room.

Martha shakes her head.

'My name's Eve Stanton. I'm your designated counsellor.'

'I don't need a counsellor.'

'You might appreciate someone to talk to as it gets closer to . . .'

She pauses, rubbing at her chewed fingernails as she searches for the right word.

' . . . to my execution?' Martha glares at Eve as she finishes the sentence. 'I know I'm going to die,' she says. 'I'm guilty. I killed him.'

Eve's gaze flickers and she looks away. 'So you say,' she mutters.

'Why would I lie?'

'Exactly. Why would anyone lie about something like that?'

'Yeah.'

They both fall back into silence.

The clock ticks.

The sparrow flies from the tree.

'Why do I have a counsellor?' Martha asks. 'Because I'm a teenager?'

'No,' Eve replies. 'All prisoners do.'

'Why?'

Eve crosses her fingers. 'Some people disagree with the death penalty, especially for teenagers. This is a . . . a *concession* for them. Something that the government can point to and say, "Yes, but look at this kind thing we allow".' She smiles with her lips pressed together. 'A glimpse of the humanity some feel we have lost.'

'Humanity? Is that what we've lost?' Martha says, running her fingers over the stubble on her head. 'What do you think?'

Eve watches the tension in the girl's face and the worry behind her eyes, nothing matching the words she says and the attitude she gives off. 'It doesn't matter what I think,' she replies. 'It's the law.'

'What? An eye for an eye?' Martha asks.

'Don't you agree with it?'

'Don't you?' Martha fires back.

Eve gives a wry smile. 'I asked you first.'

'So what? Whatever I think isn't important, is it? You tell me. Do *you* agree with voting on whether people live or die? No courts. No witnesses. No evidence . . . juries . . . nothing.'

‘Doesn’t a system of the whole public having the right to vote *mean* that everyone is a juror? That they all affect the outcome?’

Martha rolls her eyes. ‘Do you always answer questions with questions?’

Eve doesn’t reply.

‘You’re just like all the rest from the City,’ Martha says, looking away. ‘And those who live in the Avenues around it. No, you’re worse, cos you think you’re doing something worthwhile, and you’re not. Anyway, laws can change, can’t they?’

‘I don’t live in the City or the Avenues. Not quite. I’m more on the outskirts.’

‘Yeah, well, same thing. You don’t come from the Rises, do you?’

‘True.’

‘Like I said – you’re just like the rest of them.’

She sticks her legs out as far as the chains will allow and folds her arms across her chest.

‘How often do I see you?’ she asks.

‘Every day,’ Eve replies. ‘Apart from day seven.’

‘Day seven? My last day?’

‘Potentially your last day.’

‘What about visitors?’

‘No,’ she replies.

‘What? None?’

Eve shakes her head.

Outside the conversation the sparrow lands back in the tree, a worm in its beak. Martha watches it, then leans forward. ‘What about a message?’ she whispers. ‘Can you pass a message on for me?’

‘I can’t do that,’ Eve replies. ‘I’m sorry.’

‘But nobody would know.’ She looks around the room. ‘There aren’t any cameras in here. Nobody would see.’

‘I can’t . . .’

Outside, the wind blows at the branches of the tree, pushing them against the glass as the sparrow bobs up and down.

‘Who would it be for?’ Eve asks.

‘Why do you care? You just said you wouldn’t do it.’

‘Your mother is . . .’

‘You read my file?’ The chains on Martha’s wrists clank against each other as she taps at the folder on the table. ‘Then you know my mother’s dead.’

Eve leans back slowly and pulls in a deep breath. ‘I know your mother’s dead,’ she replies gently, ‘and I’m sorry about that. I was going to say that as your mother isn’t with us any more and your father ran off before you were born, who would the message be for? Who would you be writing the message to?’

‘I have friends.’

‘Do you?’ she says, and she takes the folder from the table and opens it. ‘Because it says here, and I quote – “Martha was never a social girl at school. She struggled to make friends, casting herself on the outside and not making any effort to join in with her peers.”’

‘That’s teachers for you. They never liked me.’

Eve raises a finger. “. . . although she was a very intelligent young lady, and if she had applied herself, had the ability to go far.”’

‘*If she had applied herself?*’ Martha gives a snort of derision. ‘Is that another way of saying, *if she could’ve been arsed?*’

‘No, I think it’s another way of saying, *if she’d had opportunity.*’

They stare at each other.

The clock ticks.

The branches of the tree scratch against the window.

‘I had to drop out of school,’ Martha whispers. ‘To pay the rent. Y’know?’

Eve nods.

‘If I couldn’t . . . if they started questioning . . . I didn’t want to be . . .’ The air jutters in her chest as she sucks in breath.

‘The authorities missed the fact that you’re an orphan because you were paying the rent?’

‘Suppose they must’ve. Otherwise they would’ve taken the flat away and made me live in one of those *care institution* places with all those kids. I couldn’t . . .’ She rubs her hands over her eyes and turns to the side.

Eve pushes the box of tissues towards her. ‘I understand,’ she says.

Martha looks back with tears in her eyes. She sniffs loudly and swipes the box of tissues off the table.

‘Bollocks,’ she says. ‘You can try but you never will.’

Minutes pass in silence.

The box remains on the floor.

‘I had a friend,’ Martha whispers. ‘A good one.’

‘What was her name?’

Martha glances to Eve. ‘*His* name,’ she said. ‘It was a he, a male. Boy.’ She sniffs again.

‘What was *his* name?’ Eve asks.

Martha turns to face Eve again. ‘Is this confidential?’ she whispers. ‘Like in a doctor’s?’

Eve nods. ‘Of course.’

‘If I tell you something, you won’t go off to the newspapers or go on that *Death is Justice* programme and tell them?’

‘No,’ Eve whispers.

‘Or write it down?’

‘No,’ she replies. ‘I promise.’

Martha leans across the table a little more and swallows hard. ‘He . . . I met him . . . after my mother was killed . . . he . . .’

The metal door behind them flies open and slams into the wall.

Martha spins around as a prison guard strides in, his stomach wobbling over the top of his uniform trousers and the buttons of his blue shirt straining. He swings a baton in his right hand.

Eve stares at the guard. ‘I said I’d call when we’re done.’

He shrugs. ‘Thought I heard you.’

‘No . . .’ she begins.

Martha’s eyes flash around the room. ‘Are there cameras in here?’ she says, the guard moving closer to her. ‘Is this recorded? Does this go out to the TV?’ Her voice is louder and louder. ‘I thought this was confidential.’ The chair grinds against the floor as she stands up, and the chains clatter as she lifts her hands in desperation.

‘You said –’ she says, leaning over Eve.

But the guard grabs the chains, yanks her backwards and she falls to the floor, lying near his feet with him towering over her, baton above his head and a sneer on his face.

‘Stop!’ Eve shouts.

‘Go on!’ Martha shouts back. ‘Hit me! Hit a defenceless girl if you think you’re man enough!’

The guard leers down at her.

‘Stop it!’ Eve shouts.

‘She’s a killer, this one,’ he says. ‘An animal. Should be treated like one.’

Martha kicks out at the guard but he pulls her sideways and her head and shoulder bang into the door frame.

‘Martha,’ Eve says. ‘Everything in here *is* confidential, I promise you that.’

The guard snorts. ‘Yeah, unless I can hear it, then . . .’

Martha pulls back against the guard; for a moment her strength catches him off-balance and he lurches forward, but he heaves against the chains again and raises the baton higher above her.

‘Stop it!’ Eve rushes forward, taking her phone from her pocket and pointing at him. ‘You want this in the papers?’ she asks. ‘On the television? Want voters to see what it’s really like in here?’

He stares at her. ‘You wouldn’t do that.’

‘Try me,’ she hisses.

‘Bloody softies like you,’ he says to Eve, dropping the baton and jabbing at her face with his finger, ‘are how this country got into such a mess before. Getting murderers off on some technicality, letting paedophiles go cos there weren’t enough evidence.’

‘Best thing we ever did was get rid of the courts – that weren’t no justice. This –’ he points out of the door to the cells and the

corridor – ‘this is justice. Death is justice and *you* haven’t got no place in this system with your stupid softie ideas.’

He shakes his head, sweat beading on his forehead.

‘I know how I’ll be bloody voting and more than once too.’ He drags Martha to standing. ‘I don’t care how much it’d cost, I’d spend my whole month’s wages making sure you fry, girl. If it were up to me, you’d be in that chair tomorrow.’

He wraps the chains around his fist and pulls her to his face. ‘How could you do it?’ he hisses. ‘How could you kill Jackson Paige? The man never hurt no one. Look at all them people he helped. All his charity work. He could’ve left this country with all that money he had, but he din’t. He stayed and helped the likes of you. He was an icon!’

‘He was a fucking liar!’ Martha hisses.

The head butt forces her backwards, and as he lets go of the chains she slams into the wall and slumps to the side.

Too shocked, Eve doesn’t move.

‘Did you get that?’ he says to her. ‘On your phone? Did you get a good shot? Cos I don’t give a bloody hoot. Go sell it to the papers. They’ll put it on the front page and I’ll be hailed a hero.’ His cheeks puff out as he grins. ‘They’ll pay me to do it again.’

Martha watches as his raucous laugh wobbles his whole body. Her face tightens, her eyes narrow and as she stands and stares up at him, she spits in his face.

Before he can react, Eve grabs Martha, pulls her out of the room and into the corridor.

‘Calm down!’ she shouts behind her. ‘I’ll see to this. I’ll sort her out.’

In the corridor are six metal doors, closed but for a small panel, some with anonymous eyes staring out. The seventh, the final one, is at the very end, locked up and silent.

‘What you do, girl?’ a deep male voice comes from one of the cells.

‘Spat in his ignorant face,’ Martha replies.

The voice booms a hearty laugh. ‘You made my day,’ he says. ‘You from the Rises?’

‘Come on,’ Eve says, ‘you’re not supposed to be talking to anyone. The guard will be out in a minute.’

‘Yeah,’ Martha replies to the voice.

‘Uh-huh. What got you in here? What did a girl do that was so bad?’

‘I shot Jackson Paige,’ she replies.

‘No shit?’

‘No shit.’

‘Girl, you just made my *year!* Power to the Rises!’ he says, and from the gap in the cell, a clenched fist appears, a tattoo of a rose down the side of his hand.

‘Come on,’ Eve says, but before she can lead her forward, Martha rushes towards the door and rests a hand on the man’s fist.


She presses her face up to the gap. ‘What did you do?’ she whispers.

Dark eyes peer back at her. ‘Only thing I ever did wrong, girl, was to be born in the wrong place.’

‘Martha, move! Come on, quickly.’

‘Good luck,’ she whispers to the man and walks away.

Eve pulls open the heavy cell door. ‘You shouldn’t have . . .’ she starts. ‘That guard, he’s . . .’



‘What difference does it make?’ Martha replies as she steps inside.

‘He’ll make your life a misery,’ Eve says.

‘What’s left of it, you mean?’ Martha shrugs. ‘What happens in here doesn’t matter. It’s what happens out there that does.’