

Praise for

T.M. Logan

‘A tense and gripping thriller’

B A PARIS

‘Assured, compelling, and hypnotically readable – with a twist at the end I guarantee you won’t see coming’

LEE CHILD

‘A compelling, twisty page-turner, and that’s the truth’

JAMES SWALLOW

‘Outstanding and very well-written debut psychological thriller. This book was so gripping I genuinely found it hard to put down’

K. L. SLATER

‘A terrific page-turner, didn’t see that twist!

A thoroughly enjoyable thriller’

MEL SHERRATT

‘I can do no better than recommend *Lies*, a brilliantly plotted psychological thriller by TM Logan, whom I have no doubt is going to be a major exponent of this genre . . . Exceptional and highly recommended’

ALISON WEIR

‘Even the cleverest second-guesser is unlikely to arrive at the truth until it’s much, much too late’

THE TIMES

‘Fraught with tension, with a compelling lead character who becomes more and more unsure about who he can trust’

COSMOPOLITAN

‘Creepy, creepy, creepy . . . a winner if you like thrillers’

WOMAN’S WAY

TM Logan is a former science reporter for the *Daily Mail* and subsequently worked in higher education communications. He was born in Berkshire to an English father and German mother. His debut novel *Lies* was a number one bestseller and has sold over 300,000 copies. He now lives in Nottinghamshire with his wife and two children.

Also by TM Logan

Lies

29 SECONDS

TM Logan

ZAFFRE



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For my Mum and Dad

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves . . .

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

There were three conditions.

She had 72 hours to provide a name.

If she said no, the offer disappeared. Forever.

And if she said yes, there was no going back. No changing her mind.

She stared at this stranger, this man she had never met before and never would again after tonight. A powerful, dangerous man who found himself in her debt.

It was strictly a one-time deal, a once-in-a-lifetime offer. A deal that might change her life. A deal that would almost certainly change someone else's.

It was a deal with the Devil.



PART I

TWO WEEKS EARLIER



1

The Rules were simple enough. Don't be alone with him if you could possibly avoid it. Don't do or say anything which he might take as encouragement. Don't get in a taxi or a lift with him. Be extra careful with him when you were away from the office, particularly at hotels and conferences. And most of all, the number one rule that must never, *ever*, be broken: don't do any of the above when he had been drinking. He was bad when he was sober, but he was worse – much worse – when he was drunk.

Tonight, he was drunk.

And Sarah realised, too late, that she was about to break all of the Rules at once.

One minute they were standing on the pavement outside the restaurant, the six of them, breath steaming in the cold night air, hands thrust deep in pockets against the November chill, contemplating their journey back to the hotel after an evening of good food and lively conversation. Just colleagues relaxing at the end of a long day away from home. The next minute he was striding out into the road to flag down a taxi, taking her firmly by the arm, guiding her into the back seat and following her in, his breath a hot fug of red wine and brandy and peppered steak.

It happened so fast, Sarah didn't even have time to react – she just assumed the others were following right behind them. It was only as the car door slammed shut that she realised he had separated her from the rest as deliberately and efficiently as a jungle predator.

'Regal Hotel, please,' he said to the driver in his deep baritone.

The taxi pulled away from the kerb and for a moment Sarah sat frozen in the seat, still in shock at this sudden turn of events. She twisted to stare out of the taxi's rear window at the rest of their little group stranded on the pavement and receding as the taxi picked up speed. Her friend and colleague Marie's mouth was open slightly as if she was speaking, a look of surprise on her face.

Always stick together. That was another one of the Rules. But now it was just the two of them.

The interior of the taxi was dark and smelt of old leather and cigarettes. She turned back and hurriedly put her seat belt on, edging as far over to the right side of the taxi as she could. The pleasant warm buzz from a couple of glasses of wine had fled, and she suddenly felt stone-cold sober.

If I play this right, I'll be OK. Just don't make eye contact. Don't smile. Don't encourage him.

He didn't put his seat belt on, but instead lounged, open-legged, across his side of the back seat, facing towards her. His right arm stretched along the shelf behind the passenger seats, right hand draped casually behind her head. His left hand rested on his thigh, inches from his crotch.

‘Sarah, Sarah,’ he said, his voice slow and deep with alcohol. ‘My clever girl. I thought your presentation this afternoon was fantastic. You should be very pleased. Are you pleased?’

‘Yes.’ She clutched her handbag in her lap, staring straight ahead. ‘Thanks.’

‘You’re very talented. I’ve always seen it, always known you had the right stuff.’

The taxi took a sharp left turn and he slid another inch nearer to her along the back seat, his knee touching hers. Sarah had to stop herself from flinching. He didn’t move his knee away, but let it rest there.

‘Thanks,’ she said again, thinking of the moment – *please let it be only minutes away* – when she would be able to put a locked door between them.

‘I’m not sure I mentioned it, but did you know BBC2 have commissioned another series of *Undiscovered History*? And the production company have talked about me having a co-presenter on the next series.’

‘That’s a good idea.’

‘A *female* co-presenter,’ he emphasised. ‘And you know, seeing you present up there today, I really thought you might have the potential for television. What do you think?’

‘Me? No. I’m not keen on having cameras pointing at me, to be honest.’

‘I think you’ve got the talent for it.’ He moved his right hand nearer to the back of her head. She could feel him touching her hair. ‘And the looks.’

He had been OK-looking once upon a time, she supposed. Maybe even moderately handsome as a young man. But forty years of alcohol and fine food and debauchery had taken their toll, and now he resembled nothing so much as an ageing Lothario gone to seed. He was carrying too much weight on his tall frame, a pot belly hanging over the waistband of his jeans, his jowls fleshy and his nose and cheeks dappled red with booze. His grey ponytail was thinning, strands of hair gathered over his increasingly bald pate. The bags under his eyes were heavy and dark.

And yet, Sarah thought with a trace of amazement, he still walks around acting like he's bloody George Clooney.

She tried to edge further away, but she was already hard up against the door, the door handle digging into her thigh. The inside of the taxi was intensely claustrophobic, a temporary prison she couldn't escape.

She felt a pulse of relief when her mobile rang in her handbag.

'Sarah? You OK?' It was Marie, her best friend at work – and another woman with direct, first-hand experience of Lovelock's behaviour. It was Marie who had first proposed the Rules for dealing with him the previous year.

'Fine.' Sarah spoke quietly, turned towards the window.

'Sorry,' Marie said, 'I didn't see him flagging the taxi down. I just turned around to get a light from Helen and when I looked back he was virtually pushing you into the back of that cab.'

'It's fine. Really.' She could see him staring at her, his image reflected in the dark glass of the window. 'Did you find a taxi yet?'

'No, we're still waiting.'

Shit, she thought. *I really am on my own.*

‘OK, no problem.’

‘Text me when you get back to your room, all right?’

‘Will do.’

In a quieter voice, Marie said: ‘And don’t put up with any of his crap.’

‘Yup. See you in a bit.’ Sarah ended the call and tucked the phone back in her handbag.

He shifted a little closer on the seat.

‘Checking up on you?’ he said. ‘Thick as thieves, you and young Marie.’

‘They’re on their way. In a taxi just behind us.’

‘But we shall be there first – just the two of us. And I’ve got a surprise for you.’ He tapped her leg just above the knee, letting his hand rest there. His fingers felt heavy on her thigh. ‘I *do* like these stockings. You should wear skirts more often. Your legs are *fabulous*.’

‘Please don’t do that,’ she said in a small voice, twisting her wedding ring around her finger.

‘Do what?’

‘Touch my leg.’

‘Oh? I thought you liked it.’

‘No. I’d prefer it if you didn’t.’

‘I *love* you playing hard to get. You’re such a tease, Sarah.’

He pressed himself closer again. She could smell his sweat, acrid and sharp, and the post-dessert brandy he’d swirled in his glass as he stared at her across the restaurant table. He moved his fingers a few inches higher, stroking her thigh.

Carefully and deliberately she lifted his hand up with hers and moved it away, aware of her heart thudding painfully in her chest.

Then he was stroking the back of her head, caressing her long dark hair. She flinched away, sitting forward against the seat belt and shooting him a look. He ignored her, cupping his right hand around his nose, eyelids fluttering closed for a second.

‘I love your smell, Sarah. You’re intoxicating. Do you wear that perfume just for me?’

Her skin crawling, she tried desperately to think of a way to stop this happening again.

Option one: she could just get out of the taxi right now. Rap on the glass divide and tell the driver to stop, then find another taxi back to the hotel, or walk the rest of the way. Perhaps not a great idea alone in a strange city – and besides, he’d probably follow her. Option two: she could politely ask him – again – to respect her personal space and respect her as a colleague. As likely to be effective as every other time a woman had said that to him. Option three: do nothing, stay quiet, make a note of what he said afterwards and report him to HR as soon as she was back in the office on Monday. About as likely to be effective as . . . well, see option two.

Then of course there was option four. The option her seventeen-year-old self would have taken: she could tell him to *get his damn hands off her and just piss off, and then keep on pissing off until he couldn’t piss off any further*. She could feel the shape of the words on her tongue, picture the look on his face. But of

course she wasn't going to blow everything by actually saying them out loud. She wasn't seventeen anymore and there was too much at stake now, too many people depending on her. Fifteen years on, she'd learned that just wasn't the way things worked. It wasn't the way to get on in life.

And the worst thing was, he knew it too.

2

Sarah took a deep breath. She had to be better than that. She just had to take a minute, stay calm, walk the line between anger and acquiescence.

Which meant it would have to be option five: try to get him thinking about something else.

‘You know, Alan, I’ve been following up on that research grant we won from the Bennett Trust recently,’ she said, a steadiness in her voice that she did not feel. ‘I’ve been looking into other sources of funding and I think I’ve had some luck – there’s something called the Atholl Sanders Foundation who’ve match-funded Bennett awards in the past and I think they might do it again with ours.’

‘The what foundation? I’ve never heard of it.’

‘Atholl Sanders. Based in Boston, in the US. Quite secretive, made a fortune in property, pharmaceuticals, that kind of thing. Normally they keep a low profile but I think they’d be interested in funding some of our studies. The chairman has a personal interest in Marlowe.’

He clasped his hands together in his lap.

‘That’s good work,’ he smiled. ‘Go on.’

Despite herself, she smiled back. With a glance over his shoulder, she scanned her surroundings. There was the train station, and the bridge, and the court building she recognised from earlier – they were close to the conference hotel now. All she had to do was keep him talking.

‘I’ve been in touch with the chairman of trustees,’ she said, ‘and they’re keen to find out more about what we can do.’

‘*That’s* why you’re our clever girl, Sarah. I think you should present your idea at the departmental meeting on Tuesday. The dean will be there – lots of brownie points on offer.’

‘Sure. Sounds good.’

‘Aren’t I nice to you?’

She said nothing.

‘Which reminds me,’ he continued, producing an envelope from his jacket pocket. ‘I’ve been meaning to give you this. I do so hope you can make it.’

He handed her the envelope, his hand brushing her leg again. It was heavy, expensive cream-coloured paper, her name on the front in swirling handwritten ink.

‘Thanks,’ she said, tucking it into her handbag.

‘Aren’t you going to open it?’

‘I will do. When we’re back at the hotel.’

‘I am nice to you, aren’t I?’ he said again. ‘You can be nice to me, too, you know. Once in a while, at least. Why don’t you try it?’

‘I just want to do my job, Alan.’

The taxi finally pulled to a wheezing halt outside the white stone façade of the Regal Hotel.



‘Here we are. Now, I’m going to treat you to a very special nightcap. Don’t you dare go anywhere.’

He leaned forward with a twenty pound note in his hand as the driver’s light came on.

‘Sorry, I’m exhausted,’ Sarah said hurriedly. ‘Going to call it a night.’

As fast as she could, she undid her seat belt, pulled the door handle and got out, walking quickly around the front of the cab, through the revolving door – *come on, come on, hurry up* – and into reception, her heels clicking on the shiny tiled floor.

Please let there be a lift. Please. Just let me get to my room, with a door I can lock behind me.

There were four lifts. As she speed-walked past the concierge, the one on the far right opened and a lone woman stepped in. The doors began to close.

‘Wait!’ Sarah half-shouted, breaking into a run.

The woman saw her and hit a button. The doors slid back open again.

‘Thank you,’ Sarah said as she entered the lift, flattening herself against the wall.

The woman was an American whom Sarah recognised from one of the seminar sessions earlier in the day. A name badge on her lapel said *Dr Christine Chen, Princeton University*. She had straight dark hair and kind eyes.

‘Which floor?’ she asked Sarah.

‘Five, please.’

Dr Chen pressed the *Door Close* button just as Lovelock strode through the revolving doors at the far end of the lobby.



‘There you are,’ he boomed, starting to walk briskly towards them.

Pretending not to hear, Sarah hit the door’s close button again. Nothing happened.

‘Sarah!’ he shouted again. ‘Wait!’

With agonising slowness, the lift doors began to close.

‘Sarah! Hold the –’

His barking command was lost as the doors slid shut.

3

‘Why do you put up with that creepy bastard?’ Laura said, slicing peppers at her kitchen worktop.

‘You know why,’ Sarah replied.

‘Doesn’t give him the right to grope you and harass you. If he was my boss I’d report him to HR so fast he wouldn’t know what fucking day it was.’

‘I know. But it doesn’t always work like that at the uni.’

Laura turned away from her chopping for a moment and gestured with the knife, a long black-handled blade that tapered to a wicked point.

‘It bloody *should* work like that,’ Laura said. ‘It’s like you’re working in the 1950s.’

Sarah smiled. Her friend swore and drank more than anyone she knew, and had an ingrained Yorkshire habit of speaking her mind without any thought of the consequences. Sarah loved her for it. Laura took absolutely no shit from anyone.

They had met at antenatal classes when Sarah was pregnant with Grace and Laura with her twins, Jack and Holly. At first Sarah had been a bit taken aback by Laura’s directness – and her assertion that she wanted all of the drugs available for childbirth,



preferably from a week before labour started – but it turned out they had a lot in common. They'd both studied English at Durham, they lived in the same north London neighbourhood and were both keen to get on at work. Laura was head of digital content for a large high street retailer.

Friday night sleepovers had become a monthly feature in their diaries. The four kids all got along well and played endless dressing-up games, even if Harry, as the youngest and smallest, usually seemed to be cast in supporting roles, as a servant, bad-die or farmyard animal. He didn't seem to mind too much, as long as he was included.

They were tucked up in bed now. Laura's husband Chris was at the pub with mates from his five-a-side football team. Sarah sat at the large kitchen table while her friend busied herself preparing a stir-fry for the two of them. The air was rich with the smell of beansprouts, cashews and chicken already sizzling in the wok.

'I know it should work like that, Loz, but it doesn't. It just depends who's getting accused. In any case, it's been tried before.'

'And?' Laura took a swig of red wine from her glass.

'And nothing. He's still there. That's why they call him the bulletproof prof. And why I have to play the long game, until I get a permanent contract.'

'Bulletproof prof,' Laura repeated. 'What genius came up with that one? Makes him sound like some kind of fucking superhero.'

'It's been his nickname for years, long before I got there. Unofficial, of course.'

'Someone has shopped him before, though?'



‘It’s all whispers in corridors. No one talks about what’s happened openly, it’s all very hush-hush.’

‘Have you talked to any of them? To whoever reported him to HR before?’

Sarah shook her head and took a sip of wine.

‘God no, they’re gone. Long gone.’

‘Shit, really? Gone as in fired, asked to leave? Or gone voluntarily?’

Sarah shrugged.

‘It was before my time, but I don’t think most of them are even in academia anymore. There have been a variety of students as well, over the years.’

‘People know, then?’

‘The thing is, Loz, there are two sides to Alan Lovelock. There is the famous Cambridge-educated TV academic, charming and charismatic and incredibly clever, next in line for a knighthood. That’s the public side, the one on display to people most of the time. It’s only when you’re unlucky enough to be a woman on her own with him that you see the other side.’

‘So how many notches on his bedpost have been students and members of staff?’

‘I’m hoping I’m never in a position to see his bedpost.’

Laura snorted and refilled her glass from the nearly empty bottle of red. She was already a glass ahead of Sarah.

‘I don’t get it, though. Why don’t HR just come down on him like a ton of shite? Surely he’s in their sights?’

‘Hmm. I’ll try to explain: imagine the crappiest thing you can think of.’

Laura leaned on the countertop, facing her friend.

‘OK. I’m thinking . . . Southern Rail?’

‘Now multiply its crapness by a factor of ten: that’s how effective our HR department is. At best, they’ll give him a slap on the wrist and “Guidance training on appropriate behaviour”. At worst, they’ll say it’s his word against mine and nothing will happen except I’ll find that the next time my contract could be made permanent – in three days’ time – instead it will be *Oh sorry, I’m afraid we’re going to have to let you go. Bye-bye contract. Bye-bye job.* And either way my career, in my field of expertise, will basically be bugged.’

‘I can’t believe the university still lets him work there. Should have been sacked years ago.’

‘He’s smart. Double first from Cambridge. Never does it where there are witnesses, so it’s always your word against his. There’s never any hard evidence, so the university hierarchy end up giving him the benefit of the doubt.’

‘Someone should record him. Catch him in the act.’

‘Except if he catches you doing it you can kiss goodbye to a permanent contract.’

‘Getting him on record would at least give you a fighting chance.’

Sarah indicated the wall-mounted TV, a muted news bulletin showing Donald Trump holding court on the White House lawn.

‘Right – because being caught on tape boasting about harassing women really scuppered his ambitions, didn’t it?’

Laura pulled a face.

‘Ugh. Don’t even get me started on that one.’

She grabbed the remote and flicked to BBC2. Professor Alan Lovelock filled the screen, standing amid medieval ruins and gesticulating at the camera.

‘Jesus,’ she muttered, switching to a film channel, ‘can’t get away from the lanky bastard.’

Sarah sighed and took a sip of her wine.

‘Anyway, the university has a lot of reasons to want to keep him. Nine point six million reasons, to be precise.’

‘So he can do what he likes?’ Laura said. ‘Because of the money?’

There was no question that Professor Alan Lovelock was an outstanding scholar and a gifted researcher – he was one of the best in the world, in his specialist area. That was what had drawn Sarah to his department at Queen Anne University in the first place. But what made him untouchable was that he had landed one of the biggest grants given out to an English department ever: a seven-year grant from an Australian philanthropist worth £9.6m.

‘It’s a massive grant – more than the whole faculty got for the last five years put together. Queen Anne’s top brass are petrified that if life gets uncomfortable here, he’ll just take his grant, and set up somewhere else. And that will blow a massive hole in our research profile, we’ll drop in the league tables, they won’t be able to go on every five minutes about having this famous professor who has his own BBC2 series. Every so often he’ll drop a hint to the dean that Edinburgh and Belfast universities have been sniffing around, just to make it clear that he might walk if he feels like it.’

‘It’s a shame he doesn’t walk off a cliff,’ Laura said and Sarah smiled, but it faded quickly.

‘You know what really gets to me?’

‘Apart from the groping and harassment and discrimination and all the rest of the crap?’

‘What really gets me is that I’ve got an MA and a PhD, a full-time job and a mortgage; I’m married, I’ve got two children, and yet he still calls me “the clever girl” in meetings like I’m the fourteen-year-old work experience kid. I don’t know why I let it wind me up but it’s just maddening. I’m thirty-two years old, for Christ’s sake. He wouldn’t dream of calling any of his young male colleagues something like that.’

‘You won’t change your mind about going elsewhere?’

‘Where would I go? There are only three universities in the UK that have specialist centres on Christopher Marlowe: Belfast, Edinburgh, and us. And Lovelock’s not just *one* of them, he’s the best, with the biggest grant, the biggest team, the biggest reputation. Switching disciplines now would be like going back to zero and starting again.’

‘I don’t see why you *should* bloody move, anyway,’ Laura said. ‘You’ve worked hard for this, you love what you do and you haven’t done anything wrong. It would be taking your kids out of good schools to move hundreds of miles away; away from your dad, too. Bugger that.’

‘Quite. Anyway, while we’re on the subject, I’m hoping that there might finally be some good news around the corner.’

Laura raised a quizzical eyebrow.

‘How so?’

Sarah reached for her handbag and found the expensive cream envelope that Lovelock had given her in the taxi two nights previously. She handed it to her friend.

‘Bet you can’t guess what that is.’

‘No idea, love,’ Laura said, turning the envelope over in her hands. ‘You’re going to have to give me a few clues.’

‘Open it.’

Laura reached into the envelope and took out the thick embossed card, giving a low whistle.

‘You’ve got to be kidding me.’ She looked up, the smile fading from her face. ‘But you’re not seriously thinking about going to this, are you?’

Sarah nodded.

‘Yes. I think I am.’