

FINAL7

BOOKS BY KERRY DREWERY

Cell 7

Day 7

Final 7

A Brighter Fear

A Dream of Lights

FINAL7

KERRY
DREWERY

HOT
KEY
BOOKS

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1

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For my big brother, Colin



When money speaks, the truth keeps silent.

Old Russian proverb



PROLOGUE



Martha

Was that a heartbeat?

I don't know. Can't find it now. Can't feel it.

I move my hand, try again.

Nothing.

Try again.

Fuck, still nothing.

'He's . . .' I mumble, shaking my head. Can't say the word.

Can't end it.

Tears drip from me.

Can't see for blur.

I wipe my eyes. My hands feel sticky.

I look at them.

Looks like blood.

Isaac's.

The car tears down the road. Streetlights flash through the window.

Light

dark

light

dark . . .

across Gus's face as he turns around in the front seat.

He's staring at Isaac; he stretches and puts a hand on his chest.

So calm.
Then he looks at me, takes my hand and puts it on Isaac.
'Feel,' he says. 'He's breathing.'
I nod but can't speak.
I'm shaking.
Don't know what to do.
I watch Isaac's face as light hits it.
Wish his eyes would open.
I close mine, imagine being with him, concentrate on my
palm rising and falling as he breathes.
Stay with me, Isaac, I say in my head, willing every breath
he takes.
Something, a truck or lorry, flies past us so fast and heavy
it rocks the car and I open my eyes.
The car slows.
'What the –' the woman driving says.
I open my mouth to ask who she is, but as I turn to look
out the window, I stop.
Not far ahead, at the boundary of the Rises, under a barrage
of floodlights, are rows and rows of lorries and trucks.
I squint through the windows and the darkness, blinking to
try to make sense of what I'm seeing.
Cranes in the sky. Orange flashing lights. Workmen all over.
And massive, ugly, concrete panels, stacked up to make a
huge wall.
For what? To keep us out?
Stop our influence? Control us? What?
'Berlin,' I whisper. 'Israel, Belfast. Korea.'

‘Now London,’ Gus replies.
What the hell?
What the actual hell?

TV STUDIO

11 p.m. The programme – *Death is Justice: Late-Night Round-Up* – is beginning.

The screen shows the death row building – recorded footage from a CCTV camera. Throngs of people. Half-light. The blue eye logo above it all. The image shakes, distorts, blurs. A massive boom rocks the area and clouds of smoke rise into the sky.

GEROME SHARP (off-screen): This is Gerome Sharp, new roving reporter for *Death is Justice*, reporting live from the death row building. Viewers are warned that footage contains flashing images and scenes of an upsetting nature.

In the recording, clouds of dust plume towards the camera and the blue from the eye logo flashes and flickers.

GEROME (off-screen): As an earth-shaking explosion rocks death row we ask – did terrorists bring this carnage to the City?

The screen changes to a shaky image from a hand-held camera. People are screaming and running, some with blood pouring from them. Others stagger. The camera zooms in on the building. Bodies can be seen on the ground close by.

GEROME (off-screen): Countless injured as panic rips through the streets in what many are calling 'justice's blackest day'.

Blue lights flash over the scene. The wail of sirens and crying. The camera focuses on Martha on the ground with her hands in the air. Eyes wide and mouth open. Blood on her face. Police pointing guns at her as they approach.

GEROME: Fugitive, and prime suspect, Martha Honeydew is arrested at the scene. What may be a detonator is found nearby.

The footage fades and is replaced by live feed of Gerome Sharp at the scene: chiselled jaw, long dark coat and neatly tied check scarf. Running along the bottom of the screen are the words 'Terrorism in the heart of the City'.

GEROME: This important symbol of justice came crashing to the ground earlier today in a targeted and bloody attack. Only minutes after the final verdict had been given in the Isaac Paige case, an explosion rocked central London, threatening to bring the justice system to its knees. At present the cause

of the explosion is unknown, although there have been unconfirmed reports that it was a bomb. We are also waiting for confirmation on the number of dead; however it's feared that the amount of people injured when the building crashed to the ground in clouds of smoke and dust, throwing the entire area into chaos, may well reach into the thousands due to the crowds the case attracted. Martha Honeydew, who has been the focus of a nationwide manhunt since her acquittal from death row a week ago, was arrested at the scene. While the exact nature of her involvement in the attack is as yet unclear, CCTV footage shows Honeydew approaching the building wearing a backpack, leading to suspicions this could have been a suicide bomb attack gone wrong. We'll go to the Prime Minister now for a live statement on the events.

The Prime Minister – Stephen Renard

‘Where is Sofia?’ the PM demands as he strides down a corridor, straightening his tie and flattening his jacket. He takes his phone from his pocket and taps the screen.

People scurry around him, staring at clipboards or mobile phones with frowns and shaking of heads.

‘And why is nothing working?’ he shouts as he throws his phone to the floor. ‘You!’ He points at a young man with close-cropped hair walking towards him. ‘Who are you?’

‘Err . . . I-I . . .’ the young man stutters, ‘I’m the new intern. Gino.’

‘Gino, get me Sofia! Now!’

‘We . . . We c-can’t –’ he says.

‘What?’

‘We can’t . . . find her. Her phone’s not connecting. She’s not in her office.’

‘Her phone’s not connecting because the system’s gone down, you arse. And she’s not in her office because I said she could have an early night. Are you stupid?’

‘Then . . . ?’

‘There must be something wrong.’

‘You don’t think she’s caught up in the . . . the . . . ?’

The PM stops and turns on him. ‘Shut up,’ he hisses, jabbing him in the chest, his face contorted, his jaw clenched. ‘Shut the hell up.’

‘Sir,’ a gentle female voice comes from the side, ‘we’ve sent a car to her apartment and we’re contacting her friends and relatives.’

The PM looks to her, his face softening.

‘In the meantime, sir, if you don’t mind my saying so, the press are waiting for your statement.’

He nods slowly, stretches his neck sideways and brushes back a loose strand of hair.

‘That’s very efficient of you,’ he mumbles.

The Prime Minister walks away. Further down the corridor a young man opens a door for him, and as he steps through, his face turns calm yet serious.

On the other side rows and rows of chairs are filled with journalists and news reporters. The chatter stops, people pick up microphones, cameras, pens and notebooks, as the PM stands at the lectern at the front of the room, rests his papers in front of him and looks over the crowd.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, it’s with a heavy heart that I speak to you this evening.’ He pauses and takes a deep breath.

‘At precisely 8.57 p.m. today we, the law-abiding public, came under attack from forces who wish to unleash chaos into our society.’ He speaks slowly and deliberately, pausing at the end of each phrase as cameras flash and reporters and audiences at home hang on his every word.

‘I can confirm that a bomb was detonated directly outside death row, resulting in the collapse of one side of the building and serious and dangerous structural damage to the rest.’

‘This is a senseless act of violence.’

‘It is wanton disregard for the values we live by.’

‘It is an example of the hatred and barbarism that have been allowed to fester and grow within certain sections of our society.

‘But we will *not* let them grow any more. Nor will we allow them to affect the freedoms we hold so dear.

‘I publicly condemn the actions of the group that carried out this attack, who have no respect for the value of human life.’

He pauses, drops his head for a moment as if in sadness. Then lifts it again, takes a deep breath and looks at the audience.

‘The emergency services, our best and our bravest, are at the scene and are doing everything within their power to assist the injured. At this point, however, I cannot speculate on numbers, but suffice to say that in the region of two hundred people were in the audience at Cell 7 tonight and, as yet, fewer than fifty have been accounted unharmed.

‘Furthermore, it is believed that as many as three thousand members of the public had gathered outside the gates.

‘We ask for your patience and understanding in this time of great pain.’

He pauses, looking over the audience, and slowly shakes his head.

‘And great pain it is, but not pain we shall dwell on nor seek pity for. For we, society, the City, law-abiding citizens of the Avenues, will rise from the ashes, from the dust and the debris of this calculated, blood-thirsty attack, and we will unleash the full power of the law on those responsible.

‘As you may be aware, the fugitive Martha Honeydew was discovered at the scene. She was found with a detonator in her hands.’

He pauses while a mutter ripples through the crowd. Then he raises his hands for silence.

‘I’m sure you are all as shocked as I am that someone so young could commit such a terrible crime, especially against an institution that barely a week ago allowed her own release and was soon to acquit the young man she claimed to be involved with.

‘Speculation has been rife, and I can now confirm that Honeydew did not act alone.’

As he pauses again, he glances around the room and spots Sofia standing by a door at the back. Their eyes meet for a second and she gives a brief nod of acknowledgement.

‘There seems little doubt that a small yet dangerous group of individuals is plotting against us. Against the City, the Avenues, and the good people within it. The law-abiding, hard-working, family-loving citizens which we, *you*, all are. Plotting to destabilise our society, to attack the deepest roots of justice, and the very heart of what makes us human.

‘This group of . . . and I hesitate to call them “people” because in my mind they are no better than animals . . . have been named as . . .’

He lifts his chin, squares his shoulders and takes a breath.

‘. . . Eve and Max Stanton, Thomas Cicero, Joshua Decker, Gus Evans, Isaac Paige and Martha Honeydew. These seven, with their sympathies for the criminal, the lazy, the benefit-scroungers and the poor – the kind who we have tried many times to help so they might go on to help themselves, the kind who live in the Rises – will be brought to justice.

‘Eve Stanton has been arrested. Honeydew has been sent

to prison. Evans is already there. We wait for confirmation on Paige, while emergency services secure the area. We are putting stringent security measures in place and we will hunt down Max Stanton, Thomas Cicero and Joshua Decker. Like animals we will hunt them down, and again our city will be a safe place to live.

‘We must stand together and stand strong and we will prevail against this evil!’

He lifts his fist into the air and the crowd cheer with him.

‘Thank you for your time and your support,’ he says as they quieten. ‘My thoughts are with those affected and their families on this terrible night.’

He collects the papers and, with a final glance towards Sofia, walks from the room.

Sofia edges around the chairs and follows the PM, nodding at journalists she knows. As she reaches out to push open the door she catches sight of blood on her hand and quickly wipes it down her trousers.

Isaac’s blood.

The door swings closed behind her.

‘Sofia,’ the PM says and takes her by the shoulders. ‘Thank goodness you’re here. The systems are down, I can’t –’

She looks up and meets his eye without flinching or betraying even a shadow of doubt.

‘Nobody here knows how to reset them. I assume you do?’ he asks in a whisper.

She nods. ‘Yes, sir, of course.’

The Stanton house

The house is in darkness. Max and Cicero stand in the kitchen, the light from the television news flickering on their faces and around the room. The sound is low and subtitles stream along the bottom of the screen.

‘TERRORIST GROUP AT LARGE . . . RISES 7 WANTED FOR QUESTIONING . . . THOMAS CICERO, FORMER HIGH COURT JUDGE, IN BOMBING SCANDAL . . . MAX STANTON NAMED AS YOUNGEST EVER TERRORIST . . .’

Pounding comes from the front door.

‘Open this door or we will break it down!’ a voice shouts. ‘This is your final warning!’

Max picks up his laptop bag from the floor and looks to Cicero.

Silently he nods and, pulling their jackets around them, they head out of the French windows.

Behind them crashing sounds from the front door, but by the time the police are through, Max and Cicero have disappeared into the darkness of the garden and beyond.

Martha

The wall's going up fast.

The woman said it's too dangerous for her to go into the Rises so she dropped us off before it and we had to walk. Me and Gus carrying Isaac between us, causing God knows what damage to him. Supposing he had a broken rib and it punctured his lung? Or some head injury we were making worse by shaking him around?

I tried to persuade her but she was adamant. Kept saying Gus would explain later and that she had to go. I had the feeling I knew her face from somewhere but I couldn't work out where.

She kept saying she hadn't thought it'd happen that fast.

What?

The wall?

I glance back. Cranes rise into the sky, silhouetted by floodlights. Enormous sheets of concrete hoisted into the air. The creaking of it all and the groaning. The sounds of our freedom under stress. The shouts of men, the thunder of machines.

How long is it already?

How far does it stretch?

Will it go all the way around?

How will folks go to work, to the shops, to see friends?

How will we – I look down to Isaac – get a doctor?

We're trudging over the grass now, me and Gus, towards Daffodil House.

We've put Isaac in a supermarket trolley we found abandoned at the underpass and we're pushing him. Have to – there's no other way we can manage him.

It worries me.

It shakes and rattles like hell and it can't be doing him any good.

I want to pick him up and carry him.

Hold him.

Fix him.

He's gone blue around his mouth. I touch him and he's cold like stone, so pale and still. I pull my jacket off as Gus pushes and I throw it over Isaac.

The cold bites me, takes my breath and I tense and shiver.

'You'll catch your death!' Gus says.

'I can move to keep warm,' I reply. 'He can't.'

He shakes his head at me. 'Put in back on,' he says, and he starts pulling off his own coat.

'Don't try getting all chivalrous on me,' I say to him.

'Shut up and push,' he replies. 'This is nothing to do with chivalry. This is cos I've got a jumper on under and all you got is a T-shirt. Stop trying to be the hero and put your jacket on.'

As he places his over Isaac he throws mine back to me.

'I wasn't trying to be a hero,' I mutter. 'I'm just . . .' If I carry on I'm going to cry, so I shut up instead and lift my face into the cold wind.

He says something but I can't hear.

On the bar of the trolley his hand rests on mine.

I take a deep breath and nod.

Death Row

Eve stands barefoot in a tiny room made of old crumbling bricks and a cracked and dirty concrete floor. Moss grows in the corners and mould up the walls; a fusty smell hangs in the air. A draught through a high window sways the single light bulb hanging from the middle of the stained and peeling ceiling.

In her egg-splattered pyjamas Eve shivers and wraps her arms around herself.

The chains around her ankles and wrists clank against each other.

‘Stanton!’ a loud male voice booms, and a short chubby man waddles in through an archway at the side. ‘Time to sort you. Come on.’ He yanks at the chains and she lurches forward, following him out through the archway.

‘Where are you taking me?’

‘No talking unless instructed,’ he says. ‘You should know the drill.’

The next room is just as cold and stark as the first, but has a wooden table and chair in the middle. A long electric cable leads across the floor and to hair clippers resting on the table, along with folded prison overalls and a tub of white powder. The only other object is a metal bin.

‘Where are we?’ she asks. ‘This isn’t death row.’

He yanks on the chains and she stumbles forward.

'I said no talking,' he mutters. 'Now strip.'

'Pardon?'

'Clothes off. Hands on the table, legs spread.'

'What?'

'De-lousing. Hair off. Prison uniform on.'

She stares at him.

'Get on with it, or I'll have people come in here and do it for you. You haven't got nothing I haven't seen before, and I don't take no thrill in the body of some fifty-something wrinkly has-been.'

'I'm forty-two.'

'Like I care.'

She stares at him.

'I should've realised that someone of your . . . *physique*,' she says twisting the first button on her pyjamas, 'would be less concerned with appearance . . .'

'I told you –'

' . . . than someone,' she continues, interrupting as she undoes the next button, 'with a body they look after.'

'What?'

'Or is that unfair of me?' She unfastens the last one and slips the top from her shoulders.

He continues to stare as she lowers her trousers and steps out of them.

'Clearly your stomach hanging over your belt isn't as important as the brain in your head, is it? Just as my breasts are of no relevance to the person I am inside.'

He wipes a corner of his mouth on his sleeve.

‘And the sagging of your male . . . *chest area* . . . is as relevant to your character as my lack of thigh gap.’

‘Shut the hell up,’ he mutters, wiping his top lip.

She walks over to the table, rests her hands on top and spreads her legs.

‘You have no clue what I’m talking about, do you?’

Not taking his eyes off her, he lifts the tub of powder and twists the lid.

‘Your brain has disengaged from your head, hasn’t it?’

Without replying, he throws the de-lousing powder over her.

She closes her eyes. ‘You are just the sort of Neanderthal they want. Cheap thrills, no questions. Not even any thought.’

‘Put the overalls on,’ he grunts, ‘sit down, and for Christ’s sake stop talking.’

The overalls are the same as she’s seen so many before her wear, and as she pulls them up her legs and pushes her arms down the sleeves she fights the thought that she would’ve counselled someone wearing these exact ones, and that someone, at least one, would’ve died in these.

Once she’s in the chair, the smell of damp floats up from them and she fights the nausea rising through her stomach and throat.

Behind her, the clippers buzz into action and the cold of the metal hits the back of her neck.

Her blonde hair falls to the ground.

Martha

The place is empty.

There's no one around.

Not a soul.

The sound of that wall going up, the sight of it, must've scared everyone off.

There weren't even any of the homeless folk at the underpass.

Daffodil House is above us now, but I don't even see any lights in windows.

We shove the trolley right up to the front doors.

Remember the first time you met? my head asks me. *Remember him walking you right to this door in the rain? You told him to fuck off. Remember that.*

I do, I reply, and I look down at him, sprawled across this decrepit trolley, his face bloodied, his skin tinged blue, his eyes closed.

Celebrity Chat's Teen Bachelor of the Year. The *National News* Junior Crime Ambassador. Son of celebrity millionaire. A star pupil at Anderson's Academy for the Gifted.

What have I done to him?

I want to drop to my knees and give up.

I want to die because fighting is too hard.

Not now, my head tells me. *You owe it to him to be strong. You are strong.*

Right bloody contrary thing you are, I tell my head.
Gus pulls the door open.
Strange to be back.
I push the trolley inside.
What's that smell? It smells . . . *nice*.
A gentle light flickers on and I freeze.
There's no rubbish on the floor; it's clean and shiny. The
walls aren't smeared with grease and dirt from a million grimy
hands; instead they're painted a gentle green. And the strip
light doesn't flicker like some horror film.
Faces peer out at us.
Friendly, soft and welcoming.
Smiling.
A young girl moves towards me and puts a blanket around
me. A shiver runs down me and I have to blink not to cry. I
recognise her face but don't know her name.
Then an old man steps forward, his legs bowed like he's had
rickets or something, and his face has lines and wrinkles so
deep there must be a thousand stories hiding in there.
He takes my hand and he smiles at me.
'Welcome home,' he says.
I can't speak to reply, but I hope my smile says it all.

Max and Cicero

Through the suburbs of the Avenues they walk and walk, not daring to take public transport, keeping their heads low and their hoods up, scarves lifted to obscure their faces, keeping out of view of shops, streetlights and car headlights.

It's late at night, the last day of November, freezing cold, frost on the ground, the few people around hurrying and taking little notice of anything.

In a window to Max's side, lights on a Christmas tree sparkle and he turns away quickly; memories of his mum in his head, their tree at home, presents underneath, turkey and friends. He speeds up.

They walk and they walk, with fingers seizing from the cold and faces pinching in the wind, and eventually it looms ahead of them.

'What is that?' Max says, his voice hoarse and broken.

Staring into the sky, they both come to a stop.

'It looks like . . .' Cicero mutters, his eyes straining, ' . . . like they're building a wall.'

'Why would they do that?'

Cicero shakes his head and starts walking again, faster this time.

Max scurries up alongside him. 'To keep them in there? To stop us going in? To control?'

‘All of the above?’ Cicero replies. ‘Whatever the reason, we need to get in there before it’s too late. Come on; we need to be quick.’

‘But then . . . what if we can’t get out?’

‘What choice do we have? We stay here, we’ll be arrested, we’ll be dead in a week.’