



From the
author of the
bestselling
phenomenon

**THE
SERIAL
KILLER'S
WIFE**

Family is forever...
unless he kills you first.

**THE
SERIAL
KILLER'S
SISTER**

ALICE HUNTER

THE SERIAL KILLER'S SISTER
Alice Hunter

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Dedication

For Emily.

The best daughter-in-law I could hope for. Thank you for giving me such a beautiful granddaughter. And for reading my books!

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Prologue](#)

[May 9th: Four days to go](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[May 10th: Three days to go](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[May 11th: Two days to go](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[May 12th: One day to go](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[May 13th: Day Zero](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Chapter 40](#)

[Chapter 41](#)

[Chapter 42](#)

[Chapter 43](#)

[Chapter 44](#)

[Chapter 45](#)

[Chapter 46](#)

[Chapter 47](#)

[Chapter 48](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Keep Reading ...](#)

[About the Author](#)

[By the Same Author](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

Prologue

‘Do we have to go inside?’ The boy, small for eight, stops walking before reaching the flaky green gate and looks up at his sister, his large, brown eyes begging.

‘We’re already late. You don’t want another whipping, do you?’

‘No.’ His lower lip wobbles, and the girl sighs and turns to him, putting her backpack on the pavement. With both her hands firmly on his shoulders, she stoops to look into his eyes.

‘Come on. I’ll sneak you in and straight up the stairs. Then I’ll make us Dairylea sandwiches.’

‘Can we eat them in your special tent?’ As he asks, he dips his head, and a chunk of sand-coloured hair falls over his right eye. The girl pushes it back. There’s only one year and eleven months between them, but already she’s far more grown up; she’s had to be.

‘Course,’ she says.

He smiles, then, and takes a deep breath. ‘I’m glad I’ve got you.’

‘I’m glad I’ve got you, too,’ she says. And she means it.

The smell of stale fags, alcohol, and what she guesses is pee hits her as she cracks open the front door and pops her head around to see if the coast is clear. She had considered trying the back door, but that needs WD-40 and squeals like a hundred mice, so they could never have snuck past *him*, no matter how drunk he is today. He always senses when they’re home. He smells them, like the giant in the sky in Jack and the Beanstalk.

It’s not him the girl glimpses, though, and she allows the air in her lungs to escape with a low hiss. Maybe they got away with it this time. The woman, dressed in a grubby, oversized t-shirt, with skinny legs clad in patchy grey leggings, lies on her back on the stained beige two-seater sofa. One arm dangles off it, the hand open and an empty wine bottle on its side beneath it. Crushed beer cans scatter the floor, making the pattern of the carpet almost invisible. A waft of sick rides on the air and the girl screws her nose up before pinching it tight with her thumb and finger. She notices lumps of undigested food mixed in a gravy-like liquid on the side of her mother’s face, spreading over the edge of the sofa.

Her breath hitches. Is she dead? The girl moves to block her brother’s line of sight. She can’t let him see. ‘Go on,’ she whispers, pushing him behind her back towards the stairs.

He barely gets his foot on the first step when the voice bellows.

‘Where the fuck have you two been?’ He’s standing at the top; must’ve just got out the loo. The girl pulls the boy back to her and they both recoil, slamming hard against the wall. If they could disappear into it, they would. ‘You better have got my stuff?’

As he descends the stairs, she slips the backpack off her shoulder, undoes it and with a shaky hand delves inside. The man jerks forward, yanking the bag from her grip. He pulls out the bottle of whisky, then throws the bag back at her. The metal zip catches her square in the face. She yelps, touching her fingertips to her bleeding nose. He snorts, then pushes past them. Just as they think they’ve escaped the worst of it, he turns and rushes at the boy.

‘Pathetic wimp. Bet you got your sister to steal this, didn’t you?’ He whacks the bottle against the boy’s chest. ‘When I was your age, I’d be getting my old man whatever he fancied. No questions. No big sister to do it for me. You need to grow a pair.’ He makes a grab for the boy, one large hand squeezing hard between his legs until he cries out. The man laughs. ‘Just like I thought. No balls.’

Hot tears run down the boy’s cheeks, which makes the man laugh even harder.

The girl launches at him, smacking his arm. ‘Leave him alone!’ she yells. ‘I’m going to call the police.’

‘Oh, really? Where’s this come from, eh, kid? What are you, seven?’

‘No, I’m ten and you’re not our dad, so you don’t belong here.’ The warm, tight ball that began in her stomach, like a knotted piece of string, grows bigger and gets hotter. It rises up until it explodes out of her mouth like a firework: a fizzing, burning Catherine Wheel, making a high-pitched squealing noise. The boy’s hands cup his ears, and he cowers in the corner as the girl’s scream goes on and on.

It’s not until the front door bursts in, wood splintering like gunfire, that the screaming stops.

And they are saved.

The large, wooden double doors of Finley Hall Children’s Home open wide, as if they’re the entrance to a magical castle. For one hopeful moment, they stand in awe, mouths agape as their faces turn upwards to the ornate ceiling.

That split second of optimism – the feeling that they’ve escaped their awful life, managed to find a safe and secure place to grow up – ends abruptly with a harsh shriek. Their pale faces watch as a man drags a boy across the hall in front of them, his feet barely touching the stone floor tiles as they scramble to find purchase.

‘What are you waiting for? Get here!’ A woman dressed head to toe in black, her hair wild and straw-like, appears from a room to their right. ‘Don’t take any notice of Frank. If you do as you’re told, you won’t have to meet him.’ She turns on her heel and goes back into the room. The name *Miss Graves* is written in black on a silver plaque on the door.

The girl gulps down her fear, turns to her brother and plasters on a smile. ‘It’s you and me, always, right?’

‘Cross your heart?’ The boy’s voice quivers.

‘And hope to die.’ She makes a quick cross on her chest with her forefinger. The boy steps in front of her, preventing her from moving.

‘Stick a needle in your eye,’ he says, coolly.

She sighs, looks down at her brother and declares, ‘Stick a needle in my eye.’

Then she clasps his hand in hers, and together they walk into their new home.

MAY 9th
Four days to go