

EXTRACTS

Three in a Bed

By

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Due to the explicit nature of some of the content of this book, these extracts have been selected so as not cause offence to more sensitive readers.

A short extract from each of the three stories is provided.

Moving Pictures

DI Beth Green shivered in the cold morning air. She hated the Coldharbour Canal Basin. Its air of decay seemed to add an extra layer of chill. A strip of blue and white police tape fluttered in the stiff breeze and told her where the scene of the crime was.

She walked over to the crumbling disused warehouse and was handed a SOCO suit by the PC on guard there. She was glad she had remembered to put trousers on this morning. It saved her the walk back to the car to remove her skirt away from the prying eyes of the junior officers and civilian forensic staff.

As she struggled into the paper suit, the PC told her what he knew. “DS Daley was first CID officer at the scene, Ma’am. Dog walker found the body. Well, his dog did really, he just went to find out what all the barking was about. Anyway, it’s a naked woman, and she seems to have been given a pretty severe whipping. The Forensic Medical Examiner has already arrived.”

“OK, thanks.” Now that her ability to contaminate the forensic evidence had been reduced, Beth ducked under the tape and made her way into the building. She had to lengthen her stride to step gingerly from one metal foot plate to the next. Obviously a man had placed these, she thought. A member of the civilian staff was erecting a spotlight to help them examine the area more thoroughly. Beth spotted DS Daley in consultation with the FME.

“What have we got, Frank?”

“Woman, late thirties to early forties. Naked. Looks as though she’s taken a pretty thorough beating.”

“That wasn’t what killed her, though.” Interjected the FME. “I’d say she was strangled. There are ligature marks on her neck. Obviously, the post-mortem will have to confirm that. Oh, and she wasn’t killed here. To whip her for that long and that hard would have left scuff marks in the dirt on the ground, and there’s no sign of that, or any kind of struggle. Also, there are restraint marks on her wrists and ankles, but no sign of anything that might have been used to secure her.”

“And no sign of the woman’s clothes, either.” Added the DS.

“Some sort of S&M thing that’s gone wrong?” Beth launched the rhetorical question into the ether.

“That, Beth, is for you to find out. I’ll tell you what the injuries on her body mean and confirm the time of death and the cause for you, and if we’re lucky we’ll get some DNA off her that will tell you where to start asking questions.”

“Time of death?”

“Difficult. It was a cold night, but I’d say more than six hours ago and less than twelve.”

“Thanks Amanda. Give me a ring when you’ve got something for us and I’ll come over.” Beth turned back to her DS again. “OK, Frank, what have you got organised so far?”

The DS gave a run down on the actions he had taken since he had arrived. “Inspector Cotton arrived a few minutes ago and has taken charge of the uniformed effort from me.”

“OK, I’ll go and have a chat with him and make sure we’ve covered all the bases.” Beth went in search of her uniformed colleague.

* * *

Amanda Ellington pulled her surgical mask down from her face as she walked across the large room to greet Beth Green. Beth had changed into surgical scrubs and face mask as well, to ensure that she didn't introduce any foreign evidence to the body lying face down on the examination table.

"Thanks for coming." Amanda greeted her. "This lady has quite a tale to tell. Do we know who she is yet?"

"Not a clue. She doesn't match any of the missing person reports we've got on file and no one has contacted us today to ask for help in finding her. The original Jane Doe, as the Americans would say."

"OK, first things first. Time of death was between 8 and 10 pm last night. She's in her early forties, not more than forty five, certainly. She has expensive tastes. I would say that her perfume and make up is beyond the purse of a mere Home Office FME. I've sent samples off to see if we can identify brands, but I'd say that this is a woman that spends a lot of money on her appearance, which suggests she has a lot of money to spend in the first place."

"Not some homeless person snatched from the street to satisfy some perv's fantasy, then?"

"Oh, most definitely not. It doesn't mean she wasn't snatched from the street, of course, but I'd guess this is a lady that goes most places by car or taxi. Her hands don't show much sign of manual work, not even washing up, which suggests a good quality hand cream. Most of these injuries," The FME pointed to the red weal's on the woman's back, buttocks and thighs, "have nothing to do with her death. Bruising suggests they were inflicted at least forty eight hours before death, maybe a bit more. Of course, she could have been held captive for that long, but they certainly didn't happen immediately before her death.

The marks on her wrists and ankles are consistent with metal restraints, not rope or leather. Not handcuffs, though, they're too broad. Probably manacles of some sort. There is some rubbing, which suggests she struggled to escape them, but not severe. She wasn't panicking and trying to break free. And they were also last used forty eight hours or more before her death. There's some additional evidence that she was restrained at the time of her murder, but not for very long."

Amanda paused for breath and stepped towards the woman's head. She pointed at her neck. "This is the confusing bit. There are actually two ligature marks here, not one as I originally thought. One of them was inflicted at around the same time as most of the other injuries, but the other one was actually the cause of her death."

"You keep saying 'most of the injuries'?"

"Ah yes. See these four here?" Amanda pointed to four red stripes across the woman's buttocks. "They were made by a different weapon and just before she died."

"How can you be sure that the weapon was different?"

"The style of mark is different. Look at these ones on her back. They wrap round her body, some of them reaching right round to the front. That's a very flexible weapon. I'd guess at some sort of whip with a very pliable tip that can wrap round an object.

Now, these here," She pointed to the marks on Beth's thighs, "and also this one at the top of her buttocks. They were caused by a riding crop, I'm pretty sure. They don't wrap around her body at all, indicating a fairly stiff weapon, but see here." Amanda indicated a pattern of

inch long weals at the end of the single slash mark. “A riding crop has some short strands of leather attached to the tip. Typically, they will wrap round the object that’s being struck and leave that little pattern of lines.

But these four are different. They were made by something thin but quite stiff. Not more than half an inch wide. There’s also indications that there may be little knots spaced along its length about 8 inches apart. I’m guessing that it was something like a cane. The sort that used to be used in schools back in the bad old days of corporal punishment.”

“And they were inflicted just before death?”

“Oh yes. Hardly any bruising under the skin at all, which means that the blood didn’t have much time to get to the area of the injury before her heart stopped.”

“What about sexual activity?”

“Oh, plenty of that. There’s semen inside her vagina, deposited not more than three hours before her death. There are also traces of semen inside her anus, but older. I’d say that it got there around the same time of as the whip marks. It’s difficult to say. Anyway, we’ve sent both samples off to the lab for analysis, and if you’re lucky one or both donors may be on record.”

“Anything else?”

“Well, yes, but it isn’t scientific and I don’t think I could stand up in court and support it.”

“I’ll bear that in mind. But I need all I can get right now if I’m to catch whoever killed her.”

“OK. I didn’t spot it on the initial examination, but when we tidied her up it was pretty clear that her haircut was done by someone with excellent skills. It’s not the sort of quality you would associate with your average high street salon. This is high end hairdressing.”

“Any guesses as to where she might have had it cut?”

“Ruling out a trip to London, I’d say there are only two, maybe three salons in the city centre where she could get a cut of that quality. I can tell you now, we would both need second mortgages before we could walk through their doors. That’s if they would let us in at all.”

“OK, which ones do you think they might be?”

My Favourite Auntie

I had last seen Auntie Marje (she's not my real auntie, just a neighbour) some twenty five years or more before. She was on her third husband by that time, but still had legions of male admirers. No surprise really; despite her more mature years she was still a stunning looking woman and her figure had lost none of its allure. I had been visiting my mum and she suggested that I go and say hello to Marje, as she was always asking after me. So I did just that.

I found her in the sitting room with her husband, watching TV. We sat sipping tea and chatted for a while, before I noticed that hubby had nodded off. Out of boredom at our reminiscences, I assumed. The twinkle in Marje's eye told me she was more than up for it, so when she flung her arms round my neck and planted some passionate kisses on my lips I wasn't too surprised. It was only when she was dragging me upstairs (not too reluctantly) that she confessed to having slipped a sleeping pill into her husband's cup of tea. I'm glad it was a strong pill because age had done nothing to lessen the volume of Marje's orgasms. For any youngsters reading this I should warn you that the older generations not only still have sex, but they also enjoy it just as much as you do, if not more.

But that was then, and I hadn't been back home since. My parents decided that they wanted to retire by the sea and my younger sister emigrated to Canada, so there was nothing much to take me back there anymore.

I found out about Marje's death when my Mum 'phoned me to tell me. She had only found out about it herself when a mutual friend back in the old hometown had sent her a cutting from the local paper. Mum was very upset about it, as she had missed the funeral and so her emotions hadn't had their natural release. She and Marje had always been close, even though my mum had never approved of Marje's lifestyle. They were like sisters in so many respects.

After speaking to my Mum, I sat and had a little cry myself, mourning the passing of a woman that I had been so fond of. Then I went onto the internet to try to find out what had happened to Marje.

The case had featured in the local press quite prominently for a few days. The story was straight forward but raised far more questions than it answered. Marje had been found by a neighbour, the one that was now living in my parents former house to be precise. Marje had been beaten to death with a blunt instrument, but the murder weapon hadn't been found. Nothing appeared to have been stolen, so there was no obvious motive for her murder. The police were baffled. At least that was how the local paper reported it.

I decided that I couldn't let this pass. After all Marje had done for me (not just the sex) I decided that I couldn't let her murder go unsolved. I wasn't a detective, but I bet myself that I could find out more about Marje's death than they could. After all, people happily told me things that they would never tell anyone else.

Over the internet I booked a flight back to the UK and hotel room, then packed myself a bag. Twelve hours later I was standing in front of Marje's home.

I looked up and down the street. It had once been all Council Housing, what they call Social Housing these days, but Margaret Thatcher had changed all that. The people that had

once been tenants now owned these houses, all but a few anyway. It was as solidly Middle England as Birmingham City Hall. I couldn't know it for a fact, but I doubted the killer lived in any of those houses with their tidy front gardens and upvc double glazing.

I walked along the short path to what had once been the front door of my home. It had changed a little, but not much. The wooden front door with its faded red paint had been replaced with upvc to match the windows. The net curtains in the window were crisp and white, with a lacy pattern to make them more attractive. I pressed the bell push and heard a simulation of the chimes of Big Ben ring out.

A small woman in her early sixties answered the door. I introduced myself as an old friend of Marje and asked if she could spare me a few minutes to talk about her. She smiled and invited me in.

"Terrible business." She said, as she led me into the front room. "Please, take a seat. Can I get you a cup of tea?" I told her she could and she bustled off to sort out refreshments, returning a few minutes later with a tray laden with tea pot, cups and saucers, sugar bowl, milk jug and a plate of chocolate biscuits.

While I waited, I examined the room in more detail. It was so familiar but at the same time so strange. Our stripy wallpaper had been replaced with a pleasant lemon coloured emulsion. Our family photos and the ubiquitous 'green lady' painting were gone and had been replaced with some prints of country scenes, and photos of the new owner's own family. The mantelpiece over the empty fireplace supported some expensive looking pieces of Staffordshire pottery. Those would never have survived the boisterous attentions of my sister and myself.

"I'm Deirdre." The woman advised me. "I've lived here about ten years. I got to know Marjorie quite well. She used to tell me some really racy stories." So Deirdre wasn't even the first owner of the house after my parents sold up. But that wasn't important. She knew Marje well enough and, more importantly, she was the one to find her.

"I'm sure she did." I replied. "She was always a bit of a party animal, as they say these days. I actually lived in this house, oh, it must have been over 30 years ago now. My parents moved out in 1990."

I sipped at my tea and munched on a biscuit while I waited for the magic to work. Deirdre must have been particularly susceptible because she started chattering away quite soon after pouring the tea.

"Well, we bought it in 2009, my husband and I. He passed on a couple of years back. Cancer, you know." Why do people say 'you know' when you couldn't possibly know? "Marje was a great support to me. Even when I was at my lowest she would tell me some story that would get me laughing again. She had a huge stock of stories about all her boyfriends and some of the things she used to get up to. She told me once she had slipped a sleeping tablet into her husband's tea so she could go upstairs with some man."

I nearly choked on my biscuit but managed to turn it into a cough. Yes, that would be Marje.

"She still had a few gentlemen admirers, but nothing serious. She told me she wasn't so interested in that sort of thing now she couldn't get her knees up past her shoulders anymore. Oh, hark at me. Aren't I awful talking like that?"

I smiled indulgently but continued to say nothing. I found that it only took the slightest word out of place to break the spell and so I tended to err on the side of caution. If I needed to ask questions, I filed them away and asked them when they stopped talking of their own accord.

“Marje’s last husband, he was her third I think, died about two years before my Gerry. I think he was worn out, poor bugger. She led him a merry dance you know. She would tell him she’d gone to bingo or the cinema when really she’d be out with some bloke. Of course, that was all before I met her. She’d calmed down a lot by then, but I got all the stories. One time she told him she’d gone to visit friends in Fleetwood when she’d really gone off to Tenerife with some bloke or other.”

My parents lived in Fleetwood. I wondered if my mum knew she’d been used as an alibi.

“Anyway, Marje said she was well shot of him, that he was just an old misery, but I quite liked him. He put up with a lot, so he must have really loved her.”

Deirdre fell silent for a moment, remembering both Marje and her husband. I thought I detected a small tear, but perhaps it was a trick of the light.

“Well, I was expecting her round for coffee that morning, you know, the day I found her, and she didn’t turn up. I tried phoning her, landline and mobile, but got nothing, so I went round. That’s when I found her. The doors were locked of course. Marje told me there was a time when she never bothered locking her back door, even when she went on holiday, but of course you can’t do that now.

Anyway, I could see through the kitchen window she was lying on the floor. I thought maybe she had collapsed, so I went home and dialled 999 then went back. I broke the window on the back door and luckily the key was in the lock, so I could get in. But as soon as I got through the door I knew there was nothing I could do, with her head bashed in like that. Luckily, I’d been in St John’s Ambulance when I was younger, so I was used to blood. I’d even seen dead bodies before, so I was able to cope with it. At least with the shock. I cried for days. I do miss her so.” This time there was no mistaking the tears.

“Anyway, the ambulance came, then the police, so I told them what I knew, which wasn’t much. I took the bobbies round cups of tea and some biscuits, but they didn’t seem to know much either. There was no sign of a break in, except the window I’d broken, so they were guessing Marje invited her killer in. But that was pretty much it.

The place had been searched, they said, drawers and cupboards left open and stuff pulled half out, but no evidence that anything had been stolen. Her purse was still there, with her pension still inside it, and her jewellery hadn’t been touched. She had some lovely jewellery, you know. Real diamonds and pearls and things. But they were all still there as far as they could see. So, goodness knows what the murderer had been looking for.”

That puzzled me as well. Looking for something, obviously, but what? What could Marje possibly have that was worth more than her jewellery? But this was Marje we were talking about, wasn’t it? Marje who had more men friends than squirrels have nuts. That was probably where the answer lay.

I managed to persuade Deirdre to show me round Marje’s house. She still had a spare key, given to her by Marje but which she hadn’t returned, because she didn’t know who to return it to. It would have been too much to conduct a proper search, so the house didn’t reveal any more to me than it had to the police, but it still had the essence of Marje about it in the

pictures on the wall and the trinkets lying around in her bedroom. I found tears running down my cheek and Deirdre had to fish a tissue out of the sleeve of her cardigan for me to dab them away.

* * *

Back in my hotel room I puzzled over Marje's death. Motive was the key to this conundrum, I was sure. Someone had carefully searched Marje's house and I was assured that care had been taken, because the place hadn't been ransacked. Drawers had been opened and their contents turned over, but there was nothing thrown around, the way a burglar drags the contents of a drawer out and discards them on the floor while they dig deeper.

I parked the problem for the moment and turned my mind to other things. Switching on my laptop I found an e-mail waiting for me from my Office Manager. That title is a little bit grand, I know. I pay a woman to take calls and answer e-mails for me, so that clients can get in contact. When I'm on holiday, which is often, she will fend off the callers until she can contact me, then I make the decision on whether or not I want to speak to them. Lexie (her name) then makes the arrangements for me and forwards them on. All without leaving the comfort of her own front room.

The e-mail was short and to the point. A solicitor had been trying to contact me. There was nothing unusual in that. Companies often use their tame lawyers to front up a contact so that they can remain hidden behind the rules of client confidentiality. What made this one different was the address of the solicitor, which was a bare half mile from the hotel room in which I was sitting. I rang the phone number provided in Lexie's e-mail.

Meet The Doggers

Ellie stretched as she got out of her car. It hadn't been a long drive, but the kinks she had got in her back from bending over the shoulders of seated children, guiding their hands and their minds, were still keenly felt. The water of the reservoir glistened in the weak winter sunshine.

Walking from the car park she noticed the dark Volvo. She was sure it was the same one as she had seen just a couple of nights before. She walked to the rear of the vehicle to check. Yes, there were the two badges. Well, more accurately, one was a bumper sticker. 'John 3:16', which she vaguely knew to have something to do with everlasting life. The badge itself was the fish symbol that was often to be seen on cars owned by practising Christians. She reached into her bag for her phone and checked the registration number with the one she had recorded.

She had been right. She walked around the reservoir almost every day when it wasn't raining and this car and its messages had managed to ingrain themselves into her subconscious, which meant that its owner, too, was a regular visitor.

She decided not to walk, but to keep the car under observation and see who got into it. She walked the short distance to the café and bought herself a cup of coffee, before taking a window seat so that she could keep the car in view.

The café was empty, so the new arrival stood out, even if he hadn't been so eccentrically dressed.

From head to toe he was attired in camouflage clothing, including a broad brimmed hat. Even his wellington boots were coloured in a camouflage pattern. Festooned around his chest were binoculars and cameras. A cup and saucer rattled as he took a seat a couple of tables from Ellie.

Bird watcher, she concluded. They were often to be seen around the reservoir. The water company had even constructed wooden hides for them at various out of the way points along the waterside. He caught Ellie looking at him and gave her a polite smile, then returned to sorting the photographs he had taken on the various cameras.

Ellie returned to her thoughts about her visit to her sister. They had talked deep into the night, despite Pat feeling so ill. Ellie was all for returning home and confronting Terry, but Pat was set against it.

"You'll get no satisfaction from that." Pat said. "He'll be forced to admit it, maybe he'll grovel a bit, but that will be that. If you want to divorce him you'll end up in some grotty flat, which is all you'll be able to afford from your half of the house. I doubt if you'll get a cash payment, because he doesn't make enough money."

Ellie had to agree that was the most likely outcome. But what else could she do?

"Revenge is a dish best served cold." Pat wasn't too fussed about using clichés when they were appropriate. "And the punishment must fit the crime. Bite your tongue and carry on as though you know nothing. When the right time comes along you strike and strike hard. He'll carry on dogging, which means he'll give you lots of information. You can use that to work out the best plan to get back at him. You want to bring him to his knees."

Ellie had protested at that idea. "But I love him?"

“What? After he’s screwed all those sluts in that car park? He isn’t worthy of your spit, let alone your love. Look how he’s betrayed you, betrayed everything you believed in.

The worst part was, Pat was right. Terry had betrayed her. She had dedicated her life to him and he had torn her heart in two and stamped all over it.

For twenty-five years she had remained faithful to him. All those students at uni that had hit on her and she had politely turned away. Then, when she’s started work, the dishy colleagues and the bosses that thought it was their right to bed all the junior staff and it wasn’t just the men that thought that way. Even now, at the school where she worked as a part time teaching assistant, some of the dads chatted her up.

What was worse was that she had fancied some of them. There were the dishy ones and the charming ones and the downright ovary flipping sexy ones. She had kept herself for Terry, only to find out that Terry wasn’t keeping himself for her. There was no worse betrayal.

Pat was right. Terry had to pay and pay big. The punishment must fit the crime. The phrase kept going round and round in her head. She didn’t know how to make that happen, but if she followed Pat’s advice then a way would emerge.

There was movement in the corner of her eye and the birdwatcher rose to leave. He caught Ellie’s eye again and gave another polite smile as he left. Ellie paid him no more attention but returned to her vigil. She was soon watching him with much keener interest, however, as he headed straight for the dark Volvo. He opened the boot and started to load his camera equipment into carrying cases.

Quickly, Ellie grabbed her handbag and left the café, walking to her car, head down so as not to catch the man’s eye again. She climbed in just as the Volvo was driven from its parking space and out of the car park towards the main road. She reversed her own car out and followed at a discreet distance.

The journey wasn’t a long one, just into the city that the reservoir served. On the way, they passed the boarded-up pub where her world had fallen apart just a few nights before. The car took a route through some suburbs before turning into a small car park in front of a building that might have been a local library but wasn’t.

Above the main door was a sign declaring it to be the Community Church of the Family of Christ. The Volvo’s driver got out and walked straight through the open doors of the building.

Dare Ellie follow him inside? There might be information on a noticeboard, or something, that would provide a clue to the man’s identity.

No, she decided. If he saw her he was bound to recognise her. But this was too good an opportunity to waste.

Ellie pulled her phone out of her bag and rang Pat’s number. Her sister would still be at work, but Ellie would leave a voicemail.

* * *

They let the man settle at his table with his cup of coffee and start sorting through his photos once again, before they entered the café and approached him. Without asking his permission they sat down at his table, directly opposite him, defying the man to ignore them.

He didn't ignore them. He gave them a bright smile. "Good afternoon ladies. Can I help you?"

"Are you Pastor Frank Wilson of the Community Church of the Family of Christ?" Ellie asked sweetly.

"I am. Do I know you?"

"No, Pastor, or may I call you Frank? But we know you. We know you better than you could possibly imagine."

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Perhaps this will help you." Pat said, pulling her laptop from her bag. She opened it up and selected the file she wanted, before turning the device around so that the Pastor could see it.

As he watched, the blood drained from his face. He looked up, horrified at what he was seeing. "How did you get this?" he asked, his voice barely audible.

"I don't think that's important." Pat replied. "But you don't deny that it's you that's giving that woman what is colloquially known as a 'right old seeing to'."

The Pastor didn't need to reply. His face said everything that needed to be said.

"As well as being the Pastor for your church, I believe you also run the youth club?" Pat made it sound like a question, even though she already knew the answer. The Pastor nodded, his face still locked onto the screen of the laptop, still unable to comprehend what he was watching.

"You are also on the managing board for the Community Church of the Family of Christ in the UK, is that not so?"

"Yes." He managed to whisper.

"That sounds very important and, having looked at the church's website, I think the board would be very interested in your extracurricular activities. So, I imagine that you wouldn't want any copies of that video to fall into the wrong hands."

He looked up and stared aghast, first at Pat and then at Ellie. "You wouldn't ..."

"We don't want to, Frank, but that depends very much on you."

"I ... I ... I haven't very much money. I only have my church salary and that doesn't go very far."

"You could have fooled me." Ellie snapped, nodding towards the array of expensive cameras and lenses that littered the table. "But we aren't interested in your money. We only want your co-operation. If we get that then you need never see us again; at least not after we have what we need."

"I couldn't be a party to anything illegal." The Pastor protested.

"Don't worry. You won't have to do anything that you haven't already done. You just have to tell a couple of little lies, that's all."

"But I'm a Christian. I couldn't possibly lie."

Pat gave him a scornful look. "So, having sex with strange women in a car park is OK, but telling a couple of lies isn't?"

The pastor had the decency to look ashamed, taking a sudden interest in his hands, which were folded on the table.

"It seems I have no choice. What do I have to do?"

“You keep going to the dogging sessions, just as you currently do. But you start to mention a new girlfriend. You tell the others there that you hope to bring her along one day. You keep doing that until we decide you can stop, then you really will take your ‘girlfriend’ along. That will be Ellie here.”

“Why would you want me to do that?”

“You don’t need to know that. But no one must discover that you’re lying. If they do then that video will go straight to the members of your church committee, the board of the church and to the police, with a note about your involvement in the youth club. Do you understand?”

“I’d be ruined.”

“Precisely. So, do we have a deal.”

“It appears that I have no choice.”

END OF EXTRACTS

If these short extracts have roused your curiosity and you would like to find out more about *Three in a bed*, by Arabella Aristo then you can get more information by clicking on one of the links below.

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