

**Steve Lawson**

**DEADLY  
COMPULSIONS**

trdition

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**Das Tödlichere Geschlecht**

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Forthcoming thrillers:

**Deadly Desires**

**I, the Terrorist**

*I hate and I love: why I do so you may well ask. I  
do not know, but I feel it happen and am in agony.*

Carmina no.85

# CHAPTER 1

*South-East London*

*December 10th, 9.30 p.m.*

'Where are you, Tony?' Mandy Gibbs whimpered as she gazed up and down the street. 'How could you do this to me?' Clutching her mobile and the envelope with the photos in her trembling hand, she darted back into the house.

She heard the TV in the front room and peeked in. The room was empty. She knew that her mother was out for her usual nightcap at the local. She keyed a number into her mobile. Still no answer. She couldn't wait any longer. She must get home before Johnny comes back and catches her with her suitcase. Maybe Tony's wife was causing trouble again, and that's why he was delayed. And the three of us planned to go away, she thought bitterly.

She reached the back room and saw the door was closed. That's strange, she thought, she was sure she'd left it open only minutes before. Turning the knob, she pushed the door inward. Total darkness. She chilled. She knew she had left the lights on. Who put them out? Necessity meant she had to get her things. Nerves tingling, Mandy stepped into the room and stretched out her arm for the light switch. The moment her trembling fingers touched it, she knew she wasn't alone.

'Who is..' She couldn't finish.

A hard blow cracked against the back of her head, and she sank to her knees. She couldn't grasp what happened. Dazed, instinct told her to flee. Palms against the wall, she staggered to her feet and took a step towards the door just as it was swung violently shut, and the key was turned, cutting off escape.

The next second a solid object hit Mandy's forehead. The force made her reel backwards. Her head a mass of sickening pain, blood stinging her eyes, she groped for support.

'Who are you? Why are you doing this?' she cried out in pain and shock. There was no response.

Straining her eyes, Mandy tried to get a glimpse of her attacker. Unable to make out anything in the blackness, she began to slither along the wall, aiming for the window she knew was opposite. Her progress was impeded by the tight dress she had specially bought that day for the occasion.

Hearing a faint noise, she shifted out of the way. An object swished passed her head and slammed into her shoulder, the impact paralysing her arm. Moments later, she was again hit in the face and head, shattering nasal bone, breaking teeth and spraying blood.

Screaming in agony and fright, she inched towards the window. She'd go through even if it meant smashing the glass with her bare hands, she vowed.

A powerful kick landed on her belly. Mandy doubled over in pain and fear.

'My child, you bastard! My child!' she shrieked, dropped to her knees sobbing. As she did so, she hit out with her good hand and felt it connect with a face. Her second punch missed, but her enemy made a sound for the first time, a low inhuman growl. A split second later a brutal blow landed on her battered temple. She keeled over and lay retching. Barely conscious, she dragged herself to her knees and started to crawl towards the window.

Another kick landed on her side. She gagged but continued. Her groping hand touched the curtains, and she knew she would be safe soon. Gathering her strength, she gripped the curtains and desperately hanging on to her senses hauled herself to her feet.

She still couldn't see who was in the room with her. But by now she was certain they wanted to kill her.

A shape, darker than the background, rose up. Mandy wiped the blood from her eyes, and as she leant forward to see better, a savage blow exploded on the side of her head. She collapsed, bringing the curtains down over her unconscious body.

The key was turned in the lock, the door opened, and a dark shape slipped from the room.

When minutes later Mandy came to, she hurt all over, and there was a burning pain in her abdomen. She was lying on her back and light from the streetlamp filtered through the window. She tried to move but could not. Moments later she realized why. It was the weight of somebody on top of her, pinning her down.

Was he going to rape her? Her nose picked up a scent that wasn't there earlier, making her think it wasn't the same person as before. Unable to grasp what was happening to her, Mandy raised her eyes and found herself looking into a pair of cold, merciless eyes.

Desperation and fear gave Mandy strength and managing to free an arm, she flailed about wildly. Feeling her hand touching hair, she twisted it around her fist and pulled.

Her arm was violently knocked to one side, gloved hands grabbed her throat, cutting off a rising scream and squeezing the life out of her.

Mandy could no longer fight back. She knew she was about to die. Determined to find out who was doing this to her, she gathered what little strength she had left and shot her arm upwards. Groping at the head, she hooked a finger under the scarf covering her attacker's face, wrenched it down, and with incredulity in her dying eyes, she recognized her murderer.

## CHAPTER 2

*South-East London*

*December 10, 10.15 p.m.*

*'I did it! I killed the bitch!' I whispered to myself and hurried down the street away from the shabby house. But realizing that people running on a deserted street in this area were bound to attract attention, I slowed down to a normal pace. Too late! The split second before I did so, the curtains were pulled open, and a woman stared at me from a house across the street. The street was narrow, just wide enough for two cars to pass, and the distance between us couldn't have been more than twenty feet. She must've seen me as I passed under a street lamp. Would she know me again? I wondered, but when I felt her eyes on me, I sauntered away, resisting the urge to run.*

*Getting out of the area, I calmed down and returned my thoughts to the killing. To be truthful to myself, I enjoyed strangling the bitch. It was especially satisfying when she tore my scarf off, and I saw her recognizing me just before I felt her thyroid cartilage snapping under my thumbs.*

*It wasn't easy killing her, which was good. She was still very strong and fought back wildly despite the beating she had taken before I arrived. But, of course, because of that, my satisfaction was all the greater in the end. Nevertheless, I wished it had lasted longer. I was*

*getting a definite sexual kick out of it and still felt aroused as I recalled her body wriggling under me while I squeezed the life out of her.*

*Still, it was a pity it was over so soon, I thought. Great pity. I had no idea killing could be so pleasurable. Next time I must make it last longer; prolong the fun I decided as I reached the small cul-de-sac where I had parked my car. I unlocked it, got in and started up the engine. Before driving home to a drink and sandwiches, I selected a CD from my collection, and as the music started playing, I put the car in gear and humming to the music I drove off.*

## CHAPTER 3

*December 12*

Tony Simpson woke at 7 a.m. as usual. After a while, he reached across his gently snoring cat, Annabel, and picked up the envelope containing the ultrasound photograph Mandy had given him the last time they were together, three long days ago. It showed a tiny embryo, their baby, and pouring over it, he felt his chest swelling with pride. But then the happiness gave way to a sense of gloom. He wasn't worried just for himself. He had an impending divorce on his hands, a daughter at boarding school, and a mortgage. And he and Mandy planned to move in together as soon as possible. Two households to care for, two households to finance. But, how?

His uneasiness grew as he recalled the message he received the day before, requesting him to attend an interview with the managing director of the firm of IT consultants he worked for, Friday at ten o'clock sharp. He knew it was something serious when for the first time ever the boss didn't speak to him himself but let his secretary do the talking. Rumours of imminent reorganization of the Croydon branch offices where he had worked as a programmer for the last three years didn't make him feel easier.

He rubbed his eyes and glanced at the clock next to a smiling photograph of his eleven-year-old daughter, Clarissa. Careful not to disturb Annabel, their five-year-

old tiger cat, snoozing beside him, he got up and went to the kitchen to start the coffee percolator while he shaved. Jane, his soon to be ex-wife, appeared to have gone out.

Coming out of the bathroom, he noticed the telephone answering machine blinking. He stepped over to it and pressed the play button. A voice told him the message was recorded at 5.45 p.m. the evening before. It went: "Mr Simpson, your appointment at head office has been brought forward. Please attend at 9.30 instead of at 10.00. Thank you."

He glanced at the phone's digital clock. 'Christ, I'll never make it,' He said aloud. He turned the percolator off, dressed and bolted for the railway station barely noticing the icy drizzle.

He bought a morning paper at the station kiosk, treated himself to a first-class ticket and managed to get a window seat. There was nothing of interest to him in the sports pages, and as the train eased out of the station, he turned back to the front of the paper and glanced idly at the front-page headline.

### **LAMBETH MURDER HUNT**

Under the sub-heading: **"HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN?"** was a black-and-white photograph of a man.

Jesus Christ! He burst out and quickly raised the paper to hide behind. The face was his! But that's impossible, for Christ's sake!

With his heart hammering in his chest, he stared at the photograph. He saw wide-set eyes, prominent cheek-

bones and a square jaw. A small mole was visible over the upper lip to the left of a long straight nose. The hair was receding at the temples and appeared dark above a high forehead. And there was no mistaking the half-moon shaped scar on the left cheekbone.

There was no doubt. It was him! But it couldn't be! It just couldn't be!

Confused and feeling as if he was in a nightmare, he shrunk back into his seat, then holding the paper high to hide behind, he ran his eyes over the write-up under the photograph:-

*Scotland Yard are anxious to interview anyone who may have knowledge of the whereabouts of this man who was observed at a crime scene in Lambeth, South London during the late hours of Wednesday. Mrs Amanda Gibbs, 32, was found brutally murdered at her mother's house in Lollard Street in South-East London.*

*The victim's grief-stricken husband, a well-known local businessman and benefactor, provided police with the following description of the suspect.*

*Age: 34 years, Height: 6feet 2 inches, Eyes: Blue, Hair: dark-brown.*

*Special features: Half-moon shaped scar on left cheek. Police warn that this man is dangerous and is not to be approached by the public.*

Refusing to believe what he saw, he re-read the article several times. His world fell apart. Dear God, no, not Mandy! Not my beloved Mandy! His throat tightened,

his eyes burnt. This was the end. How could he go on without her? He coughed hard to disguise his sobs and spread the paper wider.

Mandy was dead, and he was supposed to have murdered her? But he loved her! He felt like screaming it out to the world. Yet the police was now hunting him as her murderer. What's going on? The picture was the spitting image of him, no matter how long he stared at it. But it wasn't him! So who was it? Was somebody trying to set him up? If so, why? He couldn't think straight.

With tears in his eyes, he stepped off the train at Clapham Junction, went into a cubicle in the public toilets and cried until he had no tears left. After calming down a little, he took a train back home to be alone with his grief, to think, and work out what to do.

Turning into his street, he spotted a police car parked outside his house. He did a rapid about-turn and doubled back, the familiar street a shapeless blur in his haste. When he got to a safe distance away from the house, he called his wife on his mobile.

'It's me,' he said. Jane didn't respond. 'I know the police are there and I know why. I read it in the paper. I didn't do it.'

## CHAPTER 4

'Why am I the number one suspect?' He asked himself. Admittedly, he was drunk Wednesday night, celebrating his impending new fatherhood and later couldn't remember much of what had happened or what he did. But, it wasn't in him to kill, and certainly not Mandy. So who wanted her dead? And who was stitching him up? His mind was full of unanswered questions.

Seeing the police car outside his house had sharpened the reality. It was clear the police had a strong enough case to feed his photograph to the press. But how did they come by it? And what had prompted his old mate Johnny Gibbs to give his description to the police? Fair enough, he had been having an affair with Johnny's wife, but they had been discreet, and Johnny knew nothing. The police would arrest him as soon as they saw him and they'd lock him away, where he knew his claustrophobia would drive him crazy.

And if he were caught, then what? Would the police be looking for the murderer, or would they just let him rot in jail? After all, he'd been spotted, and there was also that photograph. He must take matters into his own hands, and for that, he must remain free. He saw no other way. He needed to think this out before deciding his next move. First, he must find a place to hole up. He went through a list of friends and acquaintances in his head, but rejected them all. Most had families, and he couldn't expect them to hide a murder suspect even if

they were to believe his story. Then it occurred to him; what story? He didn't have a story! He couldn't even remember which pubs he's been to on Wednesday night, or when he got home. He doubted Jane would be willing to give him an alibi, not after the nasty row they had had the night before. He recalled how she had waited for him when he got home from the office.

'Anthony,' she called through tight lips as soon as he entered the house. She was standing in the passage stiffly, her arms folded over her firm bosom, and Tony could see she was fired up for another row. He wasn't.

'Anthony I want to speak with you right now!

'Can't it wait until tomorrow? I had a hard day.'

She glared at him. 'Yes, I can smell it from here. And no, it cannot wait. We'll have it out right now, or I won't be here tomorrow.'

'Very well,' he said. 'What's eating you this time?'

'What's eating me? What's eating me? You even dare to ask? You come home late. You smell of alcohol. You don't care about anything, not to mention how you have been neglecting me. All in all, you're impossible to live with, and I have had enough of your stupid working-class behaviour.'

Rarely has he seen her so hostile, but he knew he should've seen it coming. He should've taken more notice of her moods and be prepared for the inevitable showdown. It is said that anger made some women more attractive. That didn't apply to his wife. She was a good-looking, tall, slim brunette, but when she was

angry her green eyes flashed, her lips were tightly drawn, and she looked vicious. Once or twice, he had the feeling she was about to attack him, but had no idea what he would've done. Probably stand there, take it and feel guilty.

'What are you going to do, Jane?' he said, getting heated himself. 'Back to your parents? You know as well as I do what your toffee-nosed father would say to you; *"I told you so, my girl. But you made your goddamned bed so now lie in it."* He'd shut the door in your face.'

She didn't say anything, just stood there fuming.

'Look,' he went on, 'I know we can't go on like this, and I've seen a solicitor about a divorce,' he blurted, realizing a split second later it was the wrong time for that.

'I knew it! I knew you were seeing someone else,' she shouted.

He didn't say anything. Instead, he put his briefcase on the hall table and wondered if Jane knew about him and Mandy. She sounded certain of what she was saying.

'I should've known it wouldn't last,' Jane went on. 'My parents warned me often enough about you and your sort. You could never keep up with us. Once in the gutter, always in the gutter.'

He didn't want to stand there arguing and stormed out of the house. He was angrier with himself than with Jane. He shouldn't have said anything about the divorce until a date was set for going away with Mandy. But he

couldn't turn the clock back now and found coping with the conflict in his heart hard to bear. Soon, he must make a choice between Mandy and his daughter, Clarissa. He knew what it was like to live in a broken family. And he also knew Clarissa would suffer. She was a sensitive child, and the two of them were inseparable. He excluded Jane, knowing she'd learn to manage without him well enough.

It had taken him a while to realize you cannot force love. Either it is there, or it isn't. It might grow on you with time if there is at least respect. But if there was any at all between Jane and him, it had eroded with time. They were just too different in outlook, tastes, and needs, with little of anything in common. For a while, they made up their quarrels in bed, but when the physical side began to wear off, they were back to square one. They had slept separately for months, and he now shared his bed with Annabel, the cat.

He turned his mind away from his marriage and tried to concentrate on where he was and what he was doing the night Mandy was murdered. But try as he might, not everything came back. The dubious chain of events was punctuated with blanks. He knew that he got drunk and that there was there a traffic accident of some kind, or was his mind playing tricks? He couldn't remember.

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It started to rain. By then he'd completed a full circle of the block, but the police car was still there. His car was parked behind the house and aiming for it, he turned into the street behind the house. He stopped dead in his tracks. Another police car faced him only a few feet away. It was parked outside his back garden and was unoccupied. But the garden gate was wide open. They must be at the back door. They'd see him as he passed going to his Volvo, he thought. But he had no choice. He had to have the car to get away.

He pulled his head into his collar, bent against the rain and with his heart in his throat, he marched towards his car parked behind the police vehicle. From the corner of his eye, he glimpsed Jane's yellow Volkswagen Beetle on the garage forecourt and a little farther along he glimpsed two policemen sheltering under his balcony. He bought this house because of the balcony. He used to sit there taking in the view of Streatham Common. It wasn't Hyde Park, but for someone who spent his younger years in narrow flats in narrow streets, it was a dream come true.

Sadly, the dream lasted only a short time, and he began to feel like a tenant in his own house. Jane loved to throw sherry parties for her friends. Normally restricted to the living-room, which she liked to refer to as the "drawing room," they often spilt over to the rest of the house; the loud laughter and dirty jokes he couldn't help

overhearing wherever he sought refuge. At first, their profane behaviour shook his faith in women, but then it came to him that when alone men were no different, and he laughed the whole thing off.

However, after years of it he had nowhere to escape to be on his own for a while, and with time, he became conscious of not belonging and being an outsider in his own house, in his own marriage. He knew Jane had noticed, but she ignored it, and he concluded that she enjoyed being instrumental in his evolving a complex.

And, of course, there were her parents. Even Jane admitted they were dreadful bigots, and knowing her rebellious nature, he was convinced that one of the reasons she married him was to spite them. They constantly interfered in their private life, giving them unasked-for advice, compelling them – in particular, him – to lead the kind of life they were leading. No thank you, he thought.

By the time he got to his car, his breathing was laboured. Fumbling for the keys, his hands shook, and he dropped them. Picking them up from a puddle, he noticed damage to the front wing and a vague recollection of a traffic accident flashed into his mind again.

After unlocking the Volvo's door, he got in and fired up the engine. So as to not make too much noise, he drove away at low speed with one eye glued to the rear-view mirror as he resisted the urge to floor the accelerator. Nobody followed. He let go of his breath and steered the car south, the shortest way out of town.