

From the No. 1 *New York Times* bestselling author
of *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*



As
Good
As
Dead

HOLLY JACKSON



ALSO BY
HOLLY JACKSON

The No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller

A Good Girl's
Guide to Murder

The *New York Times* bestseller

Good Girl,
Bad Blood

As Good As Dead

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**This one is for all of you. Thank you for sticking
with me to the end.**



PART I





One

Dead-eyed, that's what they said, wasn't it? Lifeless, glassy, empty. Dead eyes were a constant companion now, following her around, never more than a blink away. They hid at the back of her mind and escorted her into her dreams. *His* dead eyes, the very moment they crossed over from living to not. She saw them in the quickest of glances and the deepest of shadows, and sometimes in the mirror too, wearing her own face.

And Pip saw them right now, staring straight through her. Dead eyes encased in the head of a dead pigeon sprawled on the front drive. Glassy and lifeless, except for the movement of her own reflection within them, bending to her knees and reaching out. Not to touch it, but to get just close enough.

'Ready to go, pickle?' Pip's dad said behind her. She flinched as he shut the front door with a sharp clack, the sound of a gun hiding in its reverberations. Pip's other companion.

'Y-yes,' she said, straightening up and straightening out her voice. *Breathe, just breathe through it.* 'Look.' She pointed needlessly. 'Dead pigeon.'

He bent down for a look, his black skin creasing around his narrowed eyes, and his pristine three-piece suit creasing around his knees. And then the shift into a face she knew too well; he was about to say something witty and ridiculous like –

'Pigeon pie for dinner?' he said.

Yep, right on cue. Almost every other sentence was a joke from him now, like he was working that much harder to make her smile these days. Pip relented and gave him one.

‘Only if it comes with a side of mashed rat-ato,’ she quipped, finally letting go of the pigeon’s empty gaze, hoisting her bronze rucksack on to one shoulder.

‘Ha!’ He clapped her on the back, beaming. ‘My morbid daughter.’ Another face shift as he realized what he’d said, and all the other meanings that swirled inside those three simple words. Pip couldn’t escape death, even on this bright late August morning in an unguarded moment with her dad. It seemed to be all she lived for now.

Her dad shook off the awkwardness, only ever a fleeting thing with him, and gestured to the car with his head. ‘Come on, you can’t be late for this meeting.’

‘Yep,’ Pip said, opening the door and taking her seat, unsure what else to say, her mind left behind as they drove away, back there with the pigeon.

It caught up with her as they pulled into the car park for Little Kilton train station. It was busy, the sun glinting off the regimented lines of commuter cars.

Her dad sighed. ‘Ah, that fuckboy in the Porsche has taken my spot again.’ Fuckboy: another term Pip immediately regretted teaching him.

The only free spaces were down the far end, near the chain-link fence where the cameras didn’t reach. Howie Bowers’ old stomping ground. Money in one pocket, small paper bags in the other. And before Pip could help herself, the unclicking of her seat belt became the tapping of Stanley Forbes’ shoes on the concrete behind her. It was night now, Howie not in prison but right there under the orange glow, downward shadows for eyes. Stanley reaches him, trading a handful of money for his life, for his secret. And as he turns to face Pip, dead-eyed, six holes split open inside him, spilling gore down his shirt and on to the concrete, and somehow it’s on her hands. It’s all over her hands and -

‘Coming, pickle?’ Her dad was holding the door open for her.

‘Coming,’ she replied, wiping her hands against her smartest trousers.

The train into London Marylebone was just as busy, standing shoulder to shoulder with other passengers, awkward closed-mouth smiles substituting *sorrys* as they bumped into one another. There were too many hands on the metal pole, so Pip was holding on to her dad’s bent arm instead, to keep her steady. If only it had worked.

She saw Charlie Green twice on the train. The first time in the back of a man’s head, before he shifted to better read his *Metro*. The second time, he was a man waiting on the platform, cradling a gun. But as he boarded their carriage, his face rearranged, lost all its resemblance to Charlie, and the gun was just an umbrella.

It had been four months and the police still hadn’t found him. His wife, Flora, had turned herself in at a police station in Hastings eight weeks ago; they’d somehow got separated on the run. She didn’t know where her husband was, but the rumours circulating online were that he’d managed to make it to France. Pip looked out for him anyway, not because she wanted him caught, but because she needed him found. And that difference was everything, why things could never go back to normal again.

Her dad caught her eye. ‘You nervous about the meeting?’ he asked over the screeching of the train’s wheels as it slowed into Marylebone. ‘It will be fine. Just listen to Roger, OK? He’s an excellent lawyer, knows what he’s talking about.’

Roger Turner was a solicitor at her dad’s firm who was *the best* at defamation cases, apparently. They found him a few minutes later, waiting outside the old red-bricked conference centre, where the meeting room was booked.

‘Hello again, Pip,’ Roger said, holding out his hand to her. Pip quickly checked her hand for blood before shaking his. ‘Nice weekend, Victor?’

‘It was, thank you, Roger. And I have leftovers for lunch today, so it’s going to be an excellent Monday too.’

‘I suppose we better head in then, if you’re ready?’ Roger asked Pip, checking his watch, other hand gripped around a shining briefcase.

Pip nodded. Her hands felt wet again, but it was sweat. It was only sweat.

‘You’ll be fine, darling,’ her dad told her, straightening out her collar.

‘Yes, I’ve done thousands of mediations,’ Roger grinned, swiping back his grey hair. ‘No need to worry.’

‘Call me when it’s done.’ Pip’s dad leaned down to bury a kiss in the top of her head. ‘I’ll see you at home tonight. Roger, I’ll see you in the office later.’

‘Yes, see you, Victor. After you, Pip.’

They were in meeting room 4E, on the top floor. Pip asked to take the stairs because if her heart was hammering for that reason, it wasn’t hammering for any other reason. That’s how she rationalized it with herself, why she now went running any time she felt her chest tighten. Run until there was a different kind of hurt.

They reached the top, old Roger puffing several steps behind her. A smartly dressed man stood in the corridor outside 4E, smiling when he saw them.

‘Ah, you must be Pippa Fitz-Amobi,’ he said. Another outstretched hand, another quick blood check. ‘And you, her counsel, Roger Turner. I’m Hassan Bashir and for today I am your independent mediator.’

He smiled, pushing his glasses up his thin nose. He looked kind, and so eager he was almost bouncing. Pip hated to ruin his day, which she undoubtedly would.

‘Nice to meet you,’ she said, clearing her throat.