

**KATHERINE  
FAULKNER**

*Author of Greenwich Park*

*The*  
**BREAK  
IN**



# THE BREAK IN

For Arthur

# Content

Part One: Afterwards

Evening Standard

Alice

Unknown

Alice

Alice

Alice

Alice

Linda

Alice

Alice

Alice

Evening Standard

Alice

Alice

Becca

Linda

Alice

Alice

Alice

Alice

Stella

Alice

Part Two: The Day Of

Alice 7.26 a.m.

6.11 p.m.

6.31 p.m.

6.37 p.m.

6.41 p.m.

6.42 p.m.

Part Three: Autumn

Alice

Alice

Evening Standard

Alice

Alice

Alice

Linda

Alice

Alice

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Becca

Alice

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Stella

Stella

Acknowledgements

A Note on the Author

## PART ONE

### AFTERWARDS

Later, Alice's memories of it are like broken pieces, with edges that don't match up. A door handle juddering up and down like a malfunctioning lever. Stella's pale face. A chair clattering to the ground, followed by the champagne bottle and flutes. A floor that glittered dangerously with broken glass.

Her husband, Jamie, tries to convince Alice that the details aren't important.

'People like him have such chaotic lives,' he tells her sadly.

Jamie understands this, because of his job. His charity tries to straighten the chaos out for people, calm the storms that engulf their lives. Alice has always been protected from these storms. Until now.

The police ask Alice what she and her friends – Yas and Stella – were talking about, just before they saw his face at the window. Alice tells the detectives she can't remember.

She only realises later that the detectives don't actually care what the three of them were talking about. They are just checking their stories, seeing if the details match up. Looking for signs that one, or all, of them are lying. And Alice has failed their first test.

Alice can remember the details, if she really has to. It's just that whenever she thinks back to that day, the same nightmare showreel starts in her brain, like those picture montages that start up unbidden on your phone. A gunshot smash of glass, a silver flash of knife. A silent leak of crimson on her kitchen tiles.

## *Evening Standard*

17 July 2023

A mother arrested for fatally wounding a teenage intruder is waiting to hear whether she will face a murder charge, the Met has said.

Ezra Jones, 18, died after his botched raid of the East London property of Jamie and Alice Rathbone on 14 July.

Alice Rathbone, 42, was holding a 'play date' at her £1.2 million house in Hackney with friends when the intruder broke in through their basement door.

Unemployed Jones, also from Hackney, was repeatedly asked to leave but it is claimed he seized a kitchen knife, before attempting to enter an adjoining room where the couple's nanny, Becca Cox, was supervising the children.

Mrs Rathbone admitted hitting Jones on the back of his head with a metal stool. Jones was rushed to hospital but later died as a result of the injury.

Mrs Rathbone was initially arrested on suspicion of murder and released on bail. A file has now been passed to the Crown Prosecution Service which will consider 'what, if any, further action will be taken', the Metropolitan Police said.

Scotland Yard said in a statement that it had informed Jones's family and is keeping them abreast of developments.

A representative for Mrs Rathbone, an art restoration expert, has previously said she had been 'terrified' during the incident and had simply done 'what any mother would have done', after fearing the children were in danger from Jones, who had been 'brandishing a knife and making threats'.

Her husband, Jamie Rathbone, a senior executive at the troubled families charity Handhold, was not at the property at the time of the incident. A spokesman for Handhold said neither 'Ezra Jones, nor any member of his household' had ever been in contact with the charity.

Detective Chief Inspector Luke Barnes said: 'This is a tragic case for all of those involved.'

‘As expected with any incident where someone has lost their life, my officers carried out a thorough investigation into the circumstances of the death.

‘A file has now been passed to the CPS as required under the guidance and they will consider what, if any, further action should be taken in this case.’

A source added that all possible charges were being considered, ‘up to and including murder’.

Inspector Barnes continued: ‘There will also be an inquest in due course, which will provide a chance to further review the circumstances of Mr Jones’s death.’

ENDS

COMMENTS (79)

**@east17er**

All fun and games living in a £1m house in an ‘edgy’ area until you get robbed isnt it

**@mamapukka**

I heard they was all drinking champagne and left there kids in the other room watching TV with a nanny, couldn’t even be bothered to make sure the house was secure when they had young kids there, disgraceful

**@chardonnay008**

Classic snobby-arsed middle-class mother, this area is full of them now, used to be a nice working class area now no one can afford because these types drive up the prices

**@alyssa\_writes**

I think she was justified if he had a knife and her kid was there??

**@jonesyboy**

How did he even get in, didn’t they even have the brains to lock there doors

**@kittyheels**

Why does she look so miserable in every photo get some botox love

**@pink\_lemonade**

Botox? She looks well young for 42!

**@jonesyboy**

Only because she looks like a teenaged boy. Can't be doing with little skinny women like that

**@redwall4**

Posh woman in '£1.2m house' how much you wanna bet she gets off scot free?!

**@oldlabour444**

How is that house worth £1.2m, that area down by the canal is so dodgy? Ppl are insane

**@Sarflondon**

She looks like a stuck up b\*%tch and her kitchen is so try hard get some taste

**@nasturtiums77**

Why was that poor child stuck in another room with the nanny while she drank champagne? Honestly, I don't know why some people have children if they don't want to spend time with them

**@KarenClarke2**

I thought the same thing, pretty clear this so-called 'restorations expert' has prioritised her career and that fancy house over her child

**@Lulabella**

Sad that he died but she did what any parent would of

**@shaggy5**

Gentrification is mental, How is this a £1.2m house, London is insane

**@roman\_road**

She shud go to jail, ridiculous

**@mrsosman**

He was only a kid, obviously had problems but deserving of sympathy not a violent death, thats whats wrong with this country there is nothing for these kids at all

[[CLICK FOR MORE COMMENTS](#) – PAGE 1, 2, 3..... 124, 125]

# ALICE

When the officers finally let her go home, Alice does not get dressed for three days.

She staggers around different parts of her house, her hair in the same wilting ponytail from the day before, or the day before that. She clutches her phone, sometimes plugging it in to charge and crouching there, by the plug and the wire, so she can keep holding on to it. She checks news sites obsessively for stories about the break-in. When she can find nothing new, she just sits, staring out of the top window at the toy shapes of boats on Regent's Canal, the snaking railway tracks that sound every few minutes, day and night, with the low clatter of overground trains.

Sometimes Alice looks down at her hands, thinks about what they have done.

Jamie does the school runs, the cooking of pasta, the polite fielding of calls and messages from concerned friends and colleagues, the job of reassuring Alice's Aunt Sarah – who is all that remains of Alice's biological family but who they find difficult company at the best of times – that no, she really needn't leave her health food shop in the hands of someone else and come and stay, that they had things in hand. Jamie organises for the basement door to be replaced, then drives to the DIY shop and purchases extra locks for the new door, a ring doorbell, a set of bars for the basement window, and wordlessly sets about installing them himself.

Alice listens to the sound of him sawing and hammering, but cannot bring herself to join him downstairs. She loads up more news clips about the break-in on her phone and watches them over and over. The coverage becomes disorientating. In it, Ezra is no longer a snarling burglar, it seems, but a baby-faced boy, a teenager. New pictures – supplied, she assumes, by the family – show him with football medals, in school uniform, in a colourful

T-shirt on holiday, one arm slung around his mother. One picture shows Ezra with his father – who died, the reports say, when he was a young teen. A bereaved little boy. And Alice killed him.

There is one clip Alice is unable to stop watching. A brief interview by the ITV local news with a woman stood on the threshold of her council flat, gripping the doorway for support.

*He was going through a lot. He didn't deserve this,* is all the woman manages to croak. Then she waves the cameras away, eyes moistening behind her glasses. She pulls the door closed, and the clip cuts out.

The caption beneath her reads:

*Linda Jones, Mother of Ezra Jones.*

Alice is haunted by *Linda Jones, Mother of Ezra Jones*. She must have watched this clip a hundred times or more. At night, unable to sleep, she replays it on her phone between checking for any new stories about the break-in. She combs the articles for anything that could suggest why it happened. Why Ezra had come to her house in the first place. What had been behind it all. But she finds nothing. And then, even though she knows she shouldn't, she scrolls down, to read the comments people have written underneath the articles. There are so many now.

Her lawyer, Jessica, tells Alice to ignore what people are writing, what they are saying online. 'It's all nonsense. None of it makes any difference to the facts. Your home and family were under attack. The case that this was self-defence is abundantly clear.' She tells Alice not to speak to the journalists. 'Just keep your head down,' she'd said. 'It'll all be over soon.'

And so, Alice waits for it to be over. She nods but makes no comment to the reporters and photographers that buzz around her doorstep for a week or so, before moving on. For the first few days, she had smiled at the cameras. But then one paper called her 'the smiling killer'. After that, she had stopped smiling, but that seemed to annoy people even more. Readers commented on how miserable she looked, how she could do with getting Botox.

In the beginning when the details were scant – a 'burglar' who had died after being attacked by a 'homeowner' – people had been ready to defend her. But as more details about Alice leaked into the coverage – her age, the fact she had a nanny, the champagne detail (where on earth had they got that?), her so-called 'high flying career in the art world', the current market

value of her London house – the readers commenting below the line had started to turn on her.

Jamie and Jessica are right. It is a form of self-harm, reading the comments. Alice knows that. But she cannot seem to stop. It is shameful, probably, how much she cares about them. The unfiltered, anonymous opinions of people she has never met. Most of whom seem to have made their minds up that Alice is a bad person, a bad parent (an ‘older mother’, one had called her). Lots of them think Alice is a murderer. And that if she gets away with this, it will only be because she is rich, or at least middle class.

She can see that Jamie is disappointed to find his wife is the sort of person who cares about all this stuff. Who lacks the courage to just let the anonymous Internet people hate her. He doesn’t understand why she can’t just click the browser window closed, and return herself to him and Martha, to the life they shared before.

Finding her squatting on the floor again one night, stabbing at her phone screen, Jamie snaps.

‘Enough,’ he tells her. ‘The charges are going to be dropped any day. We have to try to move on from all this.’

He takes her phone gently, like a crisis negotiator. Presses the button on the side so that the screen goes black.

‘What is done is done, Alice,’ he adds softly. ‘We can’t change it. It is just something we have to live with.’

*Just something we have to live with,* Alice thinks bitterly. Easy for Jamie to say.

Jamie didn’t smash someone’s skull in.

# UNKNOWN

19 July 2023

4.12 a.m.

## City Road Basin, Regent's Canal, North London

She rides harder, until she reaches a part of the canal that she doesn't know so well. Here, the banks yawn wider, and this is what she wants.

She'd considered the stretch near Baring Street, close to Alice and Jamie's house. But the water there is shallow; in the daylight, you see everything under the surface. The gaping mouth of a Tesco carrier bag, a bicycle handlebar. Once, even a child's Buzz Lightyear, his wing cracked like that was why he crashed.

At least if she'd dumped it there, though, it would be done. She wants the solid weight of it gone from the pocket of her jogging bottoms. The ancient battery still hot from being left on, like something radioactive.

But she knows she needs to get further away. So, she has taken a bike – cheap, with a flimsy lock – from the rails near the canal. She'll dump it later, in the water, somewhere deep enough. Once she has got rid of the phone.

She'd bought the black jogging bottoms and jumper from a charity shop. She'd paid cash. No balaclava – perhaps that would have been over the top, anyway. She'd found the black face mask scrunched in a coat pocket, left over from Covid times.

She'd hoped the canal would be quiet this early. But even at this hour, the city is awake: cars, night buses, Ubers. There is always the chance of a drunken reveller, a homeless person dozing under a bridge. She has seen city workers running on the towpath before dawn, heading south for the bleak glitter of Canary Wharf in their Lycra and AirPods.

What would these people do, though, if they saw a cyclist, masked and hooded, speeding along a quiet stretch of canal path at 4 a.m., then flinging a phone into the water? Something to do with drugs, they'd think to

themselves, privately. Gangs, or county lines, or all of the above. Most, she thinks, would obey the urban instinct to avert one's eyes, to not get involved.

Rain starts to fall, the surface of the water dancing with the drops. She makes herself focus, picks up speed as the canal broadens out, bends a little towards the west. She races past a queue of squat narrow boats, carries on along the bend, until she can't see anyone around. There are no bridges here; the walls between the canal towpath and the pavements above are built high. As she passes under the shadow of a ragged silver birch tree, she takes the phone from her pocket and tosses it, spinning, into the middle of the canal, where it sinks without a trace.

She turns and pedals back the way she came, until she is forced to stop, her heart beating too fast in her chest. She brakes under the bridge.

*There is no one here, she reassures herself. No one can know you were here.* Her real phone is still switched on and plugged in beside her bed, setting off – she has been assured – the telltale pings that will later indicate she was there, asleep, this whole time.

Only now does she pull the hot mask down from her face and breathe. There is a predictable stench of piss, the foaming mass of sticks and litter at the edges of the black water. She waits for her pulse to fall, looks out at the starless sky. She wonders what will happen now. Whether this will be the end of it all. Or just the beginning.

# ALICE

They've agreed that they will get back to normal this week, that Jamie will go back to the office. But now the time has come, Jamie is hovering by the door, turning his keys over and over in his hands.

They've had the door repainted, but the colour isn't right, Alice realises. It stands around Jamie offensively, framing him. Is it just because the paint is new? Or had she misremembered the colour? She'd been sure it was called setting plaster, but it had come out a fake, sugary pink, not the warm, womb-like hue she remembered. The stools are new, too. They don't match. Her kitchen looks unfamiliar and wrong.

And then there is that space, between the island and the stairs, where he fell. Nothing marks it; the blood was wiped clear, or it must have been, at some point, between the day it happened and Alice coming home. Had it been easy, she wonders, to wipe it clean? Or had someone had to get on their knees, and scrub the traces of him away? Alice does not know, and has never found a way to ask.

'Mummy, you forgot the blueberries.'

Martha is looking up at Alice from her bowl of porridge.

'Sorry, love.' Alice shakes the thoughts from her mind, finds the punnet at the back of the fridge, tips the remaining berries carelessly into Martha's bowl. Martha looks down at them and pouts, her lip starting to wobble.

'You normally cut them, Mummy. And this one is yucky, look.' She holds up a berry. It is, indeed, rancid, a band of white fur around its middle, its watery blueish insides leaking onto Martha's fingers like a fish eye.

Becca, their nanny, sweeps the bowl and the mouldy blueberry away and hands Martha a wipe for her purple-stained hand. 'Here,' she says. 'Let me.'

'I'll get going then,' Jamie says uncertainly, fiddling with the clip on his bike helmet. 'Shall I?'

Jamie hasn't exactly said he really needs to get back into the office this week, but Alice suspects that is what he is thinking. It is what she would be thinking. Alice has always hated taking time off work. Objectively her job is not important, not like Jamie's. But it is important to Alice. If she stays away too long from her paints, her easel, her coffee cup, her chair by the window, she finds it exerts a sort of umbilical pull on her. She starts to long to be in the studio, with the paintings, with her earplugs in, enjoying the quiet company of her own mind.

The last time they spoke to Jessica, the lawyer, she'd said they should both get back to work as soon as possible.

'It looks good,' she'd said. 'Shows the police your employers have no concerns, reminds them you're two professional people, getting on with your lives. Just keep your heads down, stick to your bail conditions and everything should be fine. I'd expect to see the charges dropped any day now.'

'Of course,' Alice tells Jamie, with a smile. 'You should get going.' But when their eyes meet, Alice can tell he is still not sure. Maybe because last night, he found her again, at two in the morning. Curled up in a ball in the blue light of the loft, and watching the clip of Linda, the mother, again, the clip Alice had promised to stop viewing. Her cheeks had been wet with sobbing.

'You said you'd stop doing this.' Jamie had sounded exhausted. Had her crying woken him up? Or had he been reaching for her in the night, hoping she would be there to return his touch? Hoping they could start to piece that part of their former life back together, too.

Before Alice could reply, the tinny speakers of her phone had sounded. Linda on its small screen, holding a hand up in front of her face like a stop sign, eyes moistening.

*He was going through a lot. He didn't deserve this.*

'I'm sorry,' Alice had sniffed, muting the phone. 'I'll switch it off. I will try to stop.'

But Alice still cannot seem to stop.

Becca replaces the bowl in front of Martha, blueberries refreshed.

'Mummy,' Martha says, 'where is the key ring I made you?'

Martha is staring at the hooks by the door, where Alice keeps her set of keys.

‘What, darling?’

‘The star-shaped one,’ Martha prompts. ‘With rainbow colours. I made it for you in art club.’

‘I still have it, darling. I love it,’ Alice says, although she can’t now remember the last time she saw the key ring which Martha had excitedly presented to her on Mother’s Day, wrapped in pink tissue.

‘It’s not on your keys, though. Look.’

Alice looks up at her keys. Martha is right. The key ring is gone.

‘Oh,’ she says. ‘I’m sorry. Maybe it fell off. I’ll find it, sweetheart.’

Martha’s small face is clouding, eyebrows knitting into a shelf of worry over her eyes.

‘I’ll find it,’ Alice says again.

‘But what if you *can’t*?’

Alice is pained by how little her reassurance seems to wash.

‘We’ll find it, Squidge,’ Jamie says. ‘Don’t worry.’

Martha returns to her breakfast. Alice watches her daughter, the impossible sweetness of her pale face, her small nose, her messy hair, tucked behind the pink seashell of her ear. It is pointless for Jamie to tell Martha not to worry, when it is in Martha’s essential nature to worry about everything. Monsters. Thunderstorms. The pigeon they once saw outside the National Gallery, limping on a single ulcerated leg.

‘Mummy says we can go to the open-air pool today.’ Martha tilts her chin towards Jamie for confirmation. Has her daughter decided, like her husband, that Mummy can no longer be trusted?

‘Are you sure about that, Alice?’ Jamie looks at Alice in that different way he looks at her sometimes now, as if he is talking to someone on a bridge, poised to jump at any moment.

‘Yes. Of course. Martha wants to go. I’ll be fine. And Becca can help.’

Becca is standing near the fridge now, wiping crumbs from the sideboard into a cupped hand.

‘No,’ Martha blurts, suddenly tearful. ‘I want just Mummy to take me.’

‘Martha!’ This is unlike her, Alice thinks. She adores Becca.

‘That’s OK,’ Becca smiles. She turns to Martha. ‘Hey, you. How about I stay here and finish tidying up?’ Becca tips the crumbs into the bin. ‘You go to the pool with your mum. And then I’ll meet you there a bit later, maybe?’

Martha nods, and Alice tells herself that today, she will be better. A proper parent – present, resilient, practical. More like Jamie. More like Becca.

Jamie is still lingering by the door. Alice would rather he just leave now.

‘Honestly, Jamie. We are fine. Have a good day. See you later.’

‘OK.’ Jamie pauses. ‘You will make sure you lock up properly, won’t you? Both of you?’

‘Of course,’ Becca agrees.

Jamie finally leaves with a nod at Becca, a dry kiss brushed onto Alice’s cheek, another on Martha’s head. He holds out his hand so that the door will close softly behind him – Alice cannot manage sudden noises now – and flicks her a final glance before he leaves.

Once Jamie is gone, Alice stands, straightens her spine. She takes out bread and a knife. Becca clears her throat.

‘Alice?’ Becca asks. ‘Can I speak to you about something, please?’

Alice looks up at the clock on the wall.

‘Can it wait, until a bit later? I want to get Martha to the pool before it’s hot.’

‘Oh,’ Becca says. ‘Yes. Sure.’

Becca leaves the room and Alice starts cutting sandwiches, rolling beach towels, finding hats. She makes sure she packs the sunblock. She can already feel that it is the sort of day on which a child is likely to burn.