

Darkest Moment

By Pete Malicki

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Jilly – a fifty year old woman.

I hate parties. They're always so full of... people.

Over there is Samantha Hobbs, chatting away and charming everyone within a two metre radius. They don't know she cheated on her husband with *two* men. There's Beck Brooke. *She* stole a child's bicycle and gave it to her niece. Brooke's talking about global politics like she knows how to save the world and plans to do it after she's finished the canapés.

Jono appears. "Jilly! This is Pete. Pete, my little sis."

A stocky man sticks his hand out. I don't take it. "Oh, hi. Sorry, I have a cold. Don't want to infect you."

Pete says no worries and touches me on the shoulder. All of a sudden, I am Pete. I'm drunk and screaming. "Who asked you what *you* think? Huh? I didn't ask you... Don't you talk back at me! I will be as loud as I damn well please in my own house... What did you call me?" I hit my girlfriend across the face. She stumbles back and I press forwards and follow up with two more. She crumples to the ground and I'm Jilly again.

Jono and Pete are looking at me expectantly. One of them's asked me a question I didn't hear. I'm good at covering by now so I say, "Oh well, what can you say?"

They look at each other and I excuse myself. I weave my way through the gathering and into the bathroom, where I put my face under icy cold running water. This never gets easier. I don't quite vomit but I sure feel sick.

I am cursed. The first time I make physical contact with a person, I become them when they were at their worst. I've felt the rush of adrenaline as I smash a beer glass over someone's head. The thrill of sliding someone's wallet out of their back pocket. I have lied, cheated, stolen, assaulted, sexually assaulted, carjacked and even kidnapped. The things I've done keep me awake every night.

I'm nauseous and I want to go home. I've been here long enough to keep my brother happy and I don't want to risk this happening again. I wipe down my face and find Jono. He hugs me. It's the longest I've stayed at a party in two years and the subtext of that hug is, "I'm glad you're getting better, sis."

That night my dreams are tortured and I come to work exhausted. I tell my PA I'm flat out with the Dawson Project – which I made up four months ago – and shut myself in my office. If I wasn't on the executive I'm sure I'd have lost my job a year ago.

There's a knock at my door and in comes John Millicent. "Jilly. You look like death tied you to a tree and bugged you all night."

He used to deal cocaine and once sold to a thirteen year old. “Thank you, John. Lovely of you to notice. Do you want something?”

“Auditor’s here.”

Crap! Forgot about them. I head to reception and there’s a young woman and a man about my age. I lose time when it happens so I use a strategy to touch them at separate times. I greet the younger one first with a smile and a nod, then step forward to shake the older one’s hand.

I am Steven Holsworthy. I am fifteen and sitting in music class. Dawn Summers is at the front of class playing flute for her exam and I suppress a laugh as she makes a mistake, then stops, then false starts, then rushes out of the room. I crack up. I switched part of her score for a photocopy of my butt.

The auditors are looking at me strangely and I smile at Steven. If that’s the worst thing he’s ever done he mustn’t be half bad.

We go to the meeting room and talk about the joyous topic of corporate tax for twenty minutes. It’s all fine and dandy until the young woman hands me something and brushes my fingers. I’m Chloe Wilkins. I’m texting my boyfriend. And I’m driving. I glance up and there’s nothing on the road. I type in “lol babe, love you so so much.” I hit send and look up and there’s a dog in front of me. I swerve to miss it. I hit a child. My stomach drops and my whole world shatters like a jigsaw puzzle thrown on the floor. I look out my window at the child and puke in my lap. A minute later I wipe my mouth, take a deep breath, and drive away.

Chloe is leaning forwards with concern on her face. I look at her, horror on my face. There’s no way she can know about my curse but as our eyes lock she knows that I know. I excuse myself and hurry out, passing John and telling him to deal with the auditors. I slam the door to my office and dry retch for two minutes with my head in a wastebasket.

Shaking and feeble, I call my brother. “Jono? It’s me. I need to see that doctor. Mum’s old one. I’m going to need something to sleep.”

My brother gives me a number and the earliest they can see me is tomorrow. I leave work in the early afternoon to “attend meetings for the Dawson Project.” I need to clear my mind so I go for a long swim then power walk for more than an hour. Play online chess until two AM then fall asleep, utterly exhausted.

Thankfully I don’t have nightmares; they tend to feel as real as the flashbacks themselves. I can’t help but feel grateful that I still have sick leave as I wait in the doctor’s surgery. I read New Idea.

“Jillian? Come on through.”

I head down a short corridor and into Dr Forsyth’s room. He’s a skinny sixty-year-old with sparkling grey eyes. “What’s bothering you, Ms Williams?”

I tell him about insomnia and stress and he takes my blood pressure. He touches me and I'm him. I'm administering a flu shot to an elderly gent. There's something in the shot. Something I put in there. Diamorphine. Enough to kill a, well, a person. It's not the first time I've done this. Not even close. I push the plunger and smile as the liquid leaves the barrel of the syringe and seeps into his arm.

"Ms Williams?"

I'm aghast. This doctor is a killer. A serial killer. "Dr Forsyth, have you been murdering your patients?" His jaw drops. I wouldn't normally comment but he was my *mother's* doctor! "I know what you're doing. Did you do it to Edith Williams? Did you inject my mother with heroin?"

He tells me to leave. I go straight to the police station. I've never told anyone about my curse before but this man is a monster. I have to put an end to what he's doing no matter what it costs me.

But I don't go inside. They'll never bloody believe me, what with him being a respectable member of the community and my total lack of evidence. Crap. I return to his surgery and wait in the street for over five hours for him to come out. He shuffles past and I start the engine. I look around and no one else is in sight. He crosses the road a few metres ahead. It would look like an accident. Even if I got caught, it would be worth sacrificing myself to stop him. I take a deep breath, put the car in gear and pull out. I press down on the accelerator.

Pause.

I lived in fear every day for three weeks but then something miraculous happened. Something which made me confident the police would never find me. I met a guy called Jake at a work function, shook his hand, and nothing. No flashbacks. No visions. I had just made contact with a stranger and absolutely nothing happened. I was so elated I missed the absent look in his eyes as our hands clasped.

Four months later, I realise there was something very significant about that handshake. Jake follows me home one evening and slips inside as I shut the door. I try to scream but his hand clamps down over my mouth. "You've been a naughty girl, Jillian. You thought no one would ever find out? Not only do I know what you did, I know you meant to do it."

"He was a murderer! He injected his patients with lethal doses of drugs. He killed my mother!"

"Sorry honey, it's a little late for the theatrics. You did what you did and you'll face the consequences."

"*You're* doing what I did."

He sneers contemptuously at me and his hand clamps over my throat and pushes down.

I close my eyes, lest I see one more person at their darkest moment.