

JustAddSpice

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Dedication

The characters in this book are fictional but the Hotel Volcán on the island of Lanzarote, is very real. I would like to thank the staff there, in particular the management, for letting us enjoy their generous hospitality while I was putting the finishing touches to this story.

Should you be looking for a wonderful holiday destination that offers tranquillity, charm and relaxation, then you will find it all at this wonderful hotel. It is the perfect retreat and very fitting for this novel.

I am also indebted to the team at Delancey Press who are the most supportive and fun people to work with. It is a huge pleasure to be part of their family.

Lastly, I would like to thank my husband for putting up with me while I worked on this novel, ignoring him and the housework. He, of course, always manages to spice up my life.

What about you? Do you need to inject some spice into yours?

Carol E Wyer

The windows in the old Golf GTI were almost completely steamed up, thanks to the activities of the middle-aged woman and the young man inside it. The sudden rapid barking of a dog in the distance made the woman jump. She was already sweating and aware of a rancid aroma pervading the car. It most certainly was coming from her partner-in-crime. He turned his head towards her and scowled. "Hurry up, will you? I could have finished this twenty minutes ago."

Dawn shrank at the reprimand. He might have been twenty-five years her junior, but he oozed menace. His dark eyes burrowed into hers.

"It's not easy. My knees hurt from being in this uncomfortable position, and my glasses keep slipping down my nose, which makes it much harder to see. You wait until you get to my age. The world becomes all foggy, and then you start bumping into objects like doors and cupboards ..." She trailed off. He continued to level his cold stare at her. She squirmed, then took a deep breath, and shoved her glasses back up onto the bridge of her nose for the umpteenth time. She scrabbled about again searching out the wires that had dropped down. "I should have stolen a motorbike. It must be easier than this. Or a mobility scooter," she mumbled.

"You're quite funny, you know?" he muttered, peering out of the window.

"Keep low. There's the old man from down the road, walking his dog. Don't want him seeing us."

They both dropped down in the seats until the pensioner had gone by. The dog stopped at the next lamppost and cocked its leg against it.

"Okay," he whispered. He drew himself up a little, huffed onto the passenger window steaming it further with his acrid breath and then drew a smiley face on it. "Dodgy knees and bad eyesight. Suppose that's why middle-aged women don't generally try to hot-wire cars." She ignored the comment and continued to fumble with the wires. The smart arse lying next to her in the VW Golf, had been trying to teach her how to break into the car and hot-wire it. She could get in

the car easily enough, but the hot-wiring was proving impossible. In the darkness, she couldn't see which wire went where. Despite the specially insulated thick gloves he had demanded she wore to prevent shocks, she didn't possess the same dexterity as MJ. Her left leg was going numb again because MJ also insisted she stayed in the obligatory slumped stance to avoid detection by passing *Filth*—his preferred name for the police. At that moment, she was regretting getting herself into this situation. Her back ached, and her right knee was beginning to throb.

"Almost there," she whispered. At last, she had the correct wires grasped clumsily in her hands. She only needed to pull gently to ensure they would touch to get the car started, when a loud thumping on the roof of the car made her shriek loudly and drop the wires.

“You’re supposed to be the look out!” she yelled at MJ.

MJ shrugged his shoulders. “They must have sneaked up on me when I dozed off with boredom,” he replied and grinned at her, revealing brown-stained teeth. “You’ve taken so long, it’s not surprising you got caught. It probably took less time to build the car than you to hot-wire it,” he added and smiled again. “Still, you didn’t do too badly. It took me a few months to learn how to do it properly. My cellmate was very patient.”

A face appeared at the driver’s window.

“For goodness sake! Have you two not finished messing about in my car yet?”

Dawn took in a deep breath, which was probably a mistake, given the sour smell pervading the car. She opened the door and crawled out.

“Sorry, son. I thought I’d have cracked this by now, but I can’t get the hang of it. I can’t get the wires to touch. It’s like threading a needle and missing its eye with the cotton every time. My eyesight must be even worse than I suspected. I’d better get some new lenses for these glasses.”

“I need my car to collect Phoebe from her friend’s, so soz, but you’ll have to give up. Hi, MJ!” he added as MJ slunk out of the car with one stealthy, feline movement. They tapped fists together in a show of camaraderie.

“I think I’ll have to forget it altogether,” Dawn continued, pulling off the gloves and handing them back to MJ. “I don’t think it would be viable for a woman my age to hot-wire a car like this. I’d need to

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be slimmer, younger, and a lot more flexible.”

MJ nodded in agreement.

“Don’t worry. I have faith in your devious mind. You’ll come up with another idea. You’d better get off home. Dad will be getting suspicious. I’ll drop MJ back off at his place, once he’s put the car back together,” he added, surveying the mess of wires hanging out.

Dawn nodded. “It’s all right. Your father thinks I’m at a special meeting with the writing group. I told him we needed to do some research for our writing. This classifies as research. I must say I thought it would be easier than this. It seemed simple enough, according to the internet, and MJ has been a very good teacher.”

MJ looked embarrassed by this compliment and pulled out a scruffy packet of tobacco from the back of his jeans, which hung low on his scrawny backside.

“I might have to try a different tactic now. MJ explained tonight that these old cars are the only cars you can hot-wire these days. The new models are impossible unless you have the actual key for them. I’ll have to work out a different way of stealing a car.”

Her son grinned back at her. “Yeah, right, research. I hope that’s all it is. I don’t want to have to visit you in jail.”

She smiled and hugged her son, then waved goodbye to MJ, who had wandered off away from them both, pulled out some cigarette papers, and was rolling a long thin cigarette.

“Cheers, MJ. Thanks for trying to help.”

“S’okay. Anything for the Big Man,” he mumbled, seeking out a well-used lighter from inside a jacket pocket. “You did okay, really. Another few lessons and you’ll get the hang of it.”

The Big Man—her son, Dan—grinned again.

“Night, Mum. Don’t worry, I won’t tell Dad you were here.”

Dawn drove back home along dark lanes. The radio station was playing songs from the seventies. She liked seventies’ music and was soon singing along loudly to Abba’s 1976 hit, *Dancing Queen*. Most people of her generation remembered 1976 for its long hot summer. Dawn remembered it for an entirely different reason. Memories like falling snowflakes in a storm swirled around her as she drove. That summer had been spent at the small nursing home near the village where she lived, watching her mother battle cancer and, just days

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before her sixteenth birthday, slip away from her forever.

Her father also left her that day in August. He withdrew into himself and became reclusive. In spite of her tender years, she knew she had to help her father, Jack, and focussed on him rather than wallow in her own grief. She nursed her own broken heart and did her utmost to help her father mend his.

At first, local well-wishers in their village dropped by to offer sympathy and support. The village was not large and most people knew her mother as she had worked at the local store. Little by little, they ceased their visits, embarrassed, or found it too difficult to communicate with her father, who suddenly went from quiet and reclusive to angry. It fell upon Dawn to help him. She was the only person he would engage with. She ceased being a fun-loving teenager, and instead became his carer and companion, shunning her contemporaries to stay at home and help him.

Time healed. Gradually, they felt able to talk about the woman who had been such an important part of their lives. They shared memories and tears. Jack became less angry and more resigned to the blow life had dealt him. It took a few more years before her father felt he could face the world—and dating—again. Dawn was just about to start university when he announced he was seeing a woman. She was a work colleague. Apparently, they had shared lunch together a couple of times. Dawn couldn’t have been happier for him.

She went to Birmingham University to study English in the hope of becoming a journalist and met James Ellis at the Fresher’s Ball. A mature student, he was a few years older than her and was studying accountancy. They became “an item” that same day, seeing each other regularly during the first two years she was at university. Dawn didn’t make it to her final year though. She fell pregnant and abandoned her studies to become a mother and a wife.

The day baby Elisabeth came into their world was one of tears of joy and sorrow; tears of sorrow that her own mother couldn’t be there to meet her namesake, and tears of joy as they watched the tiny miracle, weighing only six pounds three ounces, grasp Dawn’s

thumb. Like her namesake, she left Dawn broken and torn. This time, it took much longer for Dawn to heal.

Four weeks after arriving home to their rented apartment, baby Elisabeth was discovered lifeless in her cot when Dawn got up to

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feed her, wondering why the baby hadn't woken her earlier.

The verdict was cot death. Dawn couldn't focus on anything for months. She blamed herself incessantly, wondering if she could have prevented it. If only baby Elisabeth had slept with them in their little bedroom, instead of the nursery they had decorated especially for her ... if only she had woken earlier and picked her up to feed her before this happened ... the "if onlys" plagued her.

Nurses and doctors assured her that there was nothing she could have done. Dawn couldn't comprehend why it happened. She didn't want to have children for a long time after that. It took endless counselling to help her recover. For months, she couldn't look at babies in prams without filling up with tears. She attempted some distance learning to finish her degree course, but she had lost the momentum and found working at home alone too difficult. She ended up working part-time in the local town library for a while to help with the income. She had little recollection of those days. Both she and Jim changed, and neither wanted to suffer that sort of pain ever again. Jim had been stronger, but his hurt was buried deep within him. He never spoke about it. They weren't, she mused, the hedonistic days that newly-weds should enjoy. They were dark days. In 1985, she discovered she was pregnant again. She was thrilled and terrified in equal measures.

She made sure baby Daniel would never suffer the same fate. She kept vigil over him almost twenty-four hours a day until she was too exhausted to watch over him. For the first six months of his life she barely slept, but as he became stronger and bigger, she began to relax.

She remained a full-time mother even when Dan was at college. Jim's salary by then was sufficient for all of them all to live on, although there was not much left over for luxuries. Dan filled the hole in her heart caused by the loss of Elisabeth, and even though he no longer lived at home, she experienced a warmth that nothing or no one else could give her whenever she thought about him.

He had recently moved into a rented flat himself with his longterm girlfriend, Phoebe. Next, it would be marriage and then a family of his own. Dawn was no longer needed to support and protect him. All she had left now was her love for him. She felt useless. She no longer had a role to fill. Dan's departure had left her empty again. Dawn drew up to the old ramshackle house they had lived in for

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over two decades. It needed work, but like many of the plans they had made years before, these too had been shelved. Lack of energy and money meant the house was looking tired and dated, much like Dawn felt about herself.

She opened the door into the kitchen. The casserole she had left

for her husband was still on the top, untouched. A used breakfast bowl was beside the sink next to an open packet of Shredded Wheat. On the oak kitchen table stood a Hayter lawn mower. It was in pieces, and a variety of dirty parts were strewn about the table top. Grease stains leaked out from under various screws and plugs. There had been no effort to cover the table with newspaper. She slammed her handbag onto the kitchen top.

“James Ellis,” she called. There was no response. She stomped into the sitting room where she found her husband, Jim, sprawled on the settee in his work jeans, watching a documentary about Keynes and the economy.

“There’s a lawn mower on the kitchen table, and you didn’t eat the casserole I left you,” she began. Jim was firmly engrossed in the documentary and oblivious to her entry. Whenever there was a programme on the television about the economy, financial institutions, or corporations, he became completely absorbed by it. Jim had been “retired” from accountancy for a few months, but he still maintained an interest in all things financial. The firm he worked for, Chilternz, had been taken over by a larger company, who had their own experts, and so redundancies had been made. Jim was one of the unfortunate casualties who found himself without a job. He was “too old” to consider securing another position, and even though he had sent out hundreds of CVs, he had yet to be invited to an interview.

Dawn stood for a while and received a grunt of recognition for her patience. She sighed. She may as well have been invisible. He would not communicate with her until the programme finished. In fact, if he carried on working on the lawn mower, he wouldn’t notice her until it was time for bed, and even then he would probably not realise she was there. Jim had suddenly started to fall asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

She grabbed her glasses from her bag in a huff and stormed upstairs to her office. It used to be her son’s old bedroom, converted now into a sort of study. Dawn spent most of her free time here

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working on her project—her first novel.

It was thanks to her son that she had started writing. Dan had suggested she try her hand at it. He had seen an advert in the local paper and taken it to his mother.

“With me gone, you’ll need something to fill in your time,” he joked. “If you don’t fancy this, you could try getting a job in the supermarket. Or, I could just come round for my meals every other day and bring you my washing, if you prefer!”

The creative writing class was just what she needed. She had joined immediately. This was a chance for her to try writing her very own book. Led by award-winning author, Blake Ryder, she was now one of a small group of people who hung on his every word and hoped to get enough tips and coaching to help with their own journey to publication.

It was Blake’s fault she had been out attempting to hot-wire a car

instead of preventing her husband from turning their kitchen into a garage.

“You need to live, breathe, and act like your characters,” he gushed, while waving a half-eaten Garibaldi biscuit at the group. Dressed eccentrically, at that first meeting, he was sporting a striped neckerchief and a silk waistcoat. The group waited for more words of wisdom. A large raisin stuck to his front tooth made him look like a wild pirate. “It’s like a method actor.” He continued waving his arms theatrically. “A good actor becomes absorbed by his role. He, or she, gets into their character’s mind. First, they think like the character, and then they begin to act and behave like the character. They make up legends for the characters. They envisage that character’s whole life: where they came from, what their family is like—everything. That is what makes them act so well. It’s the same for an author. They become the character.”

“If you want people to believe in your characters, you need to make them credible. Whatever they do or say, you must have lived it too. Your characters must have a back story and a life, even if you don’t share that with your readers. They have it because they are real. Earl Bashkov would never have been so popular if I hadn’t got into his head,” Blake finished and sat down.

Dawn was spellbound. Earl Bashkov was as well-known as Hercule Poirot. He was an eccentric Russian detective. Dawn had read the Bashkov series before joining the class and had become a

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huge fan. Blake was a genius, as far as she was concerned, and she hung on his every word. After all, Blake had been published by a big publisher and was on best-sellers’ lists. He should have known what an author needed to do to get noticed in the world of writing.

The problem for Dawn was that her chosen protagonist was quite wacky and got up to all sorts of behaviour completely alien to Dawn. She had an imagination, but creating a character like hers had sent it into overdrive. The woman had her own agenda. Hence, Dawn had been trying to see if it would be viable for her character to steal a car. She stared at the computer screen. It was incredible what you could find on the internet these days. There were detailed videos on YouTube of how to hot-wire a car, although she didn’t fancy sitting in one, laptop propped on the dashboard, attempting to follow the instructions of the apparent twelve-year-old, who was giving the tutorial. Hot-wiring was trickier than she thought. Besides, you could only hot-wire an old car like her son’s. There must be an easier way to steal a car, especially a modern one. She fired up her laptop to check her information and was soon lost in the technical world of tumblers, pins, and levers.

Cinnamon Knight ground the stub of her Benson and Hedges’ cigarette into the pavement with the heel of her Prada leather motorcycle boot, where it now joined a small pile of tab ends. Strategically placed in a shop doorway, she watched the top left window of a block of flats opposite. She had been there almost two hours. Rain beat steadily on the pavement, drumming against the

gutter with constant thuds, but this did not deter her. Her patience was rewarded as the light blazing from the window was finally extinguished. She sauntered across the road to the BMW parked in front of the block of flats along the kerbside, sandwiched between a Peugeot 205 and a C Class Mercedes.

Dressed completely in black, face partially obscured by her North Face hooded jacket; she was almost invisible next to the dark car. It took only a minute to fiddle with the lock, open the door, and slide into the car. She lowered herself down in the driver's seat, casting a cursory glance out of the window. The streets were empty. The weather was on her side and no one was braving the downpour, not

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even the old man at the end of the road who rarely missed taking his dog out for an evening stroll.

She leant forward and pulled off the cover below the steering wheel with one deft movement. Extracting the screwdriver from a neat case, she stabbed it into the ignition lock. A quick fiddle, one sharp twist, and the car burst into life; the persistent thudding of the rain against the pavement hid the initial coughing of the engine. She pulled away from the kerb swiftly and headed up the road at speed. Pushing the hood away from her head, she checked her face in the rear-view mirror. That'll teach him to mess about with women, she thought. No one, but no one, messes about with Cinnamon—the rat!

The rat in question was Alex Wells, an advertising agent from Manchester. He had met Cinnamon in a bar eight weeks earlier. For Cinnamon, it had been the first time she liked a man since the terrible experience with her ex-husband.

Her husband of twenty years left her for a younger woman. Not just any younger woman but the younger woman who had moved in next door to them and who was, Cinnamon believed, her best friend. The woman, Jessica, had certainly hoodwinked Cinnamon. Jessica was one of those easy, cheerful, and vibrant people who gave the impression they really were interested in you. Cinnamon, in desperate need of an understanding friend, unburdened a mountain of emotions on this woman. She was the first person in years to breach the invisible armour that Cinnamon wore to protect herself. Cinnamon missed the signs. Blinkered by friendship and trust, she didn't recognise what was going on under her nose. She never imagined that Geoff would leave her, let alone have a torrid affair with the woman next door. She didn't realise until she found Geoff waiting for her when she returned from Waitrose one lunchtime, his suitcase by the door.

He had fallen in love with the feisty, go-getting harlot next door. They were moving down south where Jessica had been offered a promotion and would be an area manager for a cosmetics company. Geoff had already applied to work at the London branch of the firm of accountants he worked for, and together they were going to start a new exciting life.

Cinnamon could pinpoint the exact moment when a switch

flicked in her head, and she threw off the mantle of respectability she had been wearing for all those years. It was the moment she
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looked out of the window and saw Jessica, who had been sitting behind the wheel of her company Audi, lean forward and give Geoff a passionate kiss as he clambered into the car. The memories flowed back, opening the wound in her heart once more. Cinnamon Knight, gunned the throttle of the BMW and headed at high speed down the M6. It didn't matter if the speed cameras along the route caught her zooming along at 110mph. The Rat would be the one to be fined. He deserved more than fines.

After a string of meaningless one-night stands, which had left her with nothing but self-loathing, Alex Wells had charmed her. He convinced her it was possible to love again and enjoy a relationship. For a short while, she was reminded of the possibilities that might have lain ahead: possibilities that might have included a normal caring relationship. Just when she thought she could have become the 'old' Cinnamon again, she spotted him exiting an Italian restaurant in Birmingham. She had been at the hairdresser's. She hid among the shoppers and observed him. He walked casually out onto the street and wrapped his arm around his companion, a woman at least ten years younger than Cinnamon. He kissed her and murmured something into her ear. She nodded and smiled back at him. Red mist descended once more before Cinnamon's eyes. Without any thought, she followed them to a hotel, where she discovered that they had checked in as Mr and Mrs Wells.

She had planned her sortie that night with care. A phone call to Alex's office, pretending to be a new client, had determined he was expected back in Manchester to work at Head Office for the next two weeks. She travelled up by train and waited patiently near his apartment until she saw him return home. She was skilled at waiting: she had accomplished what she wanted.

She revved the engine again, spinning the wheels, as she tore away from the lights. She was going to leave the car abandoned in Birmingham. There wouldn't be much evidence of it by the time the sun rose the next morning. Alex would be distraught. He loved this car. It was a special edition M3 in an unusual colour, specially chosen by him. It had been fitted out with the most expensive sound system and extras. He had lavished much money and time on it. It was, without doubt, very special to him.

A tight smile played over her lips. She glanced at her reflection in the rear-view mirror, tossed back her long raven-coloured hair, and
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narrowed her eyes as she sped on. Alex was lucky. She could have done worse. The anger she had been attempting to contain for years had been unleashed. She had plenty more revenge to wreak. This was just the beginning.

Blast Alex! She had spent five years trying to forget Geoff and what an emotional wreck she had been when he left her. One selfish action by Alex Wells brought back all the bad memories.

She dumped the BMW in the middle of Birmingham, door wide open, its keys in the ignition. Someone would make off with it, change the licence plates and respray it. That would be the last he would see of it. Served him right. He'd mourn its loss, though. It wouldn't be easy to find one exactly like it to replace it. It had been pimped. He had even chipped it so it went faster than other cars. In fact, he had spent a fortune on it. Still, it was only a materialistic thing, she thought. That wasn't much to lose. In fact, compared to what Cinnamon had lost over the years, it was nothing. She dialled the number of a taxi firm and asked to pick her up, then walked up a street and waited at the arranged point at a bus shelter. She lit another cigarette and reflected on her life so far, a life she kept trying to escape from. Just when had she become so hard, so embittered? Memories of a young Cinnamon struggled to the surface of her mind: images of a pretty girl playing on a swing, a good-looking man pushing her. Laughter. "Higher Daddy!" The memory flickered like a dying match and disappeared to be replaced by another bleak colourless memory of her mother, Tina, crying.

That was a turning point. Cinnamon was two weeks away from her thirteenth birthday. Her head was full of the thoughts of getting the Bontempi organ she had been promised and maybe some proper make-up. Her mother had hinted Cinnamon might be allowed some as she was nearly thirteen. Cinnamon could not wait to be grown up. Thirteen sounded so grown up.

She had been watching an episode of a new show, *Multi-coloured Swap Shop*. She wanted to know if she could phone in and swap her old dolls, as she was getting too old for them. She wandered into the kitchen, where she found her mother at the kitchen table, head in her arms, weeping softly.