

Praise for Asia Mackay

‘Sexy, stylish, thrilling and funny. Asia Mackay rips up the rulebook in this wildly original, razor-sharp tale of marriage and murder, mundanity and mayhem. I loved it.’ Chris Whitaker

‘Murder has never been so funny. If you liked *Mr & Mrs Smith*, you’ll love this original and darkly funny thriller.’ Clare Mackintosh

‘An invaluable manual that I return to again and again’ Hugh Grant

‘I ABSOLUTELY LOVED IT!!! It’s so new and different and refreshing and I found it such fun (also loved the feminist message)’ Marian Keyes

‘Certain to be your sassy, twisted must-read of 2025’ Janice Hallett

‘I absolutely gobbled up this darkly funny and clever thriller about one of the most dysfunctional marriages to ever make it onto the page. Loved it.’ Katy Brent

‘Huge fun with a dark beating heart, a game of cat and mouse with sharpened tooth and claw. You won’t dare to put it down.’ Harriet Tyce

‘A riotously fun read. Asia Mackay puts the sass in assassin as it’s never been done before’ L. S. Hilton

‘With a slick plot, pin-sharp prose and an authentic feel, this fiercely feminist and witty thriller will keep you gripped . . . and rooting for a rather wonderful heroine’ *Sunday Mirror*

‘Funny, fast and full-tilt!’ James Swallow

‘Mackay’s debut is fresh and fun, and adroitly combines social and parenting comedy with detail-rich derring-do’ *The Sunday Times*

‘With dark humour, a twisty plot and a healthy dose of genuine emotion, this unique novel is a thrilling ride’ *Heat*

‘I loved it. Really entertaining, good fun and captures the mum juggle/guilt perfectly’ The Unmumsy Mum

‘Witty . . . fun . . . clever. BRILLIANT!’ Sophie Ellis-Bextor

‘This might be the best fun I’ve ever had reading a book. Funny, observant and proper adrenaline inducing thrills’ Georgia Tennant

‘What new mother can’t relate to murder? This is the funny and thrilling story of how one woman does what all women do all the time – manage every single thing – and throws in a bit of efficient killing. Brilliant, wish I’d done more of that . . .’ *Arabella Weir*

‘I really think it deserves to be read as a feminist rallying cry to all of those mothers doing such a lot of emotional, as well as physical, work to keep their families happy’ *Stephanie Butland*

‘This fiercely feminist and witty thriller will keep you gripped – and rooting for the really rather wonderful heroine’ *Sunday People*

‘Hilarious, clever and refreshingly original’ *Lancashire Evening Post*

‘Exciting and very funny’ <http://bookoxygen.com>

‘*Killing It* is lighthearted, funny and very easy to read . . . I couldn’t put this one down’ *The L Space*

‘Smart, funny and pacy’ *Better Read Than Dead*

Also by Asia Mackay

*KILLING IT
THE NURSERY*

ASIA MACKAY

A SERIAL KILLER'S GUIDE TO MARRIAGE



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*For Rebecca Thornton
My oldest and best friend
I couldn't do any of this without you
(‘this’ being life not just writing)*

PROLOGUE

Maybe we should've tried marriage counselling. Or planned a proper mini-break somewhere, just the two of us, as soon as the cracks started showing. If this relationship was worth saving, why didn't we do more to try and make it work? I couldn't help but wonder: if we'd had more date nights, maybe we wouldn't be standing here right now, in a Berkshire nature reserve at 1am, circling each other with a pair of hunting knives.

I stared at my husband; his lip was bleeding, his usually perfect, tousled hair wild.

A summer storm was brewing. The unbearable heat that had been suffocating us for the last few days was finally about to break. I shouted at him over the warm wind that was whipping both our faces, 'Do you even still love me?'

'How can you ask me that? Of course I do. I would've killed you in your sleep months ago if I didn't!'

He was right. He would've.

I touched my jaw and ran my tongue over the back of my teeth. One of them had come loose. A familiar metallic taste was filling my mouth.

'What about me?' he shouted back. 'Do you still love me?'

Asia Mackay

Marriage was a gamble. We all knew that. You were cashing in your chips on someone you hoped you didn't hate twenty years down the line. We all change; we just had to hope that we would change in sync, in parallel.

'Till death us do part.' I spat blood onto the ground.

He tightened his grip on his knife. It was engraved and had a leather handle – a present from me for his fortieth. I'd presented it to him in a red velvet box as we were curled up on a four-poster bed in a suite with a view of the Amalfi Coast.

We had been perfect together. Totally fucking perfect.

He did this. He killed us.

The sound of thumps carried over the wind. We both turned to look at the black SUV. The noise was coming from the boot. Someone was awake.

'We need to make a decision,' he shouted. 'You or me?'

I couldn't let him do this.

I always knew our life together would involve bloodshed. I just never thought it would be ours.

Part 1

Honeymoon

‘The honeymoon marks the very beginning of your marriage. You can look the decision you made right in the face and say yes! This is us! Forever! It’s blissful. Everything is so fresh and new. You are your best selves, and you must promise each other to keep that energy going for the rest of your lives.’

– Candice Summers, number-one bestselling author of *Married Means Life: How to Stay Happy, Fulfilled and Together Forever*

‘Soak it up, bitches – it ain’t going to last.’

– Hazel Matthews, married woman

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Three months earlier

Haze

I really was very lucky.

I looked around our brand-new, expansive kitchen. Bespoke wooden cabinets, marble countertop, an electric five-door Aga. A family painting of three stick figures holding hands stuck to the stainless-steel fridge doors.

I grew up in many different places, but I never had a home. I grew up with many different people, but I never had a family.

Now I finally had both.

Don't fuck it up.

I stared at the wall nearest the window as I chopped grapes at the island. Four different shades of white were painted on it. The paint codes for each option underneath. Decisions, decisions.

'Neeeeeowwwwwwwww!' Fox walked into the kitchen, holding a giggling Bibi with her arms out like an aeroplane. He was in the suit he was wearing when we first met. It was thirteen years ago this June. The American stranger who

came to my rescue in Paris. I felt a stab of something. I wasn't sure what.

'And crash landing!' Fox dropped Bibi into her highchair at the oak dining table, where a bowl of porridge and banana was waiting for her.

'Pawgee!' said Bibi as she picked up her plastic spoon.

'Porr-idge,' Fox corrected, sitting down next to her. 'She's twenty-nine months old, she should be up to two hundred words by now. At last count, she was only at a hundred and seventy-three.'

I shrugged. 'She'll get there.'

Fox observed me slicing. 'Don't forget: to stop the risk of choking, the grapes need to be cut vertically. Not horizontally.'

I paused. And altered my slicing direction. The knife was sharp. I was cutting them faster and faster.

At forty-three, Fox was only six years older than me, but he had aged much worse. Yes, his dark blond hair still had no streaks of grey. Yes, he was still annoyingly handsome and wrinkle-free. But . . . Jesus. He kept sounding like an old man. Maybe the passport I thought was his real one was also fake. Maybe he was actually a youthful-looking sixty-year-old.

'She's definitely behind on her talking.' Fox cleared his throat. 'Studies show a baby sibling can help toddlers develop faster.' He looked up at me over his cup of coffee.

My knife faltered and slipped.

'Fuck!' I lifted my left index finger, a streak of blood now colouring the end of it. I stood there staring at it as it dripped onto the white chopping board.

'Fuccck.' Bibi laughed.

'Language, Hazel!' Fox slammed his coffee down on the table. Wow, using my full name – he really was mad.

A Serial Killer's Guide to Marriage

‘What?’ I shrugged. ‘Now she’s at a hundred and seventy-four.’

Our home was a four-bedroom detached house in a gated community in Sunningdale. Here, the nice mummies, whom I mostly managed to avoid, had many ways to deal with the stress of running a perfect home and raising perfect children. They focused on Pilates, day-drinking, Net-a-Porter, and the local spa, where Jonas and his tight shorts massaged away any tension in their upper backs.

I had my own way of dealing with stress, but that was not allowed anymore.

It had been one thousand, one hundred and sixty-nine days.

Tonight, we were having a few of the neighbours over for dinner. We had somehow joined a rota of entertaining one-upmanship and tonight was our turn. When Bibi was at nursery, I went grocery shopping. I always went to the same smaller but slightly out-of-the-way independent shops. Supporting local businesses and killing more time. I remembered the names of all the people behind the counters and granted each one an inane pleasantry about the weather. A smile was so fixed to my face, my cheeks began to ache.

I picked up Bibi, dry-cleaning and flowers for the table. Once home, I put Bibi down for a nap. I stood over her crib, stroking her hair as she fell asleep.

‘I love you more than anything in this world.’ I leaned closer to her. ‘I’ll never let anything happen to you.’

Don’t fuck it up.

Next to Bibi’s room, a spare bedroom had been converted into a makeshift art studio. Sheets covered the beige carpet. I sat on my stool, paintbrush in hand, as I stared at the blank

canvas in front of me. Eventually, I dipped the brush into the red paint and did one little line in the centre of the canvas. And then another and another, until a stick figure looked back at me. I drew a sad face on it. I stared at it for a moment and then pushed it off the stand. Picking up my phone, I accidentally lost an hour watching Instagram reels. Then another fifteen minutes editing photos of myself to see if fashion's latest choppy fringe would suit me.

When Bibi woke, I got her out of her cot and held her close, breathing in her sleepy neck.

I let her loose on my abandoned canvas. I took photos of her as she handprinted black and red all over it: #mummy-bondingtime. When we got bored of that I parked her in front of Peppa Pig as I prepared dinner. This involved placing clean baking trays onto the drying rack, spreading crumbs onto a chopping board and ripping the deli and patisserie boxes into little shreds to go into the bottom of the recycling bin. Faking it in the bedroom – unacceptable. Faking it in the kitchen – commendable.

The three couples arrived within minutes of each other.

I watched Fox slice the beef fillet. It was very rare. He cut it with precision. He barely even seemed to notice how the bright red of the steak gently wobbled as he sliced into it.

I took Mark by the arm and brought him over to Fox.

'Isn't he perfect?' Fox looked up at us, large knife in hand. I waited a beat as he took in Mark and his fine suit and large, gaudy Rolex. 'He brought us your favourite red.'

'Perfect is a bit much,' guffawed Mark.

Fox wouldn't meet my eyes as he chuckled with Mark over the expense of having such a fine palate. There was no hint

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he remembered what the two of us used to do with men who looked like Mark.

Dinner followed the usual script. I sympathised when Raquel droned on about the difficulties of getting planning permission for their basement extension. I nodded along with Nick and Caro at the horror of interest rate rises affecting mortgage payments. I crossed fingers with Georgie for little Arthur getting a coveted school place. I sneaked a glance at the clock: 10.37pm. The final home run before the chorus of, 'Oh, look at the time!'

'I do worry that there are three Florences in Florence's class,' sighed Raquel. 'You're lucky Bibi is such an unusual name.'

'She's named after my grandmother Sabina.'

'How lovely. Were you close?'

'Oh yes.' I took a slug of wine. 'She was the only member of my family who wasn't a total cunt.'

Raquel's mouth dropped open.

I stood up. 'Anyone for more raspberry pavlova?'

After the last couple was air-kissed goodbye and the dishwasher was fully loaded, we collapsed onto the sofa. Fox was a little drunk. I was a lot drunk. I put a hand on his thigh. He smiled and pulled me to him. I reached for his belt buckle. He stopped me with his hand.

'What?'

'Bibi plays on this sofa.'

'I'll clean it,' I murmured as I pushed him back on the sofa.

'It's . . .' He sat upright. 'It's dry-clean only. So you know, bit of an effort to—'

I unbuttoned my silk shirt. 'We could put a towel down.'

He pressed at the sofa cushion. 'And it's quite soft.'

Asia Mackay

Probably not good for my back.' He patted my arm. 'Our bed is just upstairs.'

By the time the routine of locking up, checking on Bibi, removing make-up and getting undressed had been completed, Fox was asleep. I got into bed beside him and stared up at the ceiling, listening to the sound of his light snores. I wanted to scream.