THE

PERFECT MURDER

PLAYBOOK

“Have you seen it?” Jeremy Logan asked, waving his beer at the bartender for another round. “Imagine. A dark website teaching how to commit the perfect murder.”

Kenny Watts rolled his eyes and sipped from his bottle. “It sounded like a joke. It’s in my spam folder.”

“You should pull it back and read it. It’s pretty amazing.”

“Why? Who would I want to bump off around the office?”

“Who said anything about the office?”

Kenny stared at his best friend. “You have someone in mind?”

“Not me, bro. You. How long have you and Kate been at each other’s throats?”

He laughed. “We have some things to work out. But murder? We’re a long way from drawing swords.”

“Are you?” Jeremy leaned in. “Face it, you’re both miserable. Your finances still haven’t recovered since the pandemic and the layoffs. Kate wants out, but she’s not leaving you without a wheelbarrow full of cash, and you don’t have it to give. It’s that time in life when you’re worth more dead than alive. Her life insurance policy would float you for years. Half a mill, right?”

“How do you know about our insurance? I don’t recall us having that conversation.”

“Relax, buddy,” Jeremy slapped him on the back. “We talked about it back when you took out the policies—both of them. You’re worth as much to her in a pine box as she is to you. The question is, who will make the first move?”

Kenny had heard enough. “Knock it off! My wife and I don’t want to kill each other. Jeez, Jeremy. Whatever happened to harmless bar gab about bad movies and stupid things our bosses do?”

“The website has five scenarios to choose from,” Jeremy continued. “Pick your poison, so to speak.” He grinned deviously, bouncing his eyebrows. “Let’s just say I was curious and bought one: How to kill your spouse during a faked home invasion.”

“You’re not even married.”

“Like I said, I was curious. And I’m telling you this for your own good. You need to find a way out of your marriage before she gets the bead on you.”

\*\*\*

Weeks of constant prodding finally opened Kenny’s eyes to the truth hidden in plain sight. He cursed himself for ignoring the signs as his wife and his marriage slipped further from reach. Still, despite his newfound awareness, he couldn’t believe he was going through with it.

Jeremy helped Kenny draft a plan based on the downloaded murder playbook number three, a how-to manual on killing a spouse, meant to look like an accidental shooting during a home break-in. If done correctly, all evidence at the scene would support the story of the shooter defending themself. Also included was the proper conduct of the distraught spouse during interrogation. Kenny learned what to say, how to say it, and when to let the tears fall. The 911 call was especially critical and the most telling piece of evidence. Most calls for help ended up incriminating the defendant. The murder playbook contained a special section on 911 etiquette.

In preparation for the plan, Kenny secretly installed three hidden cameras throughout his house, viewable through an app on his phone. He needed to see everything from multiple angles and was surprised the murder website hadn’t included such a critical component.

Another oddity clawed at the back of his mind: the origins of the website creator. Had he been some soulless hitman who’d killed so many times that he now taught others how to murder for fun and profit? And what if law enforcement already knew of the website and used the playbook to reverse-engineer any similar cases? Rather than take the risk, he custom-tailored the plan for his unique situation.

\*\*\*

Kenny spent the final two days before the fateful night traveling on a business trip. His plane was due to land at 11 p.m., and the plan was woven tightly around that time. After picking up his car at the airport, he would drive home, arriving at midnight. Jeremy would be standing by to assist. The two of them would make enough noise as they entered that Kate would come out from the bedroom, armed with the shotgun. Kenny would shoot her where she stood with an unregistered revolver he’d purchased for the deed. With shots fired and the clock now ticking, Jeremy would create the appearance of a robbery, then leave, tossing the handgun off a nearby bridge. Kenny, with his car parked down the street, would sneak out and drive up minutes later and then call 911, sticking to his script—the perfect murder—the perfect betrayal.

\*\*\*

“Kate, I heard from Kenny this afternoon. He doesn’t suspect a thing. I’m meeting him outside your house at midnight. You have the shotgun where you can grab it quick?”

“Next to the bed, and I’m ready to use it. Just think, Jeremy. Next week, he’ll be gone, and we won’t have to sneak around anymore. I love you.”

“Love you, too, babe. See you tonight.”

\*\*\*

Kenny once more checked the security cameras from his phone app. He could see Kate talking on the phone, probably discussing last-minute instructions with Jeremy. He’d come so close to playing into their hands. Settling back into his seat, he glanced at his watch—two hours until his plane touched down, then showtime.

With an eye glued to the video signal on his phone, Kenny waited twenty minutes after Kate finished her call, then rang Jeremy. “Change of plans, buddy,” he said, his voice reflecting a rehearsed tremble. “I took an early flight home and tried to patch things up with Kate. We argued. I—I shot her. She’s dead. Get over here now!”

Kenny cut the call and dialed Kate. “Honey, I’ve been thinking. I haven’t been the best husband, but that changes now. I took an early flight home and will be there in a few minutes. Pack your bags. I’ll take you anywhere you want to go.”

“You’re. . . coming home now?”

“I’m just a couple of minutes down the road.”

From his seat on the plane, Kenny watched the phone video as Kate picked up the shotgun, pumped it, took a position behind the bedroom door, and killed the lights.“I’m wearing your favorite nightie,” she said sweetly. “Come snuggle.”

Any lingering doubt about his suspicions or intentions was as dead as he would be if he walked through that door.

The outside camera displayed the distraught Jeremy as he arrived, expecting to find Kate in a pool of blood.

Timing Jeremy’s motions, Kenny watched and waited until Jeremy ran into the dark house.

“I’m home, Kate,” Kenny announced into the phone. “I love you.”

“Come to bed, baby. I’ve got a surprise waiting.”

BOOOOMMM!

The phone went silent after the shotgun blast. Kenny watched the display as Kate approached her downed prey like a proud hunter, until she switched on the light and glimpsed the face of the bloody corpse lying on the floor.

Her scream was deep, long, mournful.

###

Kenny arrived home after midnight to find it surrounded by emergency vehicles. Flashing red and blue strobe lights cut through the darkness, bouncing off neighboring houses and the faces of gathered onlookers in their robes and pajamas. He parked a few doors away, ran to the house, and identified himself to a deputy. He was led through the front door and met by a detective.

“Mr. Watts?”

Kenny nodded. “What’s going on? Where’s my wife?” he asked, following the website script to the letter.

“Are you acquainted with Jeremy Laslow?”

“Jeremy? Yes. He’s my best friend. Why? What’s happened?”

“Mr. Watts, he’s dead.”

Kenny stared, dazed. “How?” He dropped onto the arm of a loveseat, a hand over his gaping mouth.

The detective explained the scene and asked Kenny for his cooperation in the investigation. “Of course,” he said, nodding, amazed at how well his adaptation of the double-cross had worked. Jeremy, who had schemed to kill him and live happily ever after with his wife, was dead. Kate could try to implicate him, but no dream defense team in the world had the glue to make that stick.

With the house an active crime scene, Kenny opted for a hotel after promising to be available for further questioning. Kate was led past him by deputies, her eyes filled with questions and daggers. “I love you,” he called, surprised and pleased with his rehearsed sincerity.

\*\*\*

The flashing lights dimmed in the rearview mirror as Kenny pulled away, remembering all he’d done. Everything had been exactly as scripted, and for the first time in weeks, Kenny Watts felt relief, but little else. Not spite, not anger, not even loss. Miles from happiness. The only positive thing to be said was that it was finally over. He stopped at a light and turned left toward the hotel, thinking that would have to be enough. For now.