

# WIDOW CATCHER EXTRACT

A stuffed owl studied me, and at that moment I felt every bit the mouse that it must have hunted while alive. Even though I was used to a bird staring at me—Monty—this felt different, more sinister.

Shooing the dead bird away with a flick of my wrist, I sensed someone watching me. It was Virginia, and she sat at an odd angle, her back ramrod straight but leaning over to the side. She had a fierce grimace on her face as if she was constipated, or in great pain.

“Are you okay?” I asked her.

She didn’t get a chance to reply. Karin raised her voice and said, “So who would like to start?”

From out of nowhere everyone produced a book. Ruth raised hers in the air: *Roses Are Red*, an Alex Cross novel by James Patterson. I had read that book, so it would be easy for me to join in the conversation at least.

“Go ahead, Ruth,” Karin said. “We’ll go clockwise. What was your favourite part?”

“I loved the detective’s conviction,” Ruth said. “He doesn’t give up till he catches the killer. I give up too easily. Remember my knitting project?” A few heads nodded. “Gave it up already.”

“What’s your next project?” Andrew asked.

Ruth’s face crinkled into a grin. “I think I’d like to be a female detective.”

“I think they’re just called detectives,” Andrew replied.

Ruth gave him a confused look. “I mean I’ll only investigate cases where women are the victims.”

Virginia started clapping. “Brilliant idea. Men have enough support in this world.”

“It’s true. You’ll be run off your feet,” Sophia said with an incredulous look.

“Maybe you can find out why four members of our book club have died,” Pepper said.

“Although if you believe Sophia’s claim, then it will make you a *paranormal* detective.”

Karin hit the wheel of her chair with her book. “That’s enough, Pepper.” She turned to Ruth. “Anything else about the book you liked?”

Ruth shrugged. “It was an easy read.”

“My turn,” Sophia said. She lifted her book in the air. It was a cookbook with red-frosted cupcakes on the cover. “Loved every single one of these recipes. Did not like having to do the dishes—”

Just then the front doorbell rang.

Everyone froze.