

Opening extract from  
**Run**

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## ONE

### The Day That Changed Their Lives Forever

Shay Sullivan drove his black Mercedes on a traffic free M25 with a smile on his tanned face. It was a handsome face, angular with an easy smile showing even white teeth, his Irish ancestry evident in the blue eyes that could be both open and inviting but could chill in a focused fury when aroused. His dark hair framed a visage that revealed a sense of mischief, allied with a lazy athletic confidence from a taut, fit and toned body that had led him into many a scrape in his younger days.

Satiated after a relaxed Italian meal in St Albans with Ruby Ward, the woman who, in spite of the fifteen year age gap, had become his one love, his alter ego, his soul mate. On this Thursday evening in July they had now been seeing each other clandestinely for three months as Shay's recent business partner, Billy Gower, was Ruby's mother's boyfriend and Shay knew he would totally disapprove of their liaison.

The age difference was not at the base of Billy Gower's opposition, rather the hidden thoughts of a man who harboured, as all knew, unhealthy feelings for his step daughter.

Shay was driving comfortably within the speed limit, luxuriating in the after dinner feeling of wellbeing and singing along

to an Oasis CD when the in-car phone rang displaying Billy's name – the CD muted automatically.

Shay, still euphoric, answered easily, "Alright Billy."

"Where are you?" demanded Billy in his usual abrupt tone.

"Driving home on the motorway," responded Shay.

"What, at this time!" barked Billy, his tone now decidedly ugly.

Shay laughed self-consciously, knowing instinctively that Billy was onto them and in a put-on casual tone said, "What's up? It's only 8pm."

Instantly, Billy snapped, "Gotta go, I've got the old bill behind me," and hung up.

With his brow now furrowed in anxiety for Ruby, Shay called her, "Ruby, be careful. Billy has just been on to me and I think he knows."

Her alarmed response echoed in his handset, "Oh No! He's calling me now! I'll call you back."

Shay's tension increased. The dark spectre that was Billy Gower was now intruding; their relationship was now out in the open, laid bare to the malicious, perverted thought processes that coursed through Billy's possessive brain.

Shay and Ruby had met earlier for a meal, neither having seen each other for two weeks as Shay had been on holiday. During the course of the meal Ruby's mobile had rung numerous times, constantly displaying that it was Billy. She had ignored the calls.

On this occasion, nervous though she was, she decided to answer it.

"Where are you?" snarled Billy.

"On my way home from Keely's," stuttered Ruby, the lie springing automatically, born of necessity. Keely would always back her up.

Billy's rancid tones still rang in her ear as she manouvered off the M25.

“No Ruby. Where exactly are you now?”

“I’m on the roundabout by the supermarket,” gulped Ruby. She exited the roundabout and spied Billy’s Audi 4x4 bearing down on her like a black cloud. Minutes later it loomed large in her rear-view mirror where Billy, in his fury, was in pursuit. Quaking, Ruby continued to speak on the still open line, her voice not betraying his presence.

“Right, pull over now into that lay-by!”

The vicious command was like whiplash, evoking nightmare memories of a similar event twelve months previously when Billy had forced her to pull into a lay-by. He had attacked her through the open car window, grabbing her by the throat, seizing the car keys and bending them in his blind fury.

Ruby’s plight had been seen by a passing motorist - a slight young girl being attacked by a six foot two, twenty stone, enraged bull of a man. Pulling in to assist Ruby, the motorist’s gentlemanly intervention resulted in Billy departing the scene. After ensuring that she was safe the motorist went on his way. Shaken and frightened, Ruby rang her mother, Janice, who came and collected her.

This time Ruby decided that she would not obey the monster, she knew better.

“I want to talk to you before you get home,” snapped Billy.

“I am not pulling into a lay-by. If you want to talk to me, you can talk to me at home.”

Billy hung up but stayed close on her tail. She rang Shay, her voice quivering.

“He knows! He’s following me home now! I can tell by his face he’s about to explode. It’s going to kick off. I know it.”

Shay, feigning a confidence he didn’t feel, tried to reassure Ruby that all would be ok and added, “If you want me to come and get you later, I will.”

“Would you really do that?” Ruby asked, desperately trying to

cope with the panic that threatened to engulf her as she visualised the coming confrontation with an enraged Billy.

“Yeah, of course I will. You’ve only got to ring me and I’ll be there.” Shay’s reassuring answer belied the deep concern he was feeling for her.

He personally had no fear whatsoever of Billy, whom he regarded as a despicable bully. They’d met through football; both were involved with the Tottenham Hotspur Football Firm. Shay had for many years been active in the football underworld and was well known and respected by many of the opposing firms. Whereas Billy was a weak, hated figure, who got others to do his dirty work.

Shay’s chief concern was centred on the investment he’d put into his partnership with Billy and the fact that he had, with grave lack of foresight, allowed Billy full control of the finances. This was to have disastrous knock-on effects. Deep in his gut, Shay knew he had made the biggest mistake of his life in going into partnership with that grabber.

The jet lag was beginning to kick in and was clouding his judgement. Heavy-eyed now, Shay drove on, anxious for sleep to clear his cluttered brain. He’d just returned from Mauritius that morning on a Virgin first class flight. Life could not be better for him. He was truly in love for the first time in his life. He loved everything about Ruby, her good humour, maturity and intelligence, her incredible natural beauty, her tanned skin, blond hair and amazing green eyes. His nickname for her was ‘Eyes’ and Ruby’s pet name for him was ‘London’, as he had a strong London accent.

An all-pervading tiredness was now weighing Shay down and he struggled to keep his eyes open and drive safely. The jet lag was biting, winning. The developing and inevitable conflict with Billy and Ruby’s solitary exposure was all that kept him awake.

Exiting the M25, the car phone rang. It was Billy.

Shay’s senses sharpened, he responded, “Hello!”

“Where the fuck have you been with my daughter?” came the raucous tone of the furious persecutor. Shay went to respond but was stopped in mid sentence as an out of control Billy rasped at him, “I’m telling you now, you’ve crossed the wrong man this time. You’re a dead man walking Sullivan! You think I’m fuck all? Well, I tell you this for nothing Sullivan, you’re going to be sliced up you prick!”

This time Shay made sure he was heard. “What’s the problem? We went out for something to eat! This isn’t a seedy fling. We have feelings for each other.”

Infuriated, Billy boomed down the phone, “Feelings! She’s my world, you can’t have her! I’m telling you now. You’re a dead man walking!” and hung up.

Shay continued driving, deep in thought. He needed to sort this out. Maybe a toe to toe with Billy would do it? He had no doubt that in a one to one he could do Billy damage. His years of boxing and many street encounters had gifted him with the tools and skills required. However, he had put everything he had into the new business venture so maybe a diplomatic approach with Billy would be best. Billy would calm down over night and see sense. A profitable air conditioning business was at stake, which he ran very efficiently. No Shay would mean no business, as Billy’s role was that of a sleeping partner and air conditioning was not his field.

The phone rang again. It was Billy, “You slag! Three months! Three fucking months behind my back! I tell you this Shay, you or anyone belonging to you won’t get a penny out of the firm and that’s a fact! You phone your son up now and tell him his dad is a dead man! In fact, tell him he ain’t got a dad. I’m going to open you up!”

This was not impressing Shay one bit. He had a nineteen year old son, Connor, who he adored. As father and sons go, they were, and always had been, very close.

“You couldn’t open up a tin of beans, Billy. I don’t know what your problem is. It’s nothing to do with you. We’ll talk about this tomorrow.”

Whilst Billy continued to shout, Janice was crying and screaming in the background. Shay had only met her twice but got on well with her. He felt sorry for her as he knew she was terrified of Billy, who managed his personal life by ruling with an iron fist.

Shay wondered how Ruby was as he spent a lot of time thinking about her.

As he parked his car he answered another incoming call from Billy. “Tick tock Sullivan, we’re going to kill you! Word on you is out already!” Billy abruptly ended his call.

*We’re going to kill you*, thought Shay. Had Billy intentions of involving a firm? It was common knowledge that he was very close to a few well-organised criminal families. This could be a problem, maybe diplomacy or a right hook would not be enough in this instance.

Now inside his house, Shay’s tiredness was back with a vengeance and was overpowering, all he wanted to do was sleep. He turned off his phone, showered and climbed into bed and fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

As Ruby neared her home she was filled with anxiety about what was going to happen when she arrived. Parking her black Audi TT, she noticed that the front door was already open. Her mum had obviously received a call from Billy informing her that they were due home any minute. Still in the car, she saw Billy approaching the cul-de-sac with a face that she recognised all too well.

In previous situations when Ruby, her mum, brother or even work colleagues were about to be on the receiving end of Billy’s venom, he would always show the same body language. He’d walk towards them as fast as his bulky belly would allow him with both arms swinging furiously. His face would be bright red, his bottom

jaw would protrude slightly, and his eyes would be bulging.

Whether they were his target or just an onlooker, most people would be petrified on seeing him like this. Billy's mentality was that he deserved respect and that everyone who knew him should give him respect, although his way of gaining it was to bully and frighten them.

Ruby often had been the victim of his verbal and physical abuse, yet this time, for some reason, she was not feeling her usual petrified self. Perhaps it was because she knew that Shay would be there for her or because she'd simply had enough of Billy's barbaric behaviour and wanted out anyway. She quickly got out of her car and ran into the house, where she was met by her mum who looked somewhat distressed.

"Ruby, where have you really been?" Janice asked.

"I told you, out with Keely," she protested. Before the interrogation could continue any further, Billy had thundered into the house like a man possessed. Here we go, thought Ruby. She could see that he was gearing up for one almighty explosion.

"Where have you been, Ruby, and don't fucking lie to me! I know you haven't been with Keely, so where have you been?"

Ruby knew that this was not a situation that could be diffused with a couple of convincing lies but was not yet prepared to tell them both the truth as she was still not quite sure just how much they actually knew.

"Okay, okay!" she yelled. "I wasn't with Keely, I was with a bloke that I've been seeing and I didn't want you two knowing about him yet. It's my business and nothing to do with you. I haven't got to tell you everything that happens in my life. Anyway, what gives you the right to be checking up on me? I'm an adult, not a child! I'm sick of you always interfering. You don't treat Charlie like that so why do you always pick on me?"

Billy's eyes were now on the verge of popping out of his head.

"Where's your phone? Give me your fucking phone! If you're

telling the truth you'll give me your phone!" he ranted with an element of smugness.

Ruby was panic-stricken. She realised that if Billy didn't know for sure about Shay, checking her mobile phone would confirm any suspicions he may have had. She held on to her handbag tightly as he went to grab it. Then she ran in to the lounge. He was quickly behind her and grabbed hold of her in another attempt to snatch the bag. She held it close to her chest, curled over and turned her back to him. This made it more difficult for him to get at it, so he became even rougher.

At this point, her mother, who had so far not uttered a word, tried to intervene.

"Billy, stop it! Leave her alone. It's not right!"

She might as well have asked a raging lion attacking a monkey to sit down and behave itself. As her pleas were in vain Janice then tried to get in between the two of them. Brute force prevailed, and the handbag was his to search.

As Ruby watched him rummaging for her mobile phone she knew that the game was up. She grabbed her bunch of keys, ran out to her car, got in, fumbled the key into the ignition and, with her knees knocking together, reversed off the driveway and backed in to a neighbour's garden wall. She went into first gear, looked up, and saw Billy standing in front of her car in an attempt to block her way. He was holding her mobile phone in one hand, and pointing at it with the other.

He roared at her, "Get back into the fucking house!"

Ruby revved the car. She beckoned for him to stand out of her way. He didn't stir an inch but instead goaded her to accelerate towards him. Without hesitation, she put the accelerator to the floor. The car shot forward, and he jumped aside. She wheel-spun out of the cul-de-sac and reached for her packet of cigarettes which she had left on the passenger seat. Taking long hard drags on her cigarette, her shivering eased and she started to think. She was going in the direction of the next town but had no plan in mind. With no

money, no phone, nothing but a packet of cigarettes and a car that was running on fumes, she knew she had to return and face the music. She turned around and reluctantly headed back to the war zone.

Again, Ruby arrived to find the front door was open. She quickly removed her car key from the big bunch of key rings and shoved it down the front of her jeans, hoping that if Billy snatched her keys he wouldn't notice that the car key was missing.

Even before getting inside the house she could hear Billy screaming and shouting at Shay on the phone.

“Shay you prick! You're fucking dead. Do you hear me, a dead man walking! I don't give a shit; I'm telling you that you're fucking dead!”

Ruby's arrival at the house caused him to end his call and turn his venom on her. He fired insult after insult at her and then bellowed, “Get up them stairs and pack your bags you stupid little whore, this time you ain't coming back!”

She ran up the stairs and burst into her bedroom. It had always been her haven, her own little Graceland where she could shut the door and be by herself. She was an Elvis fanatic, and her bedroom from floor to ceiling exhibited her passion. Knowing that she might never see her Elvis Presley sanctuary again, she despondently grabbed her Elvis Presley holdall and threw it onto the bed. It was quite a small bag, so she grabbed her gym bag as well. She turned the gym bag upside down and shook it so that the contents fell out on to the cream carpet. She stood and scanned the room. Numb and unable to think straight, she hesitated about what to pack first.

Her mum then came in to the room deeply upset, with tears streaming down her face, and handed her back her mobile phone.

“Why have you done this Ruby? Why him?” she asked.

Her heart went out to her mum, whom she loved dearly, but she had no regrets about the cause of the friction – her relationship with Shay, with whom she was deeply in love.

While her mother sat on the bed sobbing to herself, Ruby felt like sitting down beside her and putting her arms around her, but she reminded herself that she was being kicked out of her own home and got on with her packing.

In the course of her doing so Billy burst into her bedroom, shouting at the top of his voice, “How long’s it been going on? Have you slept with him? You dirty little slag! Do you really believe that he thinks that much of you? I tell you what! You don’t know the half of what he gets up to! He’s banging silly little tarts like you all over the place!”

Janice ran next door to the bathroom and Ruby could hear her retching into the toilet.

Billy seized on Janice’s absence as an opportunity to make it a more memorable eviction for Ruby. He grabbed her by the shoulders and like a mad bull, he pressed his forehead into her’s and ranted through his teeth, “I give it three months and then he’ll drop you, you’ve fucked yourself now! And I tell you this for nothing, as God is my witness I promise that I’ll do time for the pair of you! That shooter in the safe at work will put an end to that piece of shit. Pack your bags and get out of my house you little slag, but if you go to him, I’ll shoot the fucking pair of you. Where’s your car key?”

Ruby took a step back and then gave him the bunch of keys hoping that he wouldn’t notice that the car key was missing.

“And where’s the Log Book?” he screamed.

Ruby blinked as spit flew in her face and mumbled that it was in the office at the club. Billy slammed the bedroom door back into the wall as he left the room and went down the stairs. Within minutes, he was back in her bedroom, breathless and demanding the car key, which she meekly surrendered.

Now Ruby hadn’t a car, despite the fact that it was legally hers, not his to confiscate.

Strangely, she managed to calm herself down enough to concentrate on gathering her essentials together and pack them into her bags without shedding a tear, even though she was being kicked

out of the house where she had been born and reared, on the order of her mother's live-in boyfriend, who had only been there six years.

She was out on the landing about to go down the stairs, when she paused and eavesdropped as she heard Billy below on the phone in the lounge shouting, "You've ruined this family, Shay, and I'm gonna make sure you fucking suffer. We're going to find you and cut you to pieces! If you think you're getting any money out of the firm you can think again!"

Ruby bustled down the stairs with her two bags, handbag and one of her leather jackets. She went straight to the kitchen to get a couple of items of washed clothes that were still wet and jammed them into her bag. She walked towards the front door and was stopped by the tyrant, who ordered her to stay put whilst he called one of Shay's employees.

"Alright, Simon, it's Billy. Listen, I need to get hold of Shay, I've got an urgent message for him. Do you know where he lives?" Simon obviously didn't know where Shay lived as Billy didn't hang about in calling another two employees to ask the same question.

Unable to get the information he wanted, Billy pushed Ruby out of the front door and kicked her in the back as she went, causing her to fall out onto the driveway.

Unbeknown to Ruby, she had literally just been kicked out of her home and her family's lives forever.

It was 9.30pm and still reasonably bright outdoors. Luckily the weather was good as she headed God knows where, struggling with her baggage. She walked through the town and stopped near some garages that were well in off the road. Her feet were throbbing from having had her heeled boots on since seven that morning so she sat down on one of her bags, lit a cigarette and rang Shay. The call connected and went straight to answer phone, so she text him and said that she had been kicked out, that she was sorry for what had happened and that she loved him.

She then got the urge to get away from where she was as quickly

as possible. She rang her friend Keely, whose mobile also went straight to answer phone. She sent her a text asking her to call ASAP.

Ruby had a couple of friends at work close enough for her to feel she could trust them with the knowledge of her and Shay's relationship. She rang Bungle, who worked in the office with her and was pleased for her and Shay when she had told him a few weeks previously that they were together. Bungle was his nickname, based on a character from *Rainbow*, a children's television show. She filled him in on the details of her predicament.

He was shocked at what had happened and suggested that she stay in a hotel for the night under a false name. He offered to arrange this for her but she said that she would sort it out herself. She thanked him and said she would be in touch.

She called a local taxi firm and booked a cab with a false name. They were exceptionally busy but she would be collected in about twenty minutes.

She sat and chain-smoked, waiting for "*Helloooooo Baby...*" from The Big Bopper's "Chantilly Lace" to blast out of her phone. She had set that song as Shay's caller I.D. for when he rang her. She waited for The Big Bopper to burst into song but it didn't happen. She was puzzled because Shay usually returned her call quickly and he knew that there was a good chance that she'd be calling him.

Still sat idle on her bag, she did her best to stop herself from thinking the worst. The very thought that Shay would now finish with her hurt her far more deeply than the fact that her mother did little or nothing to help her and that her life was now fitted into two bags and a handbag.

She loved Shay more than life itself – an emotion that she had never before felt. She used to be cynical about love and relationships due to the unhappy environment in which she had been brought up. She'd had a difficult childhood, her father left bitterly many years ago and the new man in her mother's life, Billy, was evil personified.

Ruby knew that what she felt for Shay was the genuine article. She loved everything about him. His voice had been the first thing that attracted her. It was deep, gravelly and he had a strong London accent. They had spent a lot of time on the phone through work before they had come face to face. She knew that Shay might look the complete opposite to the way his voice sounded, but this didn't bother her. The day she met him, she was not disappointed with what she saw. The first thing that struck her was his well-styled dark hair, complemented with narrow, modish sideburns. In contrast to his dark hair were his piercing blue, smiling eyes. He had the type of build that she found attractive in a man: about six foot tall with broad shoulders. Not only did he have the face and the stature, he knew how to dress too. All this matched a personality and a sense of humour that she couldn't help falling for. To crown it all, he made her feel loved. The fact that she was in her late twenties and he in his early forties was of no significance to her.

All she wanted was a phone call so that she would be reassured that the man she loved still loved her.

Her phone rang but it wasn't The Big Bopper. It was The Jam, the ring tone for all other incoming calls. It was Keely on the line. Ruby explained her plight to her. Keely already knew about Ruby's secret relationship and also knew her family very well, including Billy's erratic and barbaric behaviour. She told Ruby to stay put and that she would come and collect her right away. She knew exactly where Ruby was as she herself had lived in the same Middlesex town from when she was a child up until five years ago. Ruby immediately cancelled the taxi and waited for Keely to arrive.

She tried to keep the twigs from scratching her face as she peered over a hedge, though she hadn't long to wait. Keely jumped out of her car, threw Ruby's bags into the boot and told her to get in the back of the car as her friend, Natalie, was in the front. Ruby told both of them in more detail about what had happened.

Keely was shocked at the treatment meted out to her. Natalie

also expressed her disgust as she too knew Ruby's family and had even been a victim of Billy's abuse some years previously.

Natalie was dropped off home and Ruby got into the front seat beside Keely. She needed cigarettes and asked Keely to stop at a petrol station before going to the hotel where Ruby planned to stay the night. Whilst driving to the hotel, Keely became more and more agitated about the injustice of Billy's actions. She swore that she wouldn't be afraid to attack him with a shovel if she ever found out that he laid a finger on Ruby again. Keely didn't say these things merely to amuse Ruby. She meant them from her heart. However, Ruby couldn't help but grin at little Keely and her big threats.

At the hotel, Keely helped to get out Ruby's bags, gave her a reassuring hug and made her promise to keep in touch. She waited in her car to check that her friend got safely into the hotel and then drove off.

Ruby booked in under a false name, went directly to her room, dumped her bags on the floor and put the kettle on. Whilst she waited for the kettle to boil she washed a few smalls and hung them over the radiators to dry. Having made a cup of coffee she sat on the bed sipping it in a dark mood. Why on earth had Shay not contacted her? It was so unlike him. Had he tired of her? Had he fallen for another woman? Had Billy done him harm? She didn't know what to think, so she thought the worst. She glanced up at the smoke alarm fitted to the ceiling, went over to the window and opened it. She sat at it chain-smoking and tormenting herself until the morning came.

The phone rang. Her heart missed a beat. It wasn't Shay. It was Bungle. He told her that her mum had called him the previous night and told him that Billy was uncontrollable and had gone to the nightclub to get his gun. Bungle phoned Richard and Trevor. Richard was a fellow employee and friend, Trevor was a partner of Billy's in the nightclub business.

At an unearthly hour, Bungle, Richard and Trevor had raced to

Shay's industrial unit, not sure what they would find. They found Billy there and also saw that he'd smashed Shay's office to pieces, including the entrance glass door. They tried to calm him down but he was too far gone to be pacified.

Bungle added that his mood had not improved this morning, if anything it had got worse. Billy had just phoned him and ordered him to ring every hotel in the area to find out where she was.

Ruby was not taken by surprise at Billy's behaviour, but was alarmed that he had gone to get his gun from the safe at the nightclub.