

# Not for the Faint of Heart

## *Marwood's second thriller another hit*

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### *Suspended Sentences*

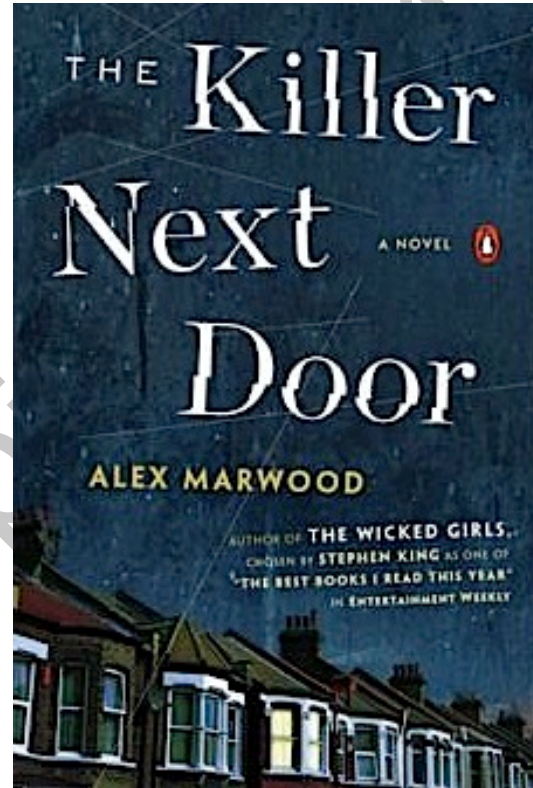
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by Jim Napier

If you think you know London, think again. There are at least three Londons: most well known, of course, is the glamorous destination of tourists seeking out such ceremonial clichés as the Changing of the Guard and the glitzy theatrical productions of the West End; but there is also the workaday London of the city's residents and commuters, vying for space on the Underground and the pavement above while going to work in an office high-rise at Canary Wharf, or stocking the shelves at a nearby Tesco's or Asda.

And then there is the London of the dispossessed: the chronically unemployed, the welfare crowd, the junkies and hookers and petty thieves, but also pensioners and widows and those with personality disorders, the possessed and the dispossessed, some suffering in silence, others inflicting harm on others, all the while struggling to maintain their precarious grasp on what loosely passes for reality.

This book is about the third London.



Thirty-four-year-old Lisa has, if not the world by the tail, at least a well-paying job at one of London's many fashionable nightclubs. Too old to work the punters, her duties include depositing the night's takings at the bank in the wee hours of the morning. Exhausted, she cat-naps in her office one evening, then awakens to find that hours have passed. She's on her way out to the bank with a sports

bag containing nearly £185,000 when she hears a ruckus in the Lounge. She looks in just in time to see a man being beaten to death. Tony Stott, the club's owner, is there, along with his henchman Malik, who's doing the dirty work. When they spot her, Lisa runs for the exit, not even thinking about the bag on her arm, knowing that if they catch her she's as good as dead.

Three years later Lisa's changed her name to Collette Dunne. She answers an advert for a flat in a Victorian rooming house, Beulah Grove, located in one of London's many residential areas that have seen better days. It's not much to look at: the bathroom's down the hall, and the last tenant disappeared without paying her rent, leaving her grubby belongings behind. Collette asks about the other tenants, and learns that they include Gerald Bright, a middle-aged music teacher, a young black woman known as Cher, and Vesta Collins, an elderly spinster who lives in the basement flat as a sitting tenant, and thus cannot be evicted. They are joined by Hossein Zanjani, an Iranian asylum-seeker, and a reclusive young man, Thomas Dunbar, who lives in the attic. In short, a microcosm of the lonely and the marginalized.

Beggars can't be choosers, and seeking only a place to retain her anonymity, Collette tells the oily landlord, Roy Preece, that she'll take the flat. Although he takes pain to conceal it, it is a decision that pleases him; for Preece has a nasty little hobby that involves closed-circuit cameras located in the house's bathrooms.

But voyeurism is the least of the concerns of number 23 Beulah Grove, for there are far more sinister forces at work there: even after three years, club owner Tony Stott is committed to running Lisa to earth. After all, she witnessed the killing at the club and made off with his money. And Beulah Grove houses someone else with a guilty secret, someone who has killed not once, nor twice, and who is quite prepared to kill again.

They say it takes all sorts to make a world, but most folks would sleep a lot sounder if they went through life without ever meeting some of the denizens of Beulah Grove. A portrait of life on the edge, the events depicted in *The Killer Next Door* might seem to be distorted for the sake of literary license; but anyone who hasn't buried their head in *Good Housekeeping* or *Chatelaine* for the last several decades will recognize that the author has made nothing up except in the service of creating a

riveting read. Definitely not for the faint of heart, *The Killer Next Door* is a compelling thriller, full of gritty violence and explicit gore; but it is also an exquisitely-rendered and evocative tale of how life and go wrong for basically

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good people, and violence overtake their lives. Following on the heels of *The Wicked Girls*, it is a fine second novel from an author who seems destined to join the ranks of the most accomplished of contemporary thriller writers.

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