

A DAMAGED MARRIAGE
A TOXIC AFFAIR
A DARK OBSESSION

BLOOD ORANGE

A wine glass, cracked and broken at the rim, is filled with a dark red liquid. The glass is positioned centrally, with the liquid level visible. The background is a gradient of orange and red, with the title text overlaid on it.

*'Fans of Apple
Tree Yard and The
Girl on the Train
will love this'*
GUARDIAN

*'Utterly
compelling...
I couldn't put
it down'*
LISA JEWELL

HARRIET TYCE

Harriet Tyce grew up in Edinburgh and studied English at Oxford University before doing a law conversion course at City University. She practised as a criminal barrister in London for nearly a decade, then completed an MA in Creative Writing – Crime Fiction at the University of East Anglia. She lives in north London. *Blood Orange* is her debut novel.

Praise for *Blood Orange*:

‘Harriet Tyce brings a new layer of visceral, addictive dark to domestic noir. Obsession, revenge, lust and murder play out on the pages as a female barrister tries to hold her life together while her personality tries to tear it apart. At once shocking and riveting, I simply couldn’t stop reading. Bravo’ Sarah Pinborough, author of *Behind Her Eyes*

‘*Blood Orange* is destined to be the debut that everyone is talking about in 2019. Dark, original and utterly compelling, I could not put it down. And what a twist at the end!’ Lisa Jewell, author of *Then She Was Gone*

‘A classy thriller with complex and compelling characters’ Clare Mackintosh, author of *I See You*

‘Complex and menacing, this is a very impressive debut’ Alison Flood, *Observer*

‘*Blood Orange* is dark and immensely readable. An impressive debut’ Marcel Berlins, *The Times*

‘Fans of *Apple Tree Yard* and *The Girl on the Train* will love the atmosphere of clenched ambiguity Tyce sustains so well’ John O’Connell, *Guardian*

‘A sizzingly addictive read . . . its mysteries unfurl brilliantly to that often most elusive quality: a genuinely satisfying end. Five stars’ Lisa Howells, *Heat*

‘A dark and disturbing domestic noir’ Louise Jensen, author of *The Sister*

‘*Blood Orange* kept me frantically turning the pages, desperate to know what would happen next. A superb, compulsive read’ Tess Gerritsen, author of *I Know a Secret*

‘This brilliant debut from Harriet Tyce has it all – a tricky murder case, a complex and conflicted female barrister battling her own demons, and layer upon layer of intrigue’ Rachel Abbott, author of *Only the Innocent*

‘We get it, every thriller going is “the new *The Girl on the Train*” but this one really does have you turning the pages in the same obsessive way . . . It’s not *all* about the twisty ending like some other thrillers. Instead it deals with issues faced by career women and the notion of “good” and “bad” in a way that will keep you thinking long after you’ve found out what happens’ *Cosmopolitan*

‘Gripping’ *Daily Mail*

‘A smash hit’ *Best*

‘This thriller breathes new life into the domestic noir genre and grips until the final page’ *Daily Express*

‘A heart-pounding thriller . . . and deliciously twisty plot’ *Good Housekeeping*

‘This is essential reading for fans of *Girl on the Train* and *Apple Tree Yard*, and it is just as unpredictable and page-turningly good. It is as disturbing as it is gripping and not for the faint-hearted’ *Herald*

‘If *The Girl on the Train* gave you a taste for alcoholic female narrators grasping at their last chance to turn their lives around, you’ll like *Blood Orange*, which I think is even better’ *Sunday Express*

‘Glittering and fierce and resolutely unsentimental, a glorious bonfire of a marriage thriller’ *Irish Times*

‘Gritty and compelling, *Blood Orange* drags you right into the hearts of the flawed characters and their stories from the get go. A book that will keep you up all night’ Kate Hamer, author of *The Girl in the Red Coat*

‘Brilliantly done. Writing, plotting, characters – wonderful and deeply satisfying, devour-in-one-sitting stuff’ Lucy Mangan, author of *Bookworm: A Memoir of Childhood Reading*

‘We were gripped’ *Bella*

‘An addictive and unforgettable domestic noir, at once shocking, sharp and seriously twisted’ *Culturefly*

‘One of the best psychological thrillers I have read for a long time . . . This book truly has it all! 10 stars out of 10’ *Peterborough Telegraph*

‘This gripping novel, an absolute page-turner with many twists and turns, had me hooked from start to finish . . . If I didn’t have to rise early for work I would have finished *Blood Orange* in a single sitting’ *RTÉ Guide*

‘A deftly plotted domestic noir thriller of the highest order with a shocking twist in the tail. Debut novelist Tyce is going places’ *Irish Independent*

‘It is a terrific domestic noir that will be one of THE book club reads this year’ *Sun*

‘The way in which these two themes are entwined – Alison’s humiliatingly sozzled, sex-mad life, and the case she is defending (rather well) – are deftly handled. There is a marvellous denouement’ *The Tablet*

‘Dark and compelling’ Mel McGrath, author of *The Long Exile*

‘An addictive and unforgettable domestic noir, at once shocking, sharp and seriously twisted. It’s the perfect book to binge read over the weekend’ *Culturefly*

‘Combines sharp spare prose with a gloriously twisty plot – I read this in one heart-pounding, furiously angry sitting’ Emma Flint, author of *Little Deaths*

‘The debut novel of the year. Harriet Tyce is now on my “must read” list’ Jeff Abbott, author of *The Sam Capra Series*

‘I raced through *Blood Orange* by Harriet Tyce, which is oh-so-timely and had me gasping aloud at the final twist’ Hannah Beckerman, author of *If Only I Could Tell You*

‘Dark, sophisticated and sexy, *Blood Orange* is a very powerful debut in the vein of *Apple Tree Yard*, that had me gripped to its very last page. I couldn’t recommend it more highly’ Elizabeth Fremantle, author of *Queen’s Gambit*

‘Tyce gives the domestic noir a timely update with this dark debut’ *iNews*

‘A dark and disturbing thriller – we were gripped’ *Closer*

BLOOD ORANGE

HARRIET TYCE



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For my family

Prologue

First, you light a cigarette, the smoke curling in on itself and up towards the ceiling. It catches at the back of your throat with the first draw, before seeping into your lungs and easing into your bloodstream with a tingle. You put the fag down in the ashtray, before turning to set your scene. Kneeling over the back of the sofa, you tie the rope on to the shelves, the smoke sliding up your face, and stinging your eyes.

Next, you wrap a silk scarf round the rope to soften it and pull at it once, twice, to make sure it's secure. You've done this before. You have practised, tested. Measured it to a perfect calibration. So far, and no further. No drop. Only a little death wanted here.

The screen is set up, the film you selected ready to play.

And the final cut, the orange you have laid out on a plate. You pick up the knife, a sharp one, with a wooden handle, a steel-dappled blade, and you push it into the fruit. A half, a quarter. An eighth. The peel orange, the pith white, the flesh bleeding out to red at the edges, a sunset spectrum.

These are all the textures you need. The sting of the smoke in the air, the figures dancing on the screen before your eyes. The padding of the silk soft against the coarse rope. The

Harriet Tyce

thumping of the blood in your ears as you come closer and closer, the sweet burst of citrus on your tongue to pull you back from there to here, before the point of no return.

It works every time. You know you're safe, alone.

Behind the locked door, just you and the glorious summit you're about to reach.

Only a few beats away.

1

The October sky lies grey above me and my wheelie bag's heavy but I wait for the bus and count my blessings. The trial is finished, kicked out at half-time after a legal argument on the basis of insufficient evidence. It's always pleasing to get one up on the prosecution and my client's over the moon. And the biggest plus of all, it's Friday. Weekend. Home time. I've been planning for this – I'm doing things differently tonight. One drink, two at the most, then I'm off. The bus pulls up and I make my way back over the Thames.

Once I arrive at chambers, I go straight to the clerks' room and wait for them to notice me amidst the ringing phones and whirl of the photocopier. At last Mark looks up.

'Evening, miss. The solicitor called – they're well pleased you got that robbery kicked out.'

'Thanks, Mark,' I say. 'The ID evidence was crap. I'm glad it's done, though.'

'Good result. Nothing for Monday, but this has come in for you.' He gestures down to a slim pile of papers sitting on his desk, tied together with pink tape. It doesn't look very impressive.

'That's great. Thank you. What is it?'

‘A murder. And you’re leading it,’ he says, handing the papers over with a wink. ‘Nice one, miss.’

He walks out of the room before I can reply. I stand holding the bundle, clerks and pupils moving past me in the usual Friday rush. A murder. Leading my first murder. What I’ve been building up to all my professional life.

‘Alison. Alison!’

With an effort, I focus on the speakers.

‘Are you coming for a drink? We’re on the way.’ Sankar and Robert, both barristers in their thirties, with a collection of pupils trailing behind them. ‘We’re meeting Patrick at the Dock.’

Their words sink in. ‘Patrick? Which Patrick? Bryars?’

‘No, Saunders. Eddie’s just finished a case with him and they’re celebrating. That fraud, it’s finally come to an end.’

‘Right. I’ll just put these away. See you in there.’ Clutching my brief, I walk out of the room, keeping my head down. My neck’s flushed warm and I don’t want anyone to spot the red blotches.

Safely in my room, I shut the door and check my face. Lipstick on, flush toned down with powder. Hands too shaky for eyeliner but I brush my hair and reapply scent, no need to carry the stench of the cells with me.

I push the papers to the back of the desk, straighten the photograph frame I’ve nudged out of line. Friday-night drinks. But I’m only going for one.

Tonight it’s going to go to plan.

Our group fills half the bar’s basement, a dingy place frequented by criminal lawyers and their clerks. As I walk down the stairs Robert waves his glass at me and I sit down next to him.

‘Wine?’

‘Wine. Definitely. Only one, though. I want to be home early tonight.’

No one comments. Patrick hasn’t said hello. He’s sitting on the opposite side of the table, engrossed in conversation with one of the pupils – that Alexia – holding a glass of red wine. Distinguished, handsome. I force myself to look away.

‘Looking good, Alison. Had a haircut?’ Sankar’s buoyant. ‘Don’t you think she’s looking good, Robert, Patrick? Patrick?’ More emphasis. Patrick doesn’t look up. Robert turns from talking to one of the junior clerks, nods and toasts me with his pint.

‘Well done on the murder! Leading it, too. You’ll be a QC before you know it – didn’t I tell you, after you did so well in the Court of Appeal last year?’

‘Let’s not get carried away,’ I say. ‘But thank you. You seem in a good mood?’ My voice is cheerful. I don’t care if Patrick noticed me coming in or not.

‘It’s Friday and I’m off to Suffolk for a week. You should try having a holiday sometime.’

I smile and nod. Of course I should. A week on the coast, perhaps. For a moment I imagine skipping through the waves like the playful portraits seen in a certain kind of holiday cottage. Later I’d eat fish and chips on the beach, wrapped up against the October chill blowing off the North Sea before lighting a fire in the wood-burning stove in my perfectly appointed house. Then I remember the files squatting on my desk. Not now.

Robert pours more wine into my glass. I drink it. The conversation flows around me, Robert shouting to Sankar to Patrick and back to me again, peaks and troughs of bad jokes

and laughter. More wine. Another glass. More barristers join in, waving a pack of cigarettes around the table. We smoke outside, another, *no, no, let me buy some more I keep stealing yours* and the search for change and the stumble upstairs to buy some from behind the bar and *no Marlboro Lights only Camels but for now who cares yes let's have some more wine*, and another glass and another and shots of something sticky and dark and the room and the talk and the jokes whirling faster and faster around me.

'I thought you said you were leaving early.' Focus now. Patrick, right in front of me. He resembles a silvered Clive Owen from some angles. I look for them, tipping my head one way, another.

'Christ, you're pissed.'

I reach out for his hand but he moves sharply away, looking around him. I sit back in my chair, pushing my hair off my face. Everyone else has left now. How did I not notice?

'Where is everybody?'

'Club. That place Swish. Fancy it?'

'I thought you were talking to Alexia.'

'So you did notice me when you came in. I wondered . . .'

'You were the one who was ignoring me. You didn't even look up to say hello.' I try and fail to hide my indignation.

'Hey, no need to get stressed. I was giving Alexia some career advice.'

'I bet you bloody were.' Too late now, all the jealousy is spilling out. Why does he always do this to me?

We walk together to the club. I try to take his arm a couple of times but he pulls away and before we reach the entrance, he pushes me into a dark corner between two office blocks,

grasping my jaw for emphasis. 'Keep your hands off me when we go inside.'

'I never put my hands on you.'

'Bollocks, Alison. The last time we ended up in here you were trying to grope me. You made it so obvious. I'm just trying to protect you.'

'Protect yourself, more like. You don't want to be seen with me. I'm too old . . .' My voice trails off.

'If you're going to talk like that you should just go home. It's your reputation I'm trying to protect. All your colleagues are in here.'

'You want to get off with Alexia, you're just getting me out of the way.' Tears leak out of my eyes, any dignity long gone.

'Stop making a scene.' His mouth is close to my ear, the words quiet. 'If you make a scene I will never speak to you again. Now get off me.'

He pushes me away and walks round the corner. I stumble on my heels, putting my hand against the wall to hold myself up. Instead of the rough texture of cement and brick, there's a sticky substance smeared right where I plant my palm. Steady on my feet now, I smell my hand and retch. Shit. Some joker has smeared shit all over the alleyway wall. The smell does more to sober me up than anything Patrick has hissed at me.

Should I take it as a sign to go? Hell no. There's no way I'm going to leave Patrick to his own devices in that nightclub, not with all those hungry young women desperate to make a good impression on one of chambers' most important instructing solicitors. I scrape the worst of the mess on to a clean bit of wall and walk with assurance to Swish, smiling

at the doorman. If I wash my hands for long enough I'll get the stink off. No one will ever know.

Tequila? Yes, tequila. Another shot. Yes, a third. The music thumps. Dancing now with Robert and Sankar, now with the clerks, now showing the pupils how it's done, smiling, joining hands with them and spinning and back to dancing on my own, my arms waving above my head, twenty again and no cares. Another shot, a gin and tonic, head spinning backwards falling through the beat as my hair falls round my face.

Patrick's in here somewhere but I don't care, not looking out for him, certainly have no idea that he's dancing very closely with Alexia with the smile on his face that should just be for me. I can play that game. I walk over to the bar, a wiggle in my stride. Looking good. Dark hair artfully pushed back from my face, fit for nearly forty – the match of any twenty-something in that room. Even Alexia. Especially Alexia. Patrick'll see oh he'll be sorry he'll be so sorry he lost this chance messed this one up . . .

A new song comes on, with a heavier beat, and two men push past me to get on to the dance floor. I sway on my feet then fall, unable to stop the momentum, my phone dropping hard out of my pocket. I knock into a woman holding a glass of red wine that spills everywhere, all down her yellow dress and on to my shoes. The woman looks at me in revulsion and turns away. My knees are damp in a pool of spilt booze and I try to gather myself a little before standing.

'Get up.'

I look up, then down again. 'Leave me alone.'

'Not when you're in this state. Come on.'

Patrick. I want to cry. 'Stop laughing at me.'

‘I’m not laughing at you. I just want you to get up and get out of here. That’s enough for one night.’

‘Why do you want to help me?’

‘Someone has to. All the rest of your chambers have found a table and are knocking back prosecco. They won’t notice us leaving.’

‘You’ll come with me?’

‘If you get on with it.’ He reaches out his hand and pulls me up. ‘Go outside now. I’ll meet you there.’

‘My phone . . .’ I look around the floor.

‘What about it?’

‘I dropped it.’ I spot it under a table near the edge of the dance floor. The screen is cracked and sticky with beer. I wipe it off on my skirt and trail out of the club.

He doesn’t touch me as we walk to chambers. We don’t talk, don’t discuss it. I unlock the door, getting the alarm code right at the third attempt. He follows me into my room, ripping at my clothes without kissing me, before pushing me face down on to the desk. I stand back up and look at him.

‘We shouldn’t be doing this.’

‘You say that every time.’

‘I mean it.’

‘You say that every time too.’ He laughs, pulls me close and kisses me. I turn my head away but he puts up his hand and twists my face back to his. My mouth’s rigid against his lips for a moment but the smell of him, the taste, overtakes me.

Harder. Faster. My head thumps into the files on the desk as he thrusts into me from behind, pauses for a moment, moves himself.

‘I didn’t say . . .’ I start but he laughs, makes a hushing

sound. One hand's pulling my hair and the other's pushing me down on to the desk and my words turn to a sob, a gasp. Again and again against the desk and then the files fall and as they fall they catch the photograph frame and it falls too and the glass smashes and it's too much but I can't stop him and I don't want to stop him but I do, and on and on and no don't stop don't stop, stop it hurts, don't stop until a groan and he's done, standing and wiping and straightening.

'We have to stop doing this, Patrick.' I get off the desk and pull up my pants and tights, tugging my skirt neatly down to my knees. He's doing his trousers back up, tucking his shirt in. I try to do up my shirt.

'You ripped off a button,' I say, fingers shaking.

'I'm sure you can sew it back on.'

'I can't sew it on right now.'

'No one will notice. No one's here. Everyone's asleep. It's nearly three in the morning.'

I look around the floor, find the button. Push my feet into my shoes, stumble into the desk. The room's spinning, my head foggy again.

'I mean it. This has to stop.' I'm trying not to cry.

'As I said, you always say that.' He doesn't look at me as he pulls his jacket back on.

'I'm finishing this. I can't deal with it any more.' Now I'm crying in earnest.

He walks over, holds my face between his palms.

'Alison, you're pissed. You're tired. You know you don't want this to stop. Neither do I.'

'This time I mean it.' I back away from him, trying to look emphatic.

Blood Orange

‘We’ll see.’ He leans forward and kisses me on the forehead. ‘I’m going to go now. We’ll speak next week.’

Patrick leaves before I can argue anymore. I slump into the armchair in the corner. If only I didn’t get so drunk. I wipe the snot and tears away from my face with my jacket sleeve, until my head slumps on to my shoulder in oblivion.