

Praise for  
**HOW TO SURVIVE A HORROR MOVIE**

"Look over your shoulder – Scarlett Dunmore's creepy YA novel *How To Survive A Horror Movie* is a haunting and hilarious debut with oceans of heart and splashes of spine-tingling terror. The book is pacy and stylish with witty razor-sharp dialogue and twists. It had me at the edge of my seat from start to finish. Get ready for jump scares galore, *How to Survive a Horror Movie* is a real scream."

**Eibhlis Carcione**, author of *Welcome to Dead Town Raven McKay*

"*How to Survive a Horror Movie* by Scarlett Dunmore is a love letter to slasher films and the horror genre and a real page-turner. Laugh-out-loud funny and heart-in-mouth thrilling!"

**Gabriel Dylan**, author of *Whiteout*

"This is a dark and thrilling horror novel, with something for all horror fans, just the right amount of humour and a main character whose obsession with the genre might just keep her alive."

**Bryony Pearce**, author of *Cruel Castle*

"A horrifically good ending! Horror movie geeks will LOVE this book."

**Tracy Darnton**, author of *The Truth About Lies*

"Fast-paced and humorous and a homage to classic films like *Scream*, this is a delightfully fun and creepy read – perfect for reading in one sitting!"

**Ravena Guron**, author of *This Book Kills* and *Catch Your Death*

"An enormously fun love letter to the horror genre, with all the gore, ghosts and gay panic you could ask for, and twists that will leave you desperate for more!"

**Leon Egan**, author of *Lover Birds*

"I thought it was screamingly good fun – a tongue-in-cheek romp through horror and high-school stereotypes with a supernatural twist. Plenty of witty one liners, nods film buffs will love and a killer (literally) setting. I enjoyed it, and I know readers will too. (I also appreciated how female-centred it was, and especially liked the helpful/not helpful ghosts.)"

**Gina Blaxill**, author of *Love You to Death* and *You Can Trust Me*

"*Scream* meets *Fear Street*. Perfect for slasher fans, this book is packed with horror movie references, scares and witty dialogue.

It kept me guessing all the way to the end!"

**Amy McCaw**, author of *Mina* and the *Undead* series and curator of *A Taste of Darkness*

"A fast, funny, twisty and best of all fright-filled adventure.

Feisty, flawed heroine Charley is perfect – I loved it!"

**Sharon Gosling**, author of *Fir*

"Packed full of laughs and gore in equal measure, this exhilarating slasher takes you along for an endlessly fun ride!"

**Tess James-Mackey**, author of *You Wouldn't Catch Me Dead*

"Toss some Skittles in your popcorn and settle in for the horror-comedy read of the season! Twisty and delightfully gory, *How to Survive a Horror Movie* is the perfect addition to any Halloween reading list."

**Kat Ellis**, author of *Harrow Lake*



For my nephews, Dylan and Ryan.  
I can't wait to watch horror films with you.

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**HOW TO  
SURVIVE  
A HORROR  
SEQUEL**

**Scarlett Dunmore**

**LITTLE TIGER  
LONDON**





# Rule # 1

## PREPARE FOR A NEW SETTING IN ACT ONE

Sanguine pools flooded my vision. Blood and flesh seeping across white tiles, dripping down grey marble, spreading across black flooring. In my dream, there was a crack and a shattering of bone. A scream, short and sharp, replete with fear and—

“Charley?”

I startled awake, my forehead colliding with the car passenger window. I blinked and the road in front of me came into focus.

My mum gently touched my arm. “Sorry to wake you, but it sounded like you were having a nightmare again.”

A tang of the dream lingered on my tongue as I rubbed my forehead, wondering if it would bruise. When I turned, I saw Mum perched on the edge of the driver’s seat, her gnarled hands gripping the steering wheel so tight that her knuckles were bone white.

“Are you OK?”

“Storms like this make me nervous on the road. Why is it always raining here?” She tutted, checking her rear-view mirror then her side mirrors.

“Because it’s Scotland,” I grumbled. “I think it always rains here.”

The rain hammered on the window and spread like a spiderweb to all four corners of the glass. Storms like this didn’t really bother me. Not any more. Not since Harrogate, where I’d found myself on a rural and isolated island in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean for half a school year. It would have been longer if it weren’t for the crazed serial killers who ravaged the boarding school, butchering Sixth-Year students. Popping heads in fridges, splaying bodies on rocks, hanging corpses in cupboards. And by ‘crazed serial killers’, I meant my best friend and the love of my life. A double hit.

OK, fine, by ‘love of my life’, I meant the girl I’d had a crush on for five months – which in dog time is, like, five years. But Olive was my best friend, my roommate, my partner in crime. Well, not exactly; she committed all the crime on her own. But she was my everything at Harrogate. And now I was running from her. Sometimes literally, sometimes metaphorically. And sometimes I just couldn’t tell.

If you thought she’d died back at Harrogate circa Halloween 2023, you wouldn’t be in the minority. There were remains, yes, but whose, I did not know.

Olive ‘Psycho’ Montgomery did not die. I knew it in my bones. Because movie villains rarely died in an ending sequence, especially in Halloween horrors. The antagonists tended to survive the final battle. Hello, Michael Myers? Most horror movies had a sequel. They were all the rage (no pun intended), because sequels led to franchises and franchises led to money.

After I received the message on my bedroom mirror last winter of ‘Happy Slasher Saturday’ – a nod to my and Olive’s old weekend activity of watching scary films – Mum and I moved around a lot. We couldn’t stay long in one place, partly because of my paranoia and mainly because being the only survivor of a real-life high-school slasher film meant always looking over my shoulder, sleeping with the lights on and installing triple locks on house doors even when the house did not belong to us and was only an Airbnb rental. Oops. I really got into trouble for that one.

Today would be the furthest from Harrogate that we had ever got. We would soon be approaching the tip of the British mainland; there was no more north after this. Just water. A vast, endless ocean. And Iceland, maybe. Or was it Norway? My geography was questionable at the best of times.

We had circled a large town on the map, one with a population of around 15,000 people. A place big enough to hide in plain sight but small enough to know your

neighbours, to recognise faces and establish motives. We'd been driving for days now, occasionally pulling over at services and petrol stations for snacks (mostly Skittles), supplies (a little hand sanitiser) and bathroom breaks (yuck). Last night we stayed at a roadside hotel called the Traveller's Rest. A perfect location to stage a horror film like *Psycho* or *Vacancy* – maybe even *The Shining*. Without the snow. And Jack Nicholson. I stayed awake all night waiting for her, but Olive did not come.

We'd seen all four seasons since we started this drive. We even had a little bit of snow down in Wales last week just before we left. I liked it there. Grassy valleys and granite skies. It wasn't the city where we were from, but it wasn't an isolated rock in the middle of the North Atlantic. But then I thought I saw her – the psychopath I used to call my 'slasher sister'. And so I made Mum move on. Again. Now she wanted some kind of normality back in our lives, which was understandable. But normality meant an end to our cross-country road trips, which worried me. I was not ready for stability, for settling down and unpacking the slippers. It was already October. With Olive's favourite season of Halloween on the horizon, what I was ready for was a taser and grenade launcher.

"Shoot," Mum grumbled beside me.

"What is it?"

"We need to stop for petrol again."

I shrugged. "That's probably good. Gives you a

break from this rain. Besides, I'm out of Skittles. It's officially a state of emergency."

"Well, we can't have that." She grinned. The car slowed, the tyres catching on the surface water on the road. Mum began to turn into a petrol station as the rain gathered on the windscreen.

The road in front of us became pixelated, obscured by the rain and the mist. A screech of tyres sliced through the moisture as my mother sucked in a breath loudly. I gripped the edge of my seat, fingernails digging into the frayed leather, as headlights appeared – heading straight for us. Mum slammed on the brakes. I pitched forward but the seat belt yanked me back. Hair splayed across my face, I slowly peeled open my eyes and swept the strands from my cheeks. A dark-coloured car idled in front of us, the tyres zigzagged at an awkward angle on the wet tarmac. Had my mum not hit the brakes so hard, we would have crashed into it head-on. The car flashed its lights twice, then slowly pulled away, disappearing into the mist. The road became quiet again, but the frantic beating of my heart pounded my eardrums like the rain outside.

My mum's hand slowly dropped from my shoulder, leaving a sore imprint. "I'm so sorry!" she gasped.

The adrenaline seeped out of my rigid body. "That's OK. That guy came out of nowhere."

"You didn't see him either? Good, that makes me feel like a better parent." She turned cautiously into the petrol

station, then shut off the engine. She rubbed her chest, hands still trembling. “Holy mackerel, I just saw my life flash before my eyes, and it wasn’t pretty.”

I rested a hand on her shoulder, gently squeezing. “Thanks.”

She snorted. “Thanks for what? Almost killing you?”

“For all of this. I know how chaotic the past year has been, constantly moving around. And you loved your job back in the city.”

“And I’ll love this next job too. Assuming I get one. I’ll find something. Although I don’t think Driving Instructor is in my future.”

My bottom lip throbbed slightly as I bit down. What if my mum couldn’t find a nursing job where we were heading? What then? She was already sacrificing so much. My past was like a tapestry of trauma, and every time we packed up the car to move again it just added one more detail to the design.

Mum squeezed my hand harder. “Charley, stop worrying about me, you’re going to give yourself stress lines on your forehead. Which is not cute. Let’s just focus on finding accommodation and a school for you to finish up your final year.”

I nodded and felt a genuine smile peck at my cheeks.

She unclipped her seat belt. “Now, Skittles, was it? State of emergency, I believe you said?”

“You know, after that near-death experience, I might get

a Snickers. I'm suddenly feeling brave."

"Look at you, what a daredevil!" She got out of the car as a fragment of a memory bled into the corners of my mind. Me and Olive standing at the edge of the cliff where rock met sand and shore met sea. I could see her now, open palm to the gunmetal-grey sky, crumbs of bread fluttering in the salty breeze, gulls slicing and frantic. We'd often walk back from feeding the seabirds, trainers crunching on the coastal path, discussing what to buy in Shop for Slasher Saturday. Always Skittles for me, always a Snickers for her. We'd share a tub of microwaved popcorn, our fingers sometimes brushing against one another as we dug into the kernels.

Ephemeral memories of a once peaceful time melted like hot clay, reforming into a new shape. An image of my best friend standing over me on that same cliff, rage and revenge glinting in her eyes. A bloodied blade in her hand after she'd stabbed me in the back. Literally.

I coaxed my temples, pushing away fragments of pain and regret, and leant back against the cheap car leather. My lungs were desperate for fresh air, for the crisp autumn chill to cool my skin that tingled and burned from the nightmare. I climbed out of the car and shoved my hands into my coat pockets. The wind pressed the rain towards me so I hurried for the station door. A bell tinkled when I pushed it open. The shop was small and the stickiness of the floor gripped the soles of my trainers, every footstep

a squelch. I located Mum in the back corner, hovering at the drinks fridge, likely torn between a Diet Coke and a full-fat Coke.

“You’re not from around here.”

I turned abruptly to the voice. A tall man with a thick black beard and dark eyes stood behind the counter, his large hands pressing into the wooden desk.

“We’re just passing through,” I murmured, pointing to my mum who was still staring into the fridge like she was facing the biggest decision of her life.

“Where are you heading?” he grunted, squinting through the rain-smearred window at the old beat-up blue Ford that we’d had to buy second-hand at short notice after the red Fiat conked out somewhere near Bristol.

“I’m not sure.”

He raised his eyebrows. “You don’t know where you’re heading?”

“I can’t remember the name of the town,” I lied, my insides churning. I turned and quickly joined my mum at the back fridge. My tolerance for small talk with creepy strangers had just reached its limit.

“Just pick one,” I moaned over her shoulder.

She tutted and grabbed the Diet, but glanced back at the full-fat as she walked away. When we returned to the checkout, it was empty, the station door swinging open with the wind.

“Where did he go?” my mum asked.

I shrugged my shoulders as the door burst open, hitting the rack of magazines advertising ‘Budget Autumn Holidays’ and ‘Halloween Recipes for Dinner Parties’. The attendant hurried back to the other side of the counter muttering something about checking the pumps. “That’s it?” he asked us.

“And we filled up at number five,” my mum added, pointing to the car.

“I know. Folks aren’t supposed to fill up themselves here. I do it for them.”

She winced. “Oh, really? Sorry. I didn’t know that.”

“We’re from the city,” I clarified. “They have self-service stations. Card machines too.” My response made him frown and he began angrily punching numbers into the till. Mum and I exchanged glances and tried not to smirk.

“Thirty-one eighty.”

“That’s cheap,” she exclaimed. “In the city we pay double that for petrol—”

“Thirty-one eighty,” he repeated sharply. It seemed I wasn’t the only one who’d exceeded their small-talk limit.

I wiggled my Snickers off the counter and headed back out into the storm. It fought me for the door, the wind pushing it closed as I pushed it open. Outside, the rain seeped in at my collar and ran down my spine like an ice-cold finger. Why couldn’t we have gone into hiding in Spain? The Bahamas, maybe? I heard South America was lovely at this time of year. No, I’d simply replaced rainy

Ireland with rainy Wales, and now rainy Scotland.

As I reached down for the car handle, a shadow shifted at the corner of my eye. When I spun round, I saw a figure standing in the rain, his feet at the edge of the yellow line where pavement met road, and life met death. He was young, dressed in black leathers, with a large backpack and still clutching a motorcycle helmet. The rain fell through him, yet he shivered, his shoulders trembling.

He was dead. A ghost. A new one, it seemed.

I'd seen a lot of ghosts now, and although their appearance still startled me occasionally, their presence didn't bother me any more. After all these months, I had grown used to seeing them. They popped up at inconvenient times, sometimes a little mangled, a little fleshy. Last week, a farmer who had been taken out by his own lawnmower waved to me from a valley down south, his face open like a Demogorgon from *Stranger Things*. He looked so bad he almost brought my tuna baguette up.

I had learnt that elderly ghosts were far chattier than the young ones, many of whom seemed too confused and discombobulated to realise (a) they were dead and (b) I could see them. The elderly, though, seemed to seek companionship of some sort, especially the terminally ill who had died before saying goodbye to their loved ones or those searching for someone before they crumbled into obscurity. An old man once asked me the Wimbledon scores. He seemed quite disappointed when I told him

I didn't watch tennis, or sports of any kind. Those spirits wanted a conversation partner, perhaps even a friend for a short time. I was neither. I was not Charley: Ghost Whisperer. I was Charley: Horror Movie Survivor, as in 'no time to talk'.

My mum burst out of the station doors, full-fat Coke in hand, having exchanged it already, and dived into the car. I looked away from the motorcyclist before he noticed me – I hated when they did that – and slid into the car beside her. She shook the water off her hood and it landed on my legs, the only previously dry parts of my body. Postcard images of white sandy Costa Rican beaches and marbled Brazilian boulevards fuelled my annoyance more.

She muttered an apology and set about fiddling with the heat and the wipers, as the station attendant watched us from the window, his palms pressed against the glass like a zombie from *The Walking Dead*.

"Friendly, wasn't he?" she scoffed as she pulled away, getting back on the road.

"Yeah, it's a good thing we're not staying around here," I snorted.

"I second that—"

A loud whirring sound suddenly filled the inside of the car.

"What is that?" I shouted over the noise.

"I have no idea. About three different warning lights just came on."

The engine chugged, spluttering and jerking us in our seats. Mum quickly flicked on her hazard lights and pulled the car to the side of the road, beneath a large town sign blanketed with thick olive-green moss and something that grew wildly from the ground, coiling around the poles and spreading across the words on the plaque.

We held our breath as she tried to restart the car. It coughed once, twice, then silenced. She groaned loudly and collapsed back in the seat. Dense, dark forest surrounded us on both sides.

“What now?”

She unbuckled her belt. “I’ll walk back and ask the attendant to call a garage for a tow. I guess we will be seeing him again after all.”

“I’m coming.”

“No, you stay. It’s raining, you’ll get soaked.”

“Mum, survival rule number one: don’t split up!”

I slid out of the car, slamming the door and walking around the vehicle to the sign. Picking up a gnarled twig from the ground, I poked at the moss, loosening it. A sharp coldness stung the skin under my clothes. “Mum!” I called to her, the fear in my voice building. “No, no and no.”

She joined me at the sign. “‘Glendale’ sounds very characterful. Certainly explains why the last couple of hours have been up and down valleys. We passed a Glenleven not that long ago and a Glenarran before that.”

“Sure, ‘Glendale’ doesn’t sound so bad, but look at what it’s known as!” I repeatedly stabbed at the nickname with the twig until it split in my hand. “The Devil’s Punchbowl?!” I tossed the shattered stick down and turned, my arms open like Jennifer Love Hewitt in *I Know What You Did Last Summer*. “While escaping a crazed lunatic, we have broken down in a place nicknamed the Devil’s Punchbowl!”

Mum pulled her mouth into a pout. “What’s wrong with that?”

I scoffed. “Haven’t you ever seen a horror movie sequel?!”