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Introduction

When I worked for Women's Aid in the mid-Eighties, I was told that some of the most vicious wife-beaters were doctors. The literature on abused women included a lengthy confessional from a woman who had frequently been beaten by her husband, a respected British village-based GP. She said that he was revered by his staff and patients and demanded that his home life be similarly deferential, with nothing ever out of place. If a few of the children's toys were lying around or the Sunday roast wasn't quite ready, he would become enraged. Though he would punch and kick her with seeming abandon, he took care to aim his blows at her body rather than her face.

The woman admitted that she'd remained in the marriage because of the lifestyle that his salary afforded them and her fear of being alone, but had

finally left after twenty years of fear and anguish. Later, I read similar stories from other British GPs' wives, and, when I began to write true crime books, found that murderous American doctors and surgeons often had a similar history of perpetrating domestic violence. Many of them had been denied a fun-filled childhood, instead growing up in families where academic achievement was everything, whilst others had been mocked and beaten throughout their formative years.

Expanding on this theme, the first part of this book, *Doctor in the House*, profiles medics who have killed a family member or members. Most murdered their long-suffering spouses, but one female doctor attempted to murder all three of her children in an arson attack.

The second part looks at killers on the ward and is self-explanatory. Most of these murderers were desperate for attention, creating endless dramas both at home and in the hospitals where they worked. They were belatedly diagnosed with personality disorders, ranging from borderline to full-blown psychopathy. The majority were nurses, who commit most medical murders, a total of 45%. The other 55% is made up of doctors, surgeons and an array of workers in paramedical roles.

Other sections look at medics in the media, particularly intriguing cases which captured

the public imagination, and paramedics who murdered their partners in order to enjoy the single life. Those of a weak disposition may want to avoid the Paper Masks section, though dental-phobics can safely read the Deadly Dentists segment as none of the surgeons killed within their surgeries.

The penultimate part, *Unbridled Lust*, examines those who killed their patients – or strangers – after raping or sexually assaulting them, and includes the profile of a medical technician turned serial killer who is currently on Death Row, whilst the final section examines typologies of medical killers.

3 Dr Geza de Kaplany

Although this murder took place back in 1962, this doctor's crime still bears retelling as one of the most shocking in recent history.

Early terror

Geza was born on 27th June 1926 in Mako, Hungary. He and his two brothers were regularly beaten by their aristocratic father and, during one particularly severe thrashing, the little boy lost an eye. The father, purportedly a wealthy baron, died when Geza was twelve years old.

Geza went to the University of Szeged to study Medicine and graduated in 1951 with honours. An arrogant young man, he went on to specialise in heart complaints, but his politics differed from that of the ruling elite and he fled to America in

1956, initially settling in Boston. He planned to practise cardiology there and was enraged to find that his qualifications weren't recognised. Instead, he had to retrain as an anaesthesiologist.

The good-looking and wealthy doctor took a post at a Californian hospital and wasted no time in seducing American women, but was dismayed when one of his conquests, a Swedish bank clerk called Ruth Krueger, became pregnant. He persuaded her to go home to have the baby, saying that he had taken out an insurance policy to support her and their child. However, when she was safely abroad, he changed the policy to name his mother as his beneficiary. He also sought spiritual back-up for his actions and was given this by a priest who told him that he shouldn't marry Ruth as she was a Protestant and he was a Catholic.

With Ruth safely out of the way, Dr de Kaplany seduced five other women, including several of the nurses at San Jose Hospital where he worked. One girl agreed to go skiing with him but was shocked to find that he'd booked them a double room at the Yosemite ski resort. When she refused to sleep with him he abandoned her, knowing that she had no transport of her own. He appeared to be completely self-centred, lacked empathy and expected women to obey his every whim.

In the summer of 1962, Geza met a former beauty queen and fellow Hungarian, Hajna Piller.

Her social-climber mother was delighted when the couple started dating and enjoyed a whirlwind romance. Hajna already had a boyfriend, a Hungarian engineer with whom she was in love, but her widowed mother insisted that she marry the aristocrat. Hajna acquiesced to keep the peace, but kept seeing her boyfriend on the side. She had met Geza in June 1962 and married him that August. She was a young and liberal 25-year-old whilst he was old-fashioned and 11 years her senior. Though Geza intended to keep sleeping with other people, he didn't expect his wife to do the same...

Revenge

Just three weeks into the marriage, a woman who was in love with the doctor told him that Hajna was still seeing her engineer boyfriend. Geza was apoplectic. The following day he went to see an attorney and said that he wanted a divorce on the grounds of his wife's adultery and that he had no intention of paying alimony, but the attorney replied that he needed proof of his wife's behaviour, not hearsay. He added that the couple could eventually divorce quietly, that no one need know the details of why they broke up.

Geza would later tell police that he went home and played the conversation over and over in his

mind. He didn't want his adulterous wife to get off scot-free – he wanted her to suffer. Making his way to the hospital lab, he prepared a potion that would wreak the ultimate revenge.

An agonising death

Back at his flat, Geza pretended that he wanted to make love to Hajna, but, when she was naked, he tied her to the bed, spreadeagled on her back, before putting their stereo on full blast and donning a rubber apron to protect himself. Taking a scalpel, he made numerous cuts to her face, breasts and genitals until they were hideously disfigured. He then dabbed the acids that he had brought home from the hospital into the wounds. He warned the writhing and terrified woman not to make a sound on pain of death.

Soon, Hajna's horrific shrieks could be heard above the ear-splitting music and alarmed neighbours phoned the police, who arrived to find that large sections of her flesh had been dissolved away by the mixture of nitric, hydrochloric and sulphuric acids. One of the paramedics who tried to lift her had to be treated for acid burns. Hajna, her face unrecognisable and parts of her chest and genitalia eaten away, spent an agonising month in hospital before she died.

The doctor went on trial the following year. His lawyers wanted him to plead insanity but Geza said that he'd known exactly what he was doing, that he'd deliberately defaced his wife so that no other man would ever want her. He then insisted that photos of her injuries could not be shown in court. When he was overruled on this, he raced across the courtroom and grabbed at the offending photos, shrieking 'If I did this, I must be mad.' He subsequently claimed that he wasn't responsible due to having a split personality and the defence suggested that he'd been possessed by a demon with the somewhat exotic moniker Pierre La Roche. The prosecution was more rational and said that Geza was a jealous husband who wanted revenge.

A psychiatrist claimed that Geza de Kaplany had become a paranoid schizophrenic during his abusive childhood and, taking this into consideration, the jury opted for life imprisonment rather than the gas chamber. Immediately after the trial he was allowed to appear at a press conference, at which he said, 'I realise the awful weight of that tragedy, but I do not feel any responsibility. I was crushed by forces over which I had no control.' The remorseless doctor, a man who had always treated women with the utmost disdain, began serving his sentence in an American jail.

Then in 1975, six months before he was

officially due for parole consideration, the Taiwanese government said that they urgently needed cardiac skills such as Geza possessed, and he was flown out there as a medical missionary. Shortly afterwards, he made a public statement saying that the Californian parole board no longer had jurisdiction over him, after which he disappeared. By 1980 he was working at a hospital in Munich but, when his sadistic crime became known, he was fired.

In 2002, a Californian newspaper tracked him down to Germany, where he was living quietly with his second wife.

The septuagenarian is now a naturalised German citizen and therefore he cannot be extradited for his 1975 parole violation, much to the disgust of Hajna Piller's surviving family and friends.

4 Dr Debora Green

Did this doctor kill her children because she wanted to return to the single life or because she wanted to hurt her ex-husband? Though the evidence against her was overwhelming, she refused to admit her guilt.

A studious life

Debora was born on the 28th February 1951 to Joan and Robert Jones in Illinois. She was their second daughter. Joan kept house and Robert initially drove a van for a bakery, though he later worked his way up to management level.

Joan had been an exemplary student and was determined that her daughters would fare equally well, so she stressed the importance of scholastic accomplishment. Fortunately, the girls

had high IQs. Debora excelled in everything that she attempted, from playing an instrument to learning a second language. She was also an athletic cheerleader, slender and with seemingly boundless energy.

Debora graduated valedictorian from school and did equally well at the local university, where she studied Chemistry. She wanted to be a chemical engineer but, when she heard that there were few job vacancies, switched to medical school. She was accepted at the University of Kansas but showed less talent for medicine than she had for engineering. She also had difficulty in maintaining a relationship and had a short-lived marriage to an engineer during these student years. He would later say that she put little effort into the marriage and that she could be very cold. Her first medical jobs also failed to satisfy her as she found working in A&E boring, and, when she switched to oncology, she became too upset when her patients died.

The seemingly confident schoolgirl was now metamorphosing into an increasingly anxious young woman. Whilst she'd excelled academically, she struggled to cope with the real world and her patients found her uncommunicative and aloof. She also tended to be passive-aggressive rather than saying what was really on her mind.

Second marriage

By 1977, Debora was single again, solvent and working in a Missouri hospital as a resident doctor. She dated lots of men but became increasingly fond of Mike Farrar, a medical student in his final year. He was twenty, handsome and stable whilst Debora was twenty-four but deeply insecure. He noticed that she flew into rages but put this down to the long hours she was working. Despite his doubts, they married on 26th May 1979.

The next two years were difficult as Debora suffered from frequent migraines and also needed to take sedatives in order to sleep. Later, they moved to Cincinnati as Mike got a job there. In January 1982 they had their first child, Tim. Within six weeks, Deborah hired a nanny and started a fellowship, studying haematology at the local university. Two years later they had a daughter, Lissa, and, again, she swiftly returned to work.

Unfortunately she failed her exams, which meant that she couldn't become board-certified. But Mike was doing increasingly well by now so they moved back to Missouri, where he'd been offered a medical partnership. Debora also joined a medical group but she was so distant with her patients that the group didn't make her a partner. Enraged, she went into practice on her own. She

also began to abuse narcotics, which she'd initially taken for headaches and for muscular pain.

In December 1988, the couple had an unplanned third child, a girl whom they called Kelly. This time Debora didn't manage to lose the weight that she'd gained, another blow to her self-esteem. She returned to work but remained unpopular with both staff and patients. The following year she gave up medicine and took refuge in overusing prescription drugs.

A possible arson attack

On the surface, Debora now became a picture-perfect mother, taking her brood to sports practice and ballet lessons, but the other parents noticed that she often shouted at the children and complained that they were driving her mad. And she didn't do any of the boring tasks that most housewives have to do, like tidying and cleaning. Instead, she left the house in chaos whilst she sat reading books. She rarely cooked so she and the children lived off takeaway food, and the house was often littered with pizza cartons and boxes containing remnants of previous fried chicken meals. By now, Debora had gained at least three stone and always dressed in baggy, dark-coloured clothes. Her mood swings continued

until eventually Mike could take no more.

In January 1994, he moved out, whereupon his wife became hysterical and abusive, but later asked if they could reconcile and move to a bigger house. Mike initially agreed, then realised that this would be a mistake. He backed off, after which the house that the family was living in mysteriously caught fire. Debora and the children had to move into Mike's apartment or they would have been homeless. Shortly afterwards, they reconciled and moved into the big house Debora had desired.

Revenge

However, the couple's marriage remained desperately unhappy and Mike found refuge in another woman's arms. Aware of his adultery, Debora turned to drink.

One teatime she gave him a sandwich she'd made earlier, an unusual occurrence. It tasted slightly bitter and, later that night, he was violently sick. He felt increasingly unwell and had vomiting, diarrhoea and a fever, spending a week in hospital whilst the doctors feared that he might die. He eventually felt better and went home to Debora, who insisted on cooking him an evening meal. Later that night, all of his symptoms returned and he was readmitted to hospital, where the doctors

concluded that he must have picked up a tropical virus during a recent family holiday to Peru.

Again, he stabilised, returned home and enjoyed another of Debora's home-cooked meals, only to become desperately ill once more. His friends were convinced that his wife was poisoning him, but Mike found this impossible to believe.

He was, however, suspicious enough to search her bag, and was alarmed to find seed packets containing castor beans. The beans are highly toxic, the ricin they contain being one of the strongest poisons in nature. He also found three used syringes and phials of potassium chloride, which, in high doses, can affect the body's electrolyte balance and cause heart arrhythmia. When he asked Debora what she was going to do with the beans, she said that she planned to use them to commit suicide.

Committed

As the night wore on, Debora became drunk and hysterical, saying that she'd kill herself rather than let him move in with his new lover. The children were terrified and Mike arranged for her to be committed to a private hospital. They evaluated her as being bipolar and having suicidal urges

and put her on three different sedatives. They also changed her status to that of voluntarily committed. Four days later, she signed herself out and returned home.

Mike immediately moved out. By now he had researched the symptoms of ingesting ricin and strongly suspected that Debora had been poisoning him, but he felt confident leaving the children with her as she appeared to love them and they were devoted to her.

Unfortunately, the household continued to go downhill after he left, as Debora was still drinking heavily and the children were left to fend for themselves in the dirty and cluttered villa. Sometimes Mike attempted to return the youngsters after an access visit, only to find that there was no one home. Yet Debora seemed unaware of her own mental health problems and talked to neighbours about becoming a psychiatrist.

A fatal fire

On Monday, 23rd October, Mike spent the evening with his children then returned them to Debora, who was in the process of heating up a takeaway. She ignored him and he left.

Later that night she began drunkenly phoning

and paging him, sometimes playing mind games. During one call he lost his temper and told her that she had to get her act together and take better care of the kids. She screamed back at him and sounded incensed.

Shortly after midnight, she arrived at her neighbours' place with wet hair and said, surprisingly calmly, that her house was on fire. The neighbour, who was immediately convinced that Debora had set the blaze, phoned the emergency services and alerted Mike.

Odd behaviour

When the firemen arrived, they found a woman with a little girl standing outside watching the flames, the woman serene but the child increasingly hysterical. The girl begged the firemen to save her brother and sister, who were trapped inside. The fireman asked where the children's mother was and the woman, Debora, admitted that it was her. He was nonplussed that she was so detached from events.

When Mike was told of the blaze, he was also convinced that Debora had started it to get revenge or for attention. As he drove to his former house, he expected to find all of his children waiting for him on the lawn; it didn't occur to him for

a second that Debora would harm them. When he was informed that two of his children had perished in the flames, he began to cry and ask Debora what she'd done, but she merely stared expressionlessly at him.

Interview

Police interviewed Debora in the early hours of the morning and she said that she'd been woken by the fire alarm but had assumed that it had been triggered in error. She'd made four attempts to switch it off before opening her bedroom door and seeing smoke in the hall. She'd escaped by a back door then had heard her thirteen-year-old son, Tim, on the intercom, asking if he should fetch his sisters and escape by sliding down the roof on the second floor, something he'd done successfully before when he'd lost his keys. She'd told him to wait in his room for the fire brigade, a move she now admitted to the police was 'the kiss of death'.

After alerting her neighbour, Debora had returned to her own lawn and seen her ten-year-old, Lissa, standing on the garage roof. She told Lissa to jump into her arms but didn't catch her. Fortunately, Lissa survived the fall.

Officers were surprised at how easily the

former doctor referred to her two dead children in the past tense. She also spent a sizeable part of the interview denigrating her husband and swearing repeatedly. They hid their shock at her strange priorities and at the extent of her rage.

When the fire died down, investigators returned to the house and found that six-year-old Kelly and her pet Labrador had died of carbon monoxide poisoning in Kelly's bedroom. Tim had died whilst breathing in the smoke-filled air. He had also been burnt pre-mortem and, after he died, part of his body had been burnt away.

Lissa went to stay with Mike's parents whilst Debora went to a hotel and resumed drinking. Her psychiatrist found her there and had her admitted to hospital.

Meanwhile, firemen found that the blaze at her house had been deliberate, that someone had set several small fires using an accelerant. This was now a murder inquiry.

Debora continued to behave inappropriately, swearing at some of the people who attended Tim and Kelly's funeral. Her rage at Mike was much, much stronger than her love for her dead children and her remaining child.

Whodunnit

Detectives, determined to keep an open mind, began to make investigations into who might have started the fire. Mike, who was inconsolable with grief, had an alibi. Debora had claimed that she wasn't close to the flames yet the neighbours said that her hair was wet, and, the following day, she'd gone to a different hairdresser to her usual one and had singed sections cut from her fringe.

They also established that she'd gone to a garden centre many miles away to order the castor beans that they believed she'd used to poison Mike. She had arrived on two different occasions to purchase the deadly seeds.

On 22nd November 1995 they arrested her as she arrived at her daughter's ballet recital. Bail was set at three million dollars. Sent to a jail in Olathe, she was given antidepressants and tranquillisers and spent much of her time in a daze.

Mike was suffering much more than his ex-wife, as the ricin had led to bacterial poisoning and he now had to have a brain abscess drained, a potentially life-threatening operation. He also developed a heart valve infection and remained thin and weak.

The preliminary hearing

At the hearing, Debora pleaded not guilty and her defence team suggested that thirteen-year-old Tim had started the blaze as he was fascinated by fire and had set light to a couple of rubbish bins when he was eight years old and his parents were talking about divorce. They also suggested that Mike's illness had resulted from swimming in Peru and eating the local food.

The garden centre staff testified that Debora had bought the castor beans, claiming that they were for a school project. And a neighbour testified that Debora had arrived at his house to report the fire with wet hair and that she seemed distant from events.

Debora remained detached in court until they were about to show photographs of her dead children, whereupon the defence shepherded her from the court. Jurors had to look at slides of Tim's feet, which had burnt away from the rest of his body. It was an unnecessary death as he could have escaped via the roof if his mother hadn't told him to go back inside.

Confession

As the trial neared, Debora admitted to her attorneys that she'd started the fire, though she said she had been so drunk she hadn't known

what she was doing. Her psychiatrist talked to her and Debora claimed that Tim had poisoned his dad.

Debora decided to plead no contest to the arson charges, which meant that there was no trial and she no longer faced the death penalty. On 30th May 1996, she was sentenced for forty years in jail and was transferred to the Topeka Correctional Institute in Kansas to serve her sentence. Now, as before, she could spend most of her days reading books.

Later, Debora recanted her confession and appealed her sentence, only to change her mind again and drop the appeal. She will be in her mid-eighties before she is released.