**An introduction by Hannah Harker**

My name is Hannah Harker and I am a deeply disturbed young woman.

If I was in a special group – perhaps sitting on a plastic chair in a draughty hall – with other disturbed young women, that comment might generate a warm round of applause.

“How brave to admit that!” they might mutter to one another.

I am not in a group. I don’t want anyone’s applause and I don’t expect anybody, you included, to like me. I only admit what I am now because I’m simply too disturbed to conceal it anymore.

Be careful not to jump to hasty conclusions about me though. I don’t live in a spooky cottage in the woods with the curtains drawn, rocking back and forth while picking at the stitches in my blanket. I actually live in a large house in a leafy suburb, and I have an incredible job, great wealth and the sort of influence world leaders can only dream about. This enviable position I find myself in came about as a result of me being the only person left alive to describe to the world the most shattering, utterly incomprehensible news event in history.

But, sadly, I’m completely psychotic. Whatever outward shell I portray is completely undermined by the total emotional and mental meltdown of my inner self. Horrors of my own creation dance around my head and no psychiatrist in the world could make them stop. Behind my eyes there is nothing but absolute insanity, and I’m afraid the only way to halt this madness will be to self destruct.

But first I want to tell my story. I want to leave a little confession, because it’s not so long ago that I was what you would consider normal. It was only my quest to find a cure for the boredom which plagued me that left me in this ruined state. At least now I’m too insane to be bored.

I have had to enlist the help of another writer to tell my tale because, as you’ve probably gathered from this short introduction, my mind is not in any state to sit down and compose a structured, chronological account of my journey. I am a journalist of distinction and can write eloquently about all manner of topics, but an autobiographical novel would now be beyond me.

There’s no special reason why I chose James Howell to write the book, he was simply a persistent bastard who cornered me in a bar and said he wanted to write my story. He chose his timing well because I was feeling especially vulnerable and sensed that the end was near. I reluctantly decided to allow him into my life for just long enough to record an open and honest account of my rise and decline. The story, therefore, although written in the first person, has been penned by Howell. A few brief sections that I wrote myself, aside from this prologue, appear in italics.

Howell doesn’t know that I’ve written this prologue, and it would probably break his heart if he did because he was in love with me. I have therefore asked the publisher to include this introduction without his knowledge. He has written his own opinions of me in an epilogue at the end, in case you are interested in reading what he thought of me.

When this story is made public the authorities will come for me. I have no wish to spend the rest of my days incarcerated in a secure unit for the insane, barking like a mad dog in a straitjacket as electrodes are plugged into my brain, so I will take my own life as soon as this book goes to print. I’m sure that if I invite him, Howell will join me.