

Memory Scents

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ISBN-13:978-1482558043

For Christopher, with all my love

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As always, a huge thank you to my literary agents, Paul and Susan Feldstein for their unwavering faith and support.

Prologue

Norfolk 1950

I don't want another cup of tea or coffee, a sandwich, piece of cake or another person to say to me that they are sorry. Sorry for what?

The word sorry, at first, caused quite a lot of confusion in my head. Were they sorry that my daughter had died or that she'd been murdered or that they'd committed the evil deed? How can someone else be sorry for another's death unless they were somehow to blame? I was always led to believe that sorry was used when you had done something wrong. Sorry, sorry, sorry. If I heard it again, I'd be committing murder myself. I'd had my fill of that tiny self-satisfying word, especially today.

All I wanted to do was sit in my daughter's bedroom on my own, undisturbed and forgotten about for a few hours. I knew I was being rude, flouting the unwritten laws of funeral etiquette, but I didn't particularly care. All those people downstairs, paying their respects, coping with their own grief as well as

contemplating mine; talking in hushed voices as a mark of respect or as if they were frightened of startling the grief stricken.

But what could be more startling than being told your seven-year-old daughter had been found murdered. Snatched and then strangled. Five-minute wonder for a sick perverted killer. To then be told by the police that they were doing everything they could. Well, everything they could didn't include bringing my daughter back alive, exactly as she was, untouched, innocent.

The last few weeks had been filled with statements and remarks, as if I wasn't there or too fragile to have a conversation with. And sometimes it was as if I was devoid of feelings, as our home had been searched, family and close friends questioned.

And now the day had come to bury our child. I felt like I'd reached a milestone, the top of the mountain. I knew that getting to this day and enduring the funeral meant I could then grant myself this time. It had become a long-awaited piece of light relief. A tiny spark, albeit minute, of something to look forward to. I desperately wanted to award myself this time to steal away, to lie in

my daughter's bed, her childlike sanctuary, and interact with only me; wishing I was an infant again.

I needed to still my mind, face my thoughts. I'd cringed at every stark, raw vision as it entered my head. It had dawned on me that it would be better to try to face them. They were something I would have to live with for the rest of my life. It was like being given a box full of films that you had to carry around with you forever. Like another limb, a useless, damaged, painful one.

My thoughts flittered from the funeral, to her tiny body lying amongst the leaves. Grey skin, tinged with blue. Her body distorted, broken like a discarded doll. The top half of her body exposed, apart from her grey cardigan, just covering her arms. 'Remember me' etched on her torso. Her skin purple and livid where the cuts had been made, with a kitchen knife, the police had said.

I hadn't been to see where they'd found her; I was already haunted by the visions in my imagination. The scenarios kept turning in my troubled head, tormenting myself, wanting to feel every bit of it. Surrender to the nightmare, which is what I'd stolen myself away for, to completely wallow in the horror of it all. In the hope that

I would come out the other side a bit stronger and saner? My logic here was to do with knowing that bottling things up made everything so much worse and letting the floodgates open would make me feel so much better. It was a long shot and one that I knew wouldn't leave me feeling much different than what I felt now. But a fraction of relief was far better than none. So, my logic was to face all those abhorrent visions in my head, fearlessly and courageously, with the hope that I would somehow desensitize it all.

I sighed as my mind drifted to the image of her lying in her coffin, her tiny hands clasped peacefully across her chest. A far cry, I'm sure, from the violent position that she'd been found in. I'd clasped her cold, lifeless little hands and become obsessed with them thereafter. Any parents most frequent memories are of their child's hands, from birth onwards. There are so many photographic memories of them completing new activities as they learn and grow, relying on those funny little spindles to guide them and keep them safe. They are a part of them learning so many new things, touching and feeling their way forward. The best memory of those

little hands for me was of them simply holding mine. The night before her funeral I'd woken up crying and felt a tiny hand in mine and saw the outline of a small figure beside me in the dark. I wasn't dreaming; I'd felt her presence; saw it with the help of the moonlight through the window.

I sighed again, kicked off my shoes and sat heavily on the bed. I stood up again, lifting my skirt, hitching my nylons down over my legs and feet. I loved that feeling of freedom after I'd been trussed up in layers and then crippled my feet in high heels. If only everything could be so easily released. So trivial a thought, when my mind rapidly moved back to the reality of the situation and what lay ahead of me. I swung my legs on to the bed and wriggled my toes. I leaned back on the wooden head board and clasped my hands together as they rested on my lap. I pulled her dusky pink eiderdown over my legs, tucking it under my thighs, wanting to feel cocooned, comforted. A thought dawned on me and I pulled my arm behind me and under her pillow. There they were, still folded, waiting for her return home to wear for bed; her tiny soft pink checked pyjamas. Waiting patiently to be

filled and warmed up. I pulled them out and buried my face in the gentle fabric and took in the scent left by my daughter.

As I leant back on the head board, tears flooding my eyes again, I felt something jutting in my back. I let my hand search under the pillow and pulled out a book. A book that we were reading together – *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* – she'd marked the page by folding it over at the corner, something I often scolded her for. I stared at the book for quite some time, running my fingers over the silver lettering that had been embossed in the pink hardback cover. It was ironic really that we should be sharing this fictional little girl's adventure together when, so abruptly, we had arrived at a crossroads where my daughter was taken down another path, a different journey to mine. Somewhere I wasn't permitted to go. She'd woken up that day not expecting to go on that adventure much like I'm sure Alice had when she'd fallen down the rabbit hole. Only, my daughter's adventure was over and wasn't anything like the one in the book we had been reading.

I gripped the book and her pyjamas, savouring the scent left behind. It conjured up a clear, strong picture of her in my mind, and I wanted to stay there forever. I didn't want to cry dramatically or rock backwards and forwards with my head in my hands. I just wanted to step off the world for a while and sit with the knowledge that my daughter had been murdered. That she would never be coming back. Growing up or growing old. She had ceased to exist. A decision I had no power over, one that had been taken out of my hands and placed in the palms of another.

CHAPTER ONE

Norfolk 1989

Dear Alice,

I don't know why I'm writing you this letter, but I am at a loss to know what to do. It's a year to the day that you went missing from our lives, and we don't even know where you are or what has happened to you.

The world around us appears to have creaked back into action and life goes on, but not for us my darling. I feel that if I move on, I'll somehow be accepting your fate, and I can't bear to think what that might be.

We haven't touched your bedroom since you left, but to clean it and keep it tidy. I've washed your bed

linen every week as normal so that it's nice and fresh for when you come home.

You're getting quite a collection of Jackie magazines now; I've been and fetched them every week from the village shop as you would have done. I've often thought that I might bump into you there doing the same as me. But that would be silly because you would have come home to us if that was the case.

You must have changed a lot in a year; you'll be fifteen in a couple of months and it doesn't seem possible. Daddy and I often try to imagine what you would look like now and if we would even recognise you. But that's a silly thing to think because we couldn't mistake our beautiful girl.

I can't express to you darling how much we all miss you and how we've felt our hearts breaking every single day.

Loving you always

Mummy xxx

Norfolk 1998

Chrissie lugged another box from the sitting room and dumped it into the kitchen of her new home. She was fatigued and almost at the point of giving up for the day. She could feel every tendon and muscle in her body and her feet were buzzing and sore from all the physical wear and tear.

She linked her fingers behind her back and stretched her arms feeling the immense relief right through to her bones. Deciding it was time for a break she made a cup of coffee and went out into the garden to survey the property she'd bought just over a week ago. Chrissie walked across the grass to sit on an old swing that was hanging from an apple tree. She swung aimlessly round causing her coffee to splash down the side of the mug. She studied the Norfolk red brick of the cottage that seemed to have lost its lacklustre since she'd

very first viewed it. A familiar feeling of knowing the house filtered through her causing an uneasy detachment from her present life. A fluttering of fear stirred in the pit of her stomach and she wasn't sure if it was regret or just apprehension at her new circumstances. It had been a huge decision to move four hours away from the area she'd grown up in; leaving her family and friends behind. Divorce had been the trigger causing her to become aware that she needed to get out of her comfort zone and embrace the unexpected. She'd barely given it much thought apart from the fact that she'd be moving so far away from her stepchildren, family and friends. It helped that she had moved to a place where she'd spent all her childhood holidays with her parents and siblings.

Chrissie yawned, threw the last dregs of her coffee on to the grass and made her way into the house. She wanted to get some more boxes unpacked and pictures up to give the house more of a homely feel. As she walked through the small cottage door the darkness covered her whole being like misty rain. She hadn't realised how quickly it had turned dusk. It had blanketed the cottage in a thick, sad, darkness, making it quite apparent that there

had been no life in it for quite some time. Chrissie wasn't fazed by this, as she'd gotten used to being on her own. What with the divorce and all the dark lonely evenings that had brought her. And anyway, she wasn't alone; she had her three beautiful cats.

After an hour of mainly moving items from one room to another, unable to decide about where to put anything, she lit candles and turned the oven on to heat up some supper. Cats were fed, dinner underway and the television was flickering in the background and suddenly the house seemed to smile, glad of the company.

Eventually, after some supper and half an hour spent arranging her bedroom, Chrissie snuggled down with Lewis, Harry, and Rosie, her somewhat confused and unsettled felines, and slipped into a deep and peaceful sleep.

The morning appeared as quite a shock and Chrissie woke up wondering where she was and where she'd been. The night had passed in a flash with lots of dreams full of faces she didn't recognise, which were now drifting from her mind. They swirled like steam,

disappearing into the atmosphere as she pulled herself into an upright position in the bed.

She swung her still aching body out from underneath the warm quilt and threw on a comfy sweater over her pyjamas. She stretched and made her way down the stairs to make a hot drink.

The house felt different this morning, slightly drab, and there was a strong cloying smell of damp. Outside wasn't much better, but then it was to be expected being five hundred yards from the sea.

She tried not to allow the atmosphere to affect her and decided over a cup of coffee that she would spend the day making the sitting room cosy and homely. Hopefully then she could get some work done and concentrate on the new book she'd just started writing.

Chrissie opened the kitchen door to the garden and breathed in the salty, fresh cold air. Lewis wound his body round her legs as she wandered across the uneven grass, almost tripping her up. She never worried about her cats wandering off, she'd moved so many times and they were so fond of her that they just accepted their new surroundings. Chrissie bent down and picked him up with

one hand. He immediately climbed onto her shoulders and curled his silky black body around the back of her neck. Slightly stooped, she continued her exploration of the garden. She reached some thick undergrowth that she pushed her way through. Lewis chirruped and chattered to her as she eventually came across a wooded area that led to a narrow stream. She'd seen it before when she'd viewed the property, but not from this end of the garden. It was just as beautiful as she had remembered, even though it was an overcast day. Through the evenly spaced trees the sparkling stream flowed, the field acting as an embankment. The views were breath-taking and she stood for many minutes taking it all in, as Lewis purred in her ear.

Chrissie looked around her and noticed a small ivy-covered brick building through the trees. Intrigued, she made her way across the soft undergrowth towards the odd-looking building. On closer inspection it looked very much like a miniature chapel, mainly because of its pointed roof. Most of the tiles were missing and there were lots of saplings growing out of it. Above the door was a small hole cut in the brick. Inside it contained a

discoloured old bell which had taken on the shade of the concrete it was set in.

As Chrissie approached the unhinged cracked wooden door, the temperature seemed to plummet, which made her pause. She put it down to her overactive imagination; she had a habit of thinking too much, which was what made her such a good novelist. But in certain circumstances it occasionally frightened her out of her wits. Being in a wooded area in front of a derelict building was causing a whisper of a chill to creep over her skin. She stopped for a second to focus her mind to the fact that she was standing in the bottom of her garden in front of an old brick shed. The house and garden she'd viewed and fallen madly in love with all those weeks ago

Pausing dispersed her irrational feelings and she began to move again towards the rickety old door. It was colder, and there seemed to be complete silence, as if someone had pressed a switch and turned off the countryside. Even Lewis had stopped purring. She felt his body tighten around her neck and a soft growl was emanating from the pit of his throat. This only caused her senses to heighten again as she felt Jack Frost tip toeing

up her spine. However, freaked out she was, she still had a need to find out what was behind the door, knowing that would then stop all this silliness. After all, it was just an old shed and Lewis was only picking up on her irrational fear. But Lewis continued his growl and had started to sit up, digging his claws into her shoulder. Chrissie reached her hand up to stroke him, but he ducked from it, his big green eyes like marbles, intent on staring at the shed door.

As she pushed the door with her foot and her hand, it was all too much for him and he leapt from her back growling and hissing. Chrissie flinched at his claws leaving her shoulders; her skin prickled with goosebumps. She peered inside the shed, her heart was pounding and every hair on her arms was standing to attention. As her eyes got used to the light all she could see was an empty building with a few young trees sprouting out of the top. The floor was made up of soil, which would explain the cold damp feeling in the air. As she strained her eyes to the back of the building, she became aware of some piles of logs but that was all she could see. She had a sudden need to look behind her,

which only revealed the wooded area, just as still as it was before. It was as if it had been pulling faces at her behind her back and she'd almost caught it.

“It’s just an old wood shed,” she muttered to herself repeatedly as her body relaxed and her heart slowed down. She could feel a sweat flashing all over her body and a warm heat rising up her face as she walked away and headed back to the house. Lewis had completely deserted her, and she cursed him as she gingerly made her way across the garden. She kept thinking how silly it was to get in such a tizzy over a stupid old wood shed. But she was walking quicker than normal, eager to get inside and close the door. What a drama over nothing. But even though she was telling herself this, there was something niggling in the cellar of her mind. There had been a strange familiarity about going into that shed, a flash of a memory, a smell, and a feeling that she couldn’t quite grasp. Whatever it was, it wasn’t sitting very well with her. She physically shuddered as if to mentally shake the feeling off and steered her mind to emptying boxes and heading back towards the house.

As she made her way through the wooded area and back to the bumpy lawn, she glanced up at the cottage and as she did, she lost her footing on the uneven grass and stumbled forward onto her hands. On pushing herself up from the ground her vision had flashed across the front of the cottage and in that split-second she saw a small figure of a child, standing on the doorstep, and she almost stumbled forward again, as she looked back at it. But when she did so, there was nothing there. Having composed her balance, Chrissie stood still on the grass and stared, then looked around her. Then stared again. Icicles dripped down her back and a sick feeling crept through her stomach and into her heart. This wasn't how she'd imagined it. She hadn't even got through a month in her new home and she was already feeling frightened and homesick.

Chrissie sat on the damp grass for a few minutes while she rationalized her mind. She didn't care for the fact that the wetness from the ground was seeping through her trousers. She was more concerned about how tired and stressed she appeared to be and what a huge factor it was playing in all of this. She felt a bit like a

child refusing to give in to exhaustion. But she didn't want to kid herself. Moving to a new house was supposed to be one of the most stressful things you could go through in your life. Along with getting divorced. She knew perfectly well what stress could do to a tired mind and body.

Feeling newly composed, she put it all down to the fact that she'd frightened herself in the wood shed. She rolled over onto her knees to make it easier to stand up. Taking a deep breath and feeling much better she stomped back in the house and began unpacking boxes. It took her a while to settle to it, and there remained an obsessive urge to keep looking behind her. But she turned the radio on and erratically hummed her way through it until the atmosphere seemed to have lifted. The problem was that however much Chrissie tried to convince herself that the figure hadn't existed, the more the little child became clearer in her head. She kept seeing flashes of a little girl in the cinema of her mind, with straggly bobbed dirty blonde hair, wearing a smock style dress covered in a loud pink and turquoise pattern with a pinafore. Not dissimilar to the type of thing she

had worn as a child. But this little girl was barefoot and very dirty. There was also something peculiar about her eyes, but Chrissie hadn't been close enough to see properly. She pushed the vision away and busied herself, until a creak from the front door made her gasp and jump at the same time.

"Oh sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you!" said a friendly faced woman who was looking round the door.

"I live in the white cottage down the track, the Old Dairy? We're your most immediate neighbours, my husband Tim and I, albeit two hundred yards or so away. I'm Grace. I just wanted to say hello and see if there was anything you needed. I am so sorry; I gave you quite a fright, didn't I?"

"Gosh, sorry...come in, come in...I'm just a bit jumpy today. Think it's just the move and everything" replied Chrissie, getting her breath back and feeling relieved that the woman standing in the doorway was actually a real solid human being.

"How are you settling in? You've made a lot of progress, seeing as you only arrived last week." Grace said looking around at the already cosy sitting room.

Chrissie could tell that she'd moved into a typical village where she presumed no one missed a thing. She decided to be friendly but not reveal too much.

"Well, not really but I'm getting there. Would you like a cup of tea or coffee? I'm Chrissie by the way."

"Oh... um... yes that would be nice, as long as I'm not stopping you. I did just pop by to say hello and see if you needed anything."

"Not at all, I'd be glad of a break to be honest." They stepped into the garden while the kettle was boiling and chatted as if they'd known one another for years.

"I tell you what? I've got a nice bottle of wine in the fridge...."

"That'd be nice, but it's a bit early isn't it...?" Grace said glancing at her watch.

"No! It's Saturday afternoon and I haven't celebrated my moving in yet."

"Ok, why not..."

Chrissie smiled at the warm amiable lady who she knew would become her first friend in the village. Maybe she was just being friendly and not the nosy neighbour that Chrissie had first judged her to be.

Chrissie tied back her straggling brown hair with a band that she had wrapped around her wrist and went to the kitchen to get the drinks. Grace followed her.

“So how are you finding this strange old house?”

Chrissie frowned at her and then smiled. She had a lovely warm face with small features apart from her soft brown eyes, which were huge and accentuated by her blonde hair. In fact, she was extremely tiny in form, Chrissie realised as she took in the physical outline of her new companion. She reminded her of her mother a little bit; she was about the same age.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean strange...because it’s lovely, but...” Grace said, trying to recover herself.

“Its fine,” Chrissie raised her hand to reassure the nervous woman, “I know exactly what you mean. It is strange but carries a lovely charm with it. Let’s go back outside and enjoy the last of the summer weather.”

They chatted like old friends once Grace had relaxed and Chrissie was glad of the company. It seemed to lift the spirit of the whole house and garden. It was almost dark by the time Grace left and they’d drunk a whole bottle of wine.

“I better get back; I only popped out for five minutes.”

“I’m sorry it’s my fault, enticing you with white wine! Will your husband be worried?”

“No, he won’t be back yet, he’s gone on one of his fishing trips with his friends and afterwards they always end up in the local pub. Which reminds me. Most Sundays we all pop there at lunch time for a few drinks and sometimes lunch, for whoever can’t be bothered to cook. Do you fancy joining us? Get you properly ensconced in the village?”

“Yeah...I’d like that, thank you, that’s really kind.”

They hugged each other and then said their farewells feeling warm and light-hearted at the prospect of their new friendship. Chrissie pulled her cardigan tightly around her and wandered back into the house. She really felt like they’d picked up where they left off. Then she realised what she had just thought. Left off from where? They’d only just met. It had suddenly turned cold and feeling slightly uneasy again, Chrissie wanted to get

the lamps and the television on in the house before her imagination got the better of her again.

CHAPTER TWO

Norfolk 1982

Lucy cycled her usual route she followed at the same time every day to the village shop. The sun had crept through the clouds and was warming the freshly sprinkled rain. The dirty spray from her bicycle wheels was soaking her white socks and splattering muddy water up her shins. She marvelled at the colours reflecting off everything and how sparkly everywhere looked, as it always does when the sun arrives after the rain.

Lucy smiled to herself as she thought about the youth disco she was going to that night. She couldn't believe her Mother had agreed to let her go. She was so protective of her and at fourteen she was beginning to

develop a more social personality and she'd wanted her to loosen the apron strings. With her head full of outfits and friends she wasn't concentrating on her bicycle when the tyre burst and caused her to come off the quiet country road and skid into a field. For a few seconds the world seemed to turn upside down.

Once everything stopped moving and she managed to untangle herself from her slightly mangled bike Lucy was able survey the damage. A few bruises were appearing on her grazed legs and there was a throbbing in her elbow, which she had landed on.

But this was nothing in comparison to what she would look like in a few hours' time. Unfortunately, while Lucy was examining the cut on her arm, she was unaware of the gloved black figure approaching her. Or the rope and sack they were carrying or the red car that she would be bundled into, that was parked in the field behind the hedge.

There wasn't much of a struggle, Lucy was very slight and being caught unawares hadn't given her much of a chance.

Her bicycle was neatly leant up against the hedge, out of view of the road, and the rain began to pour again, washing away any trace of Lucy on the muddy track.

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Norfolk 1998

Grace was comfortably ensconced in her favourite tatty armchair in the kitchen, staring at the dead and empty fire place. A draft was occasionally circling her feet and scuffing up the ashes in the grate. She was falling into the depths of her mind, like a deep-sea diver moving softly through the chilling water. Grace's thoughts were becoming colder and colder as time ticked on. Images of children intruded her mind, pricking her conscience and sending a wave of pain across her heart.

The sound of her husband Tim coming through the old cracked latch door brought her quickly back to the surface, giving her the emotional bends. He turned on the kitchen light causing her to squint and jolt her mind back into the present.

“Whatever are you doing sitting in the dark like that? You almost gave me a fright.” he said, resting both hands on the arms of her chair and leaning in to look at her perfectly formed, childlike face.

Grace could smell the warm deep scent of rum on his breath and her stomach turned in revulsion as the bristles of his grey moustache kissed her on the lips.

Tim pulled away from her and studied her face, just in time for her to plaster her usual well practiced false smile on.

“You alright gal?”

“Yep, I’m fine. I was just out visiting our new neighbour and thought I’d have five minutes in the chair when I got back. I must have nodded off; too much wine I should expect. You know what that does to me,” she said, scraping her chair back across the rickety stone floor, causing him to move away from her. She pushed passed him and busied herself with the supper.

“Get on well did you?”

“Yes, we did actually. She’s really nice.”

“Good for you. What’s for supper? I’m starving!” he said, hanging his coat up behind the door and wandering into the sitting room to put the telly on.

“I’m making a curry,” Grace called after him.

And that was pretty much the end of their conversation for the rest of the evening. Grace’s hatred towards him had simmered in the pit of her stomach for over a year. She’d not liked him much after thirty years of being treated like a second-class citizen and having to put up with his selfish, tedious ways, although this wasn’t what had caused her hatred towards him. But her feelings were beginning to bubble dangerously close to the surface. As she prepared the supper, she tried to get a grip of herself and her thoughts. Meeting Chrissie had unsettled her for some reason. Her face was all too familiar, and it had brought back flashes of the past. She poured herself another glass of wine; the only thing that would get her comfortably through another excruciating evening with Tim.

It had taken all the will she had not to walk out on him almost a year ago, but Grace felt that she could do a better job if she stayed. She’d come so far. Having to

share a bed with him, a table, even a drink; it all repulsed every cell of her body. But she was going to have her revenge and get away with it because like everything else in Grace's life, when she set her mind to do something she made sure she carried it out.

Unfortunately, Grace hadn't discovered he was having an affair or that he had a secret life with someone else. But a different personality, that involved children. She'd found out that Tim was a murderer, a child killer in fact. It wasn't information she was unsure of, and it certainly wasn't something you discovered about your partner every day. She only wished he had been having an affair. That was the grim reality Grace had discovered about him over a year ago. And it didn't matter how much she thought about it or pondered over it, it was still there, set in stone because she couldn't turn back the clock and erase the irreversible damage that he'd caused.

*

Dear Alice,

Daddy is talking about us having a holiday in Spain. He says we need to get away and that we can't stay here forever, hoping that you'll walk through the front door. I don't want to go but there is a part of me that thinks we may feel differently after a holiday. I've barely been out since you left for fear of missing you, but maybe he's right. Are you really going to walk through the door after ten years?

I've spent all this time dreaming of it, imagining you every day, opening that door and shouting your greetings. I've even imagined you as you would be now, grown up. Your beautiful blonde hair stylishly cut; stopping in on your way home from work to tell us about your day. Every day I wake up and go to the window...but you're never there.

I'm sorry darling; I promised I wouldn't get maudlin in my letters to you.

Daddy painted your bedroom last weekend in a gorgeous shade of apple green. We've put everything

back where it was, but we wanted to give it a spring clean because it was getting a bit dusty in there.

I've been thinking about starting an art course to try and pick up my painting again. I've found a really good home studies course, but Daddy says I'd have to go to college to do it properly and you know how I feel about going out to new places. I can just about cope with visiting Nana and Granddad at the retirement home, let alone anything else. He thinks I'd benefit more from the course if I went to college and mixed with other people. I'll think about it a bit longer.

Nana and Granddad are settling in well by the way and getting used to their new surroundings. They're still arguing as much as ever! Granddad says he's going to buy his own microwave meals because he hates the food there and thinks the wardens are trying to poison him.

That's all my news for now my beautiful darling and I'll write again soon.

Loving you always – Mummy

*

NORFOLK 1998

Tim sniffed hard at the small child's T-shirt that he had screwed up in his hands and then took another swig of his rum bottle. Even though the item of clothing smelt of the sheds that it had lived in for fifteen or more years, he could still occasionally catch a whiff of the child's smell that he so adored. He had always been fascinated by the smell of children, especially when they lost that baby smell and gained the smell of school and hormones. It comforted and eased him in a way that nothing else could. Everything had a personal scent to Tim and the first thing he did when he discovered something new was to sniff it. He saw it as an invisible label; like looking at an object and observing its colour or shape.

Tim liked nothing more than sitting in his shed with a bottle of rum and reminiscing over his box of souvenirs. They were what he called, his 'memory scents'. He'd thought of this nickname whilst he muttered to himself about all the boxes of children's

clothes and toys he had stored one day when he was in his shed. He tried to preserve the scents by putting each one inside a polythene bag, as though he was vacuum packing them. Each time he held one and smelt it, it conjured up memories of the short time he'd spent with that child. Tim felt they were celebratory, happy times in his life, filled with excitement and thrills. Another conquest gained through planning and hard work and a pat on the back for not getting caught. The only blessing to each child being dead was that they weren't alive to reflect on the horror that he had put each one through.

The particular child's T-shirt that he was pondering over wasn't one of his favourites. But he always started off with the lower impact items and then ended his session in the shed with the items that had the most recent smells and the most vivid memories.

The T-shirt belonged to one of his earlier victims; a small boy with a strangely angelic face which had captured Tim's attention. Tim didn't know why he'd murdered him; he usually went for girls and grabbing the small boy hadn't been anything sexual. It was in the early days and he put it down to a bit of practice and the fact

that six-year-old Jonathan had been quite happy to talk to him. And quite happy to get into Tim's car and quite happy to go and look at some puppies that didn't exist. Jonathan played along amicably with the game, until he realised what Tim was going to do to him. But to Tim's disappointment he died quite quickly, and he put that down to him being small for his age, and not the fact that the frayed rope was extremely tight around Jonathan's neck.

He breathed in deeply and tried to recapture the boy's smell so that he could revel for a little while in that fond memory. But it was becoming distant and it only just triggered a feeling and a memory, like a wasted spark trying to reignite a dead fire. It was slowly being replaced with a musty stale odour and the scent of turpentine which was found in most sheds.

The police had discovered that victim, which had been another thrill for Tim. He loved it when they found one of the bodies, but there was also something thrilling about the body they had never uncovered. It was a huge power game to Tim; he'd laid out a knotted web of a puzzle for the police to untangle, with a few prizes here

and there. But there was one body he wanted no one to ever find. It made him feel as if he was keeping the game alive. He didn't want the police thinking they'd completed a part of it; he wanted them to be forever wondering, the same as he wanted the families to keep hoping, and then he would revel in what he'd caused when their precious children were found. There was a feeling of tragedy and despair and Tim was so sick and twisted that he absorbed himself in it. He loved watching the families on the television, appealing for anyone with any information to come forward. The feeling of power and adrenaline that rushed through his body was immense. The knowledge that he was the only one who knew what had happened to that child. Being the only person in the whole world made him feel like he could rule it.

But there was one family who didn't know what had happened to their little girl. They had a good idea, but Tim got a kick out of the fact that they didn't know for sure.

Alice had been special, partly because she was to be his last victim for the time being and because she had

the strongest scent of all. Alice not only had the scent of a child turning into a teenager, but she had traces of her Mother's perfume on her clothes, which reminded Tim of his own Mother.

He often wondered whether this was where he got his urges from; having been brought up by a woman who was one minute over protective and emotionally smothering and then the complete opposite end of the scale; cold, dismissive and distant.

The problem with Tim's box of tricks was that all the items were slowly losing their scent. Even Alice's pretty, embroidered cardigan.

A warm exciting feeling began to stir in the pit of Tim's stomach as he screwed the cap on his rum bottle and thought about where his next memory scents would come from.

*

Chrissie ambled down to the local pub at lunchtime on Sunday and felt quite relieved when she spotted Grace in the distance. She didn't fancy entering a

close-knit village pub on her own. She could just tell it would be one of those pubs where they'd all stop talking, put down their drinks and stare at the stranger who'd dared to enter their domain. She waved frantically, and Grace half-heartedly raised her hand and nodded in acknowledgement. Chrissie was a bit uncertain as she approached Grace and her husband as to whether she'd made a mistake coming along. Grace seemed a bit subdued and not at all how she'd been yesterday. Chrissie scolded herself for her over-sensitive nature and put it down to it being Sunday and maybe they'd had a late night.

Grace gave Chrissie a brief hug and then introduced her to Tim. He wasn't what Chrissie had expected at all. She'd imagined a large man, the life and soul of the party with evidence of it written on his face. But instead, she was faced with a short person, of not quite medium build, from what she could gather under his checked shirt and jeans, and a full head of floppy salt and pepper hair and a moustache to match. His face was very well lined but not, thought Chrissie, from laughter. His small brown eyes seemed to be dark pools of

nothing. As he shook Chrissie's hand he breathed in through his nose, very strongly lifting his head to lock eyes with hers. Chrissie frowned at him and decided he was very strange indeed. She saw Grace watching her face and quickly smiled and exchanged pleasantries with him. Maybe that's why Grace was a bit subdued; having to put up with him, thought Chrissie.

"Are you ok? Is it still alright for me to join you?" Chrissie said as they entered the pub.

"Yes, course it is!" Grace gave Chrissie's arm an affectionate squeeze. "Sorry. I'm a bit subdued today. Had a few more glasses of wine when I got home last night, which I've now decided was not a good idea!"

"I nearly did that," Chrissie laughed, 'but I'd frightened myself so much during the day that I thought I ought to get some supper and myself to bed compos mentis!"

"What did you frighten yourself over?" Grace asked, walking over to a table and pulling out some chairs so that they could all sit down. The pub was empty apart from a couple of regulars in the corner, who they politely said hello to while Tim got the drinks.

“Oh, it’s nothing I’m sure. Just tiredness I think.” Chrissie didn’t want to appear like a tall story teller. She wasn’t keen on sharing ghost stories with people she didn’t know too well, just in case they thought it was a load of rubbish or they were terribly religious and found it offensive.

“I remember now! You nearly jumped out of your skin when I knocked on the door. That didn’t look like nothing to me. What had you seen?”

Chrissie relayed her story of the previous day’s events to Grace and then reluctantly to Tim who joined them with the drinks half way through.

“Well it’s obvious why you saw that little girl,” said Tim smugly, “it’ll be because of that child killer who committed murder in the village, committed offences over quite a long period.”

Chrissie and Grace both turned to stare at him, but not for the same reasons.

“What child killer?” asked Chrissie; the tiny hairs on her arms lifting at the words.

“Oh, it was years ago now but there was someone going around the area topping children of different ages.

Some of them were found not far from the village and one of them was in your garden.” Tim said with a slight smirk wavering on his lips.

Chrissie’s blue eyes were the size of saucers and she had begun to feel slightly sick.

“Stop it Tim, that’s enough!” Grace leaned in his face, the words coming out a bit sharper than she’d meant them to.

“Well someone’s bound to tell her sooner or later, it may as well be us,” Tim leaned back in his chair with his pint, thoroughly enjoying the attention he was getting, “Yeah, they reckon the one found in your garden was strangled with an old dog chain, very grim business. But as I said it was a very long time ago.”

“Just ignore him Chrissie, he’s winding you up.” Grace tried to dilute the situation. She glared at Tim, unable to believe how cocky and arrogant he was being. Grace tried to distract everyone by handing out menus.

“But its true isn’t it, what you’re telling me?” Chrissie wanted to continue the conversation; she was feeling very unnerved. It wasn’t just what Tim was telling her that was making her feel uneasy; it was the

odd flashes that had passed the screens of her mind. She was unable to interrupt them long enough to see what they were or work out what they meant.

“Yes, it is true Chrissie but it all happened a very long time ago and the family that lived in the house before you had a very happy time there. You were just very tired my love and your mind can play tricks on you when you feel like that. Now let’s change the subject and order some food before the crowds get here.”

And that’s exactly what they did; talked about something else. But it didn’t change anything for any of them because all three had their minds set on the same subject and all three of them were feeling completely different emotions to each other. One was frightened, one was furious, and the other was full of anticipation.

CHAPTER THREE

Dear Alice,

I found a box of your old toys in the attic yesterday and it set me off on one of my bad days again. Daddy is still insisting that we go on holiday, but I just can't do it, Alice. And the very thought of it is making me feel ill. What if I missed you? What if the one time that I don't get up in the morning to look out of the window, you appear at our door?

Daddy has even mentioned selling up and moving away but that is just unbearable to think about. We have hope, which is something other families don't have. There is always hope my darling and I think its this that

somehow keeps me alive and enables me to get through each day.

Aunty Jenny brought round some pictures of your cousin Emily's wedding. They're gorgeous and were all taken in black and white. Nana and Granddad managed to go, and there are some lovely pictures of them dancing together. We have chosen the ones we want and framed a couple and put them in your bedroom for you. They look nice against the newly painted walls.

I think that's another reason I'm having such a bad day. The photos are beautiful, but they were just another reminder of what you would have looked like had it been your wedding day. You and Emily are so alike.

Daddy says I should go and see a therapist to talk about how I'm feeling. He thinks it will help me to move on. But apart from my bad days, I'm fine Alice. I'll never get over it, but then who would having lost their precious daughter? No not lost, not lost, not lost! I don't know why I said that my darling Alice, please forgive me.

I don't need to move on. I am here in the present, living each day without you, without my beautiful daughter, but I know one day that you'll walk through the

door and we will make up for all the time we've lost together.

Loving you always – Mummy

*

Norfolk 1984

Jody was happy to go with the nice man because he'd promised to find her mother, who she'd lost in the commotion of the Christmas shoppers. Her mother had told her not to run off, but she'd been distracted in the large store by the little Russian dolls that were on display. She wanted one of those so badly and she'd written about it in her letter to Father Christmas. Her mother had helped her put it together and they'd added lots of other things to the list of items including a copy of The Velveteen Rabbit and a pram to push her teddy around in. She was filled with magical excitement at the thought of it all, as if Christmas was a brand-new

invention and she would be one of the first to experience it. Until today, where the excitement had melted like snow and had been replaced by a sickly fear. She had run and pushed through people and turned in circles searching for her mother's familiar face. Eventually she had found herself near the main doors and had walked straight into the man's legs as if they were fated to meet.

The man's hands were large and warm around her tiny cold one and he smelled like her father.

Jody chatted away to him, totally distracting herself from the fact that he had walked her out of the department store and down the street to his car. They looked like any other father and daughter shopping for mother a few days before Christmas and went unnoticed by the passing public, who smiled at the pretty five-year-old who appeared to be chatting to her father.

By the time they reached the car it was too far away for Jody to hear the panicked shouts of her mother out on the street. A mother who was already filled with a heavy dread and fear as she turned around and around in the street, frantically calling for her little girl in the busy

town; knowing all too well that there was a child killer on the loose.

*

Norfolk 1998

The suffocating heat and stench of over-boiled vegetables and urine hit Tim in the face as he was bleeped through the double doors of Poppy Field's retirement home. He was used to it after visiting his Mother religiously every week for the past eight years.

She'd had a series of strokes when she was sixty-seven and never fully recovered. The doctors had put it down to the stress of losing her husband and suddenly being on her own. But Tim felt as though it wasn't the fact that she was 'being' on her own, it was the fact that

she had to ‘cope’ on her own after a life with a husband who saw to her every whim.

Daphne had grown up in a working-class family with lots of siblings, all living hand to mouth, appreciating every tiny little luxury that rarely came their way. Luxuries that wealthy families took for granted. She didn’t fit into her family at all and they looked upon her as a stranger. They felt that she had ideas of grandeur. There wasn’t much resemblance with any of them, physically or mentally. Daphne held herself differently, daydreamed often and read books, which was unheard of in the household. She came from generations of a repetitive theory, a school of thought that you accepted what you were given, ‘your lot’ as it was so aptly put.

The community she lived in frowned at her attitude of wanting to improve her situation. So, she was generally an outcast and no one was surprised or pleased when she met Jack Charlesworth, a very wealthy lawyer. They fell in love quite quickly and Daphne fled as fast as she could, not realising that she may have just used Jack as a scapegoat to get away from her circumstances. She loved him, but not as he loved and adored her. As his

adoration grew stronger throughout their marriage, Daphne's love turned into bitter resentment for him. The life she'd spent years wishing for hadn't turned out to be the one she wanted after all and she made him suffer for it. Money didn't buy you happiness or put right life's tragedies, she'd found that out the hard way. But as horrible as she was to him he still loved her, until the day he suffered a massive heart attack in his green house at the unripe age of seventy. Daphne had seen it more as an inconvenience than a tragedy, which was how she'd treated him their entire married life.

But, as Jack had adored her, so did Tim. However frequently she pushed him away, he went running back, seeing her in his younger days as an independent and powerful woman instead of the bitter, twisted person he was to see her as later in his life.

And this is where she'd ended up; Poppy Field's retirement home. She'd recovered from the strokes eight years previously but was deemed too unstable to live alone. Tim thought that a lifetime of being waited on hand and foot had left her fragile and slightly pathetic; a side to her that very few people glimpsed. So, Tim had

been quite happy to keep her in the retirement home. As much as he adored his Mother, he didn't want her interfering with his life and spoiling his routine. He had learnt only too well from her that you treated people like you treated your possessions. Getting them out when it suited you and then putting them away when they grew tiresome. So, Daphne was safely ensconced in the box that Tim had put her in; boxed with a memory scent like everything else in his life.

There was something quite repulsive and sinister about Tim's relationship with his Mother. He had this sickly-sweet affection for her and treated her as one of his prized possessions. He also revelled in the fact that their roles had reversed. It suited Tim very well to have her in a retirement home where he could pick her up and drop her, as she had done to him so often when he was a child. A part of him saw it as payback in the warped little depths of his mind.

He remembered so often how his mother went out for hours on end and left him with the housekeeper, Dora. She would put him in the cellar because he was being a nuisance. This was where Tim heightened his

sense of smell. Dora would turn up the wireless to drown out his cries, leaving him unable to hear or see anything in the pitch-black cellar. However, much as he strained his eyes to adjust to the light, hoping and waiting for shadows to become apparent, nothing happened. It was thick, damp and dark blackness all around him, so Tim improved the only sense he had left because there was nothing else to do. If he closed his eyes and imagined hard enough, he could pretend he was somewhere else. He got so good at it that sometimes he fell asleep. He used his sense of smell as a guessing game and would see what he got right when Dora deemed it necessary for him to come out of the dark. He would guess what they were having for dinner, which perfume from her dressing table his mother was wearing, whether his father was on his way home or not. All this he achieved from detecting scents.

It was no good telling his mother that Dora made his life a misery when she went out; he just ended up being punished again for telling tales.

Tim wandered down the corridor carrying the white carnations that he took her every week. Daphne glanced at him as he walked into her private bedroom. She turned back to the window that she was sitting next to. Tim kissed her on the cheek, smelling stale perfume with undertones of decay and laid the flowers on her portable table.

“Hello Mother, how are you today? Shall I put your flowers in a vase?”

“You ask me that every bloody week that you come here. Have you got nothing else to say to me?”

“Having a bad day, Mother?” he said, putting his arm around her shoulder and giving her a squeeze. She shrugged him off; a look of repulsion streaking her thickly made up face. Daphne never passed a day without her makeup. She put on lashings of powder that made her look ghostly white, black liquid eyeliner that crumbled once dry on her tissue paper eyelids, along with her lumpy mascara. A bold layer of cerise pink lipstick was put on last, which always leaked into her stained, lined lips. The headband that she used to keep her hair out of the way of this ritual was replaced with a turban. Her

makeup routine was the only time she didn't wear it. She thought this gave her the look and air of a movie star, but it just made her look freakish and harsh.

"And how's that lovely wife of yours doing; still too busy to come and see her Mother in law?" Sarcasm dripped from her mouth.

"Don't start that again. You know how busy she is, and she always sends her love. Anyway, she thinks it's nice for us to spend some time on our own. I don't want to share you with anyone."

"Yes, yes, yes! Can you go and sit on the bed; I don't want you smothering me." She said, swatting him away like a dirty germ ridden fly.

Tim sat down on the edge of the bed and watched her as she scowled out of the window. It was to be one of those visits again. The ones that made him feel like he did as a child. Only, the difference was, he was an adult and it made him feel like strangling her.

*

James banged on Chrissie's bathroom door, startling her and causing her to spill water over the edge of the bath.

"Come on Mother, hurry up, you know what the water does to your wrinkly skin!"

"I was just getting out. And don't call me Mother, it makes me feel old!"

"You are old!" said James wandering downstairs to make a cup of tea.

"What time did Kate say her train was coming in?" Chrissie called down to him, choosing to ignore his last comment. It was an ongoing joke between them because there were very few years separating Chrissie and her step-children. Their Father, Marcus was fifteen years older than Chrissie. She'd always got on well with them because she had never posed as a replacement Mother. They had a perfectly good one as far as she was concerned and whom she got on well with. Chrissie had no intention of playing mother to two young adults who weren't much younger than she was. So, they saw her more as an older sister, which was why they thought it was funny to wind her up by calling her 'Mother'.

“James?!” she called again, but he couldn’t hear her above the noise of the boiling kettle and the blaring radio that he’d switched on.

Chrissie shivered as she stood up and grabbed a warm towel off the piping hot rail. She was so thankful that the previous owners had installed central heating and replaced the kitchen and the bathroom in the time that they had lived there. Something she’d dreaded having to do. It needed a lot of cosmetic work, but they’d done all the expensive stuff. Grace had told her that the last owner was in the Armed Forces and he had been posted away, taking his family with him. Chrissie had looked at so many cottages, but they all needed too much work, and she didn’t want a brand-new home because she found them characterless. Just as she was about to give up, having decided that it wasn’t meant to be, there had been a phone call from the estate agents. They told her that there was a cottage that had just come on the market and the couple needed a quick sale.

Chrissie knew as soon as she stepped out of the car that she wanted it. She loved the old Norfolk red brick which looked deep in colour in the midday sun, and the

pretty overgrown front garden. Stocks and roses crowded the path that beckoned her to the front porch. It all held a familiar feeling with it. A feeling she couldn't pin point but had decided was her gut reaction telling her that it was the right house.

Chrissie dried herself with the soft towel, soothing her skin which was prickled, having stepped out of the warmth and comfort of her steamy bath. The latch on the door clicked up and the door creaked open, startling her again, causing her to quickly cover her naked body with the towel.

"James, I haven't finished!" she screeched, looking up at the empty doorway.

But there was no reply and no James stood at the bathroom door.

"James....?" Chrissie called, feeling her heart begin to pound; her skin prickling from fear, rather than a chill, that was creeping over her body. Chrissie stood in her bathroom staring at the space left by the door; cold water was running down her body as it dripped off her hair.

“Did you call me?” James appeared in the doorway, startling her yet again.

“Cover yourself up, I don’t wish to....” He stopped, seeing her pale face. “Chrissie are you alright?”

“Um, yeah, did you open the bathroom door?”

“No, I’ve been downstairs making a cuppa. What an earth is wrong?”

“Nothing, I probably didn’t shut the door properly, and it swung open and made me jump.”

“You dozy old bag! Get some clothes on for god’s sake and hurry up and get downstairs; I’ve just made a brew.”

“Enough of the old!” Chrissie shouted light heartedly after him as he made his way down the winding staircase. But she didn’t feel light hearted, not one little bit. She felt silly getting so worked up about a door, but it was the feeling that it had left her with that bothered her the most. She knew she’d shut the bathroom door properly because since she’d moved into the house, doors opening on their own had become a frequent occurrence. This had caused her to become almost obsessive about checking them.

When James and Kate rang to tell her that they were coming to stay for a couple of days, she'd tried to stop herself sounding too hysterical. The relief that had swept through her was palpable. Almost every day she had spent in the house there had been some incident or another that had either frightened her or made her waste time wondering whether she had caused it herself. Especially after what Grace and Tim had told her at the pub. Hearing about the murders of all those children, particularly one that was found in her garden, had really freaked her out.

There had been things left on the kitchen work top that she knew she hadn't removed from the fridge, pictures falling off the wall for no reason, the television changing channels of its own accord and the most frightening one of all was when the dial moved on the radio. Chrissie had been unpacking some boxes and listening to her favourite radio station when it had suddenly become high pitched and crackly. She went into the kitchen to see what had happened, and as she began fiddling with the aerial she had spotted the dial turning backwards and forwards as if someone was tuning it.

Most of the time the house felt warm, homely and familiar, and these were the times that Chrissie really felt she'd made the right decision. And that the future was full of exciting things. But at some point, during each day, a cold blanket descended on the cottage like a layer of snow; silent and chilling. It left her feeling sick and fearful and wanting to jump into her car and drive far away from the whole place.

These extreme changes in atmosphere were causing Chrissie to have conflicting emotions. She enjoyed and looked forward to each day in her new house because at times she felt elated. But she also dreaded anticipating the change in atmosphere that could appear at any time. So, gradually and very slowly Chrissie was becoming a nervous wreck; like a large screw being turned inside her head. The offer of some company was grabbed with both hands because Chrissie naively convinced herself that it would all stop for a couple of days.

CHAPTER FOUR

NORFOLK 1955

Daphne unscrewed the cap of her flask and inhaled the metallic smell of strong sweet tea that wafted towards her nose.

It was a beautiful summer's day and it was promising to be warm by the afternoon. She was pleased to be outside for a change. When the weather was bad, Daphne spent time in the library or a café. But she preferred to be in the fresh air, it made her feel free. Something she didn't feel in her life in general. When she was at home with Tim and Jack, in their big house, with

their acre and a half of garden, she felt trapped like a rabbit in a hutch.

So, most days during the summer holidays Daphne asked Dora their housekeeper to watch over Tim.

They were some of the best days of her life and some of Tim's worst, something she was oblivious to. Lost in her own world, she never once questioned why Tim hated the summer holidays, unlike other children, who loved them.

Daphne leant back on the bench, crossed her feet and breathed deeply. Relief flooded her. She came out most days to be alone, think and reflect. It was like a whole new life she'd created outside her old one. This had been imperative to the wellbeing of her family, even though they were unaware of her other life.

It had been on a day a few months previously when she thought her head would explode like a ticking bomb. It had scared her, what she might do to Tim, she'd become so distressed. So, she'd called on Dora to look after him for a few hours. And it was like someone had turned a tap on. She'd run to the park that day, sobbing

all the way there in the rain, wanting so desperately for things to be different.

That day had been the first of many and a tiny spark of an idea had ignited in her head. She decided that for her to be able to function in her role within her family, she would go out whenever she could. So, Daphne approached Dora with an agreement. Dora was paid extra to stay on and look after Tim and she wasn't to breathe a word of it to anyone. If Jack ever asked, she would just tell him that she'd been out visiting, or shopping and Dora had agreed to baby sit. He had no idea how often or how long she was out; he was always at work. She couldn't tell Jack she wanted a Nanny because he'd then enquire where she was going. Dora just thought that Daphne was having an affair, one that she was glad of because it was lining her pockets and her lifestyle.

The agreement worked for many years and Daphne was eternally grateful for the lifeline she'd been thrown. It had saved her from committing suicide and taking her son with her. It had only meant to be until Tim started

school full time but then Daphne had found herself calling on Dora during the school holidays.

Daphne became a familiar face to people after a while, visiting the same places. Frowning, inquisitive looks had turned into cheery hellos and a brief passing of time. Those people knew her as Daphne and no one else and she found this immensely liberating. She'd picked a town roughly fifteen miles away where she could safely immerse herself. No one there had any idea that she had a son and a husband at home. They knew nothing about her, thought she was a loner. She liked it that way, it was comfortable and familiar, and it made her feel whole and complete.

There was no guilt involved for Daphne; she knew she needed this life to be able to continue with the other one. Leaving either life wasn't an option for her. She'd made her bed and she would lie in it, now, more comfortably than before. Had she been aware of what Tim was going through while she was away from him, she would have felt very different.

And as Daphne now sat on the bench sipping her tea and enjoying the peace, her son was sitting in a pitch black, damp cellar, wishing for the entire world that his mother would come home and rescue him.

*

Norfolk 1998

“There was no need for you to tell Chrissie all that nasty business about the murdered children. What on earth were you thinking? She’s only just moved in and she’s trying to get used to the place. Thanks to you, she’s probably frightened out of her wits!”

“Oh, shut up, you stupid woman! Someone was bound to tell her. You know what the gossips are like in the village, I’ve done her a favour.” Tim said, opening

the fridge door to see if there were any leftovers to quell his hunger. Drinking beer at lunch time always made him hungry, even if he had already eaten at the pub.

“And what makes you think that you were the right person to relay that information?” Grace searched his face for any sign of a nervous reaction.

“Just being neighbourly. If I’d have left it to the gossips she would have heard some half-baked story more frightening than the truth, which would have had her packing her bags and leaving. At least what I’ve told her is a matter of fact, without all the bullshit with it.”

“I can’t understand why you would think that anything could be more frightening than the truth of all that happened to those poor little souls. And what makes you an expert on delivering the facts?”

Grace leant on the kitchen worktop and folded her arms. She scrutinized his face while he busied himself with some bread and cheese, but to no avail. Not a flicker; he was as cool and calm as normal. This only made her more agitated and she needed to watch her step. The last thing Grace wanted to do was to let him know that she knew what he’d done all those years ago. She

wasn't frightened of him killing her, just the fact that he might do it before she got the pleasure of doing it to him first.

Grace felt she had already experienced the worst kind of fear and pain that any human being could go through. She wasn't worried about dying; that would be a time to go to sleep and be put out of the misery that she'd endured through her lifetime. No, dying was a luxury. There had been a time when she'd wanted that experience to happen sooner rather than later. That had been the day her daughter had died in a terrible accident. She'd felt that she'd died right there and then with her on the day the police knocked at her door. Dying, for Grace felt like it would have been a light relief from the horrendous nightmare that she was about to go through.

She remembered an unconscious thought fleeting through her mind when she saw the two officers walking up the path; that they'd come to tell her that Tim was dead. Not her precious daughter.

Nadine had been playing in the garden of an old derelict house and hadn't seen the open cess pit. The police said they thought that Nadine had been playing

whilst waiting for her friend who lived next door. A dog walker had seen her there and had told her to move on saying it was dangerous, but she'd ignored him. It was when he heard her screams after he'd got some way past her that he knew something bad had happened and alerted the police from a phone box. He searched for Nadine with the help of her friend Pauline and Pauline's Father, who had heard the commotion because he was working nearby. They almost fell down the cess pit themselves, it was so well camouflaged.

That day had happened almost ten years-ago, but it was as clear as the minutes passing now. She could even remember the warm sunshine peeking through the rain clouds making them look like they were lined with silver. But there was no silver lining that day or any of the days that had followed for Grace. Tim had dealt with his grief in his own selfish way. Leaving her for days on end to lose himself in his sailing and then coming back for such a brief time she hardly noticed he was there. Even though she yearned for some support, she realised looking back she hadn't wanted it from him. All the times she'd screamed at him that he wasn't there for her, she realised

in her quieter, less hysterical moments that he had done exactly what she wanted, which was to leave her alone. How could she gain any sort of comfort from someone she thought was emotionless and weak?

So, Grace was looking forward to the luxury of dying but not until she'd had the pleasure of killing Tim first and making it look like a tragically sad accident. This comforting thought passed through her mind as she watched him sink his teeth into the bread and cheese he'd prepared for his supper.

*

Tim found himself wandering past his shed and down the garden path and through the gate. He didn't quite know what he was doing but he knew where he was going.

He was becoming increasingly bored with his boxes of memory scents; the smells were fading fast. Until he worked out what he was going to do next he needed to occupy himself with something else and that was to have a bit of fun.

Chrissie had made a huge mistake telling him about her little problem. He laughed to himself at how women were so over-emotional and stupid; couldn't keep anything to themselves, not like men. Tim thought he was especially good at it. He knew that the only way to continue enjoying what you were doing was to keep your mouth shut. He believed that the only person you could ever trust was yourself.

And that was why Tim had got away with all his gruesome activities. He'd not told a soul, not even his Mother, with whom he shared the most secrets.

He contemplated this little gem of information about himself as he walked down the dimly lit lane towards Chrissie's house. He wanted to go and sit in his favourite shed at the bottom of her garden, so that he could think about what he was going to do next. This particular old shed held fond memories for him and there was still a faint smell from the past that he could detect if he breathed in hard enough.

It was time to plan some excitement and by the time Tim finished, Chrissie would have a perfect understanding of the meaning of fear. Tim would make

sure she would feel like she had completely lost her mind.

It would be a part pay back for the spectacular escape she had made when she was a child. It had taken him a while to work out the familiarity of her. The smell was similar to when she was younger, but only a hint. It was her eyes that had given her away. Those fascinatingly beautiful blue eyes that almost looked like they were coloured lenses because they were so bright. Tim recognised her when they were talking about her house, and from her scared expression. He couldn't place her in that capacity at first, not until she mentioned she had holidayed with her parents in the village for many years as a child. It caused a memory to flash across his mind. He remembered that scared look very well, and what a beautiful little child she'd been.

Chrissie was on holiday with her family and Tim had watched her for almost a week, waiting to pounce on her as soon as her family left her alone. There were three little girls, but he'd only been interested in her. Partly because of her alluring eyes but also because she'd passed him innocently in the local post office, leaving a

scent behind her that had captivated him. A child like smell mixed with washing powder and soap and a slight scent of unwashed hair with remnants of the sea.

Tim was slightly worried she was on to him; why else would she have moved here? He was so conceited; he couldn't imagine anyone making a decision that didn't concern him being considered. Even though Chrissie hadn't appeared to have known who he was, Tim needed to keep an eye on her and make sure she didn't put two and two together. Logically he couldn't see how she could link him to anything because he had never let her see his face back then.

Luckily for Tim, on this occasion he had picked the night time to abduct Chrissie. If he hadn't, she would have been able to give the police a full description of his face. Tim was usually the last person that his victims saw, but he hadn't been Chrissie's. He remembered her being a strong little thing, not wanting to give up without a fight. He was surprised at her will to live. His other victims had given up after what Tim saw as only a tiny struggle, pathetic and weak. The fact remained, it had

been pure fear that had caused their bodies to fail in their functioning, that and Tim's rough handling.

That night, he'd gone into the garden of the holiday cottage where Chrissie and her family were staying. He'd observed whilst watching her and her family that Chrissie would go back outside after she'd got ready for bed and sit on the old swing in the garden. Her mother regularly called her in, but she ignored her until she was physically marched upstairs to bed.

Tim thought the best way of enticement would be to make a noise like an animal to draw the little girl to the gate. It worked and with very little effort he grabbed the tiny six-year-old, clamped his hand over her mouth and took her a little way down the track to a nearby back garden where he knew of an old unused shed. He knew it was quiet there, because it was so far away from the house that it belonged to.

It was to be that same house and garden that Chrissie bought, many years later.

It was all as simple as that, in those few seconds that any parent whose child has gone missing wishes they

could rewind. Those missing minutes that can never be repeated.

Luckily for Chrissie it all back fired on Tim because, being used to taking children during the daylight, the night time seemed to have short-footed him. So, while he was trying to deal with a small child who was kicking but unable to scream, he didn't notice the slight step into the old shed and as he stumbled forward he lost his grip of her and Chrissie made her escape. She ran and ran and somehow managed to get back to the holiday cottage where her mother was frantically searching the garden for her.

For the first time in his life, Tim had been scared. He rushed back to his house hoping that no one was in, so that he could hide his panic.

The house had thankfully, been empty, because Grace was at a Women's Institute meeting. This enabled Tim to turn on the lights, get something in the oven, and generally make it look like he had been there all evening. Tim knew that the whole place would be crawling with police in a matter of minutes; especially as they were on the hunt for a child killer. That was the only time he

scolded himself for being stupid and genuinely felt he may have blown the whole thing.

Within half an hour he was back to his usual calm, cold self and when the police knocked on the door to let him know what had happened he looked like any other normal citizen who had spent an evening in on his own. The problem was Tim was so clever that he'd managed to convince the entire village that he was a pillar of the community. He'd been a serving police officer since he was old enough to join up. A local bobby, trustworthy and friendly, prepared to go that extra mile for someone else and always keeping a watchful eye over everyone's children.

CHAPTER FIVE

Dear Alice,

I think I've managed to convince Daddy to go on holiday without me. I know I'm going to miss him dreadfully, but I just can't bring myself to leave the house. He knows I wouldn't enjoy it anyway. I'd be constantly wondering what was happening here. There in body but not in mind as they say. He refused at first and said he wouldn't go at all, but he needs a holiday desperately. He sees it as a way of moving on and I suppose we all deal with things differently, but it's not a way forward for me. The thought of it is just pure torture.

Anyway, I was reading an article the other day about how some people can suffer amnesia from shock or a bump to the head. In some cases, they go wandering off, not remembering who they are. Sometimes, after a few years they just come to, and go looking for their real families. It gave me fresh hope because you were on your own that day, and you could have easily fallen over and bumped your head without anyone knowing.

The whole thing made Daddy cross and I've promised not to mention it again. Daddy is convinced that you're not coming back and that the only thing that would have caused you to leave us would be if you were dead. But I would know that as a mother, and I've never felt it, not like other people who have lost a child.

I know you wouldn't leave us intentionally because I know how happy you were. And you certainly wouldn't have left your beloved little dog, Tilly.

I'm sorry for running on again my darling, but I've felt that the whole situation has consumed me lately. Maybe this is a sign that you are near and that we will see you soon. I don't just feel it, I know it.

I cut the article out and put it in your scrap book with all the other cuttings for you to read when you get home.

Loving you always

Mummy xxx

*

NORFOLK 1956

The scent of Dora and the warmth of the range cooker that they were sat next to in the old familiar kitchen were making Tim sleepy. He was sitting on Dora's lap; his head leant against her breast, as she read from his favourite story book. His tiny fingers were entwined in her soft blonde hair, as he twirled the golden locks round and round. He loved the feel of her silky,

waxen, shiny hair on his hands. It was something he should have been doing with his mother, but she was hardly ever around, and he'd grown used to Dora as a substitute.

They'd had a lovely day together. Tim had skipped into town with her in the sunshine and she'd bought him a packet of sweets. He'd even heard her humming to herself on the way. It was the first day he could remember in his short little life that she hadn't scolded him or snapped at him. She was in one of her better moods.

Whatever had caused this gaiety in Dora was to be short-lived, but Tim wasn't old enough to know this familiar pattern of events. Launching him off her lap and across the kitchen was the result of him snagging her hair with a hang nail. Dora's temper brought out her true roots, the posh clipped accent she used to impress Daphne and Jack evaporated as quickly as fading breath on glass.

"You stupid little bastard!" she screeched at Tim as he hit the far kitchen wall and crumpled in a heap on

the floor, shocked and astounded, as ever, at the personality change in her.

“Get up!” she said, rubbing her neck where he’d snagged her hair.

“I’m sorry...”

“Get up, I said.” This was said more quietly but with a sinister tone in her voice, which scared Tim more than anything. She was bent over and moving towards him slowly, as he desperately scrambled to pull himself off the floor and stand up straight. He closed his eyes, not wanting to meet hers, and crossed his tiny legs, hoping she wouldn’t see the dark stain appearing on his trousers. But urine began to drip loudly on the unforgiving linoleum floor.

Dora stared at the wet patch and then back at Tim, a look of disgust shadowing her face. She grabbed him sharply by the arm, her temper getting the better of her, and dragged him screaming to the cellar door. As she thumped down the steps dragging him behind her, his small legs couldn’t keep up and he fell twisting his arm in her grip. She continued regardless, his body thumping down the concrete steps as if she was a child again

dragging a rag doll. She swung him around and flung him on the soot and dirt covered floor.

Back in the kitchen, Dora leant her hands on the kitchen sink and stared out of the window, trying to calm her breathing and her rage.

Tim's crying could be heard through the floor in the kitchen, which only served to irritate her more. She poured herself a large gin and tonic and went outside for a cigarette, so she couldn't hear him. Jack was away on business and Daphne would be out until late, so she wasn't concerned about anyone coming back. She lived in the house, she was there far more than Tim's parents and she'd begun to treat the house like it was her own.

Two hours later, a tear and urine stained Tim was removed from the cellar and put into a hot bath and scrubbed clean. Afterwards, she put him to bed and finished reading the story that had been interrupted earlier. It was as if nothing had happened. Dora looked in every way the angelic young beauty that she always portrayed to Daphne and Jack. It was the perfect calm setting for when Daphne eventually came home.

*

Norfolk 1998

Chrissie wandered along the beach, deep in thought, looking very troubled. There were all sorts of scenarios running through her head, but the light sea air seemed to be helping. Just lately she'd felt safer outside her house than she had in it. The sheer panic that engulfed her when there was a change of atmosphere at home had caused her on a few occasions to run outside and sit on the swing. The swing was where she felt safe. And whatever it was that she thought was chasing her inside, outside felt like an expanse of escapism.

There had been a new turn of events just recently and it had caused her to call her best friend Sarah. She needed to feel that someone was there with her and, not knowing many people in the village, the telephone seemed like the next best option.

Chrissie had been unable to hide her alarm and begged Sarah to stay on the line and keep talking. This

obviously worried Sarah greatly and, after talking with Chrissie for almost two hours until the commotion died down, she insisted that she would get some time off work and drive over to her for a few days as soon as she possibly could. She'd wanted to get in the car that night and drive over to Chrissie, but had been ordered in no uncertain terms not to. Chrissie assured Sarah that she would call on Grace if things got unbearable. Sarah felt that 'unbearable' had already been reached but didn't like to say, in case it unsettled Chrissie further.

Not only were there things going on in the house but to add to Chrissie's hysteria there were unexplained activities going on outside. The night it started she hadn't had too bad a day apart from the interference with the radio, but that was becoming a normal occurrence for her, and the atmosphere in the house hadn't dropped to its normal level.

Whatever it was that was going on outside seemed to have a knock-on effect of aggravating the activities indoors. She wasn't sure what she had heard at first because every time Chrissie turned down the television it appeared to stop. But then it continued so she switched

the TV to standby and waited. Then she heard it. A scratching at the window which she thought might be one of the cats. But after a quick look around she located all three. The scratching grew louder, and it sounded like a razor blade being dragged across the window, which caused Chrissie to shiver uncontrollably, even though she was sweating with fear. The cats began to stir, and a low deep growling could be heard coming from their tiny bodies. In her panic Chrissie had checked the back and front doors were locked and in doing so had briefly peered out of the small window to the door. She couldn't see anything and wasn't brave enough to pull back the curtains and look out of the windows. She'd made that mistake the other night when she thought she'd heard something, only to have been frightened out of her wits at the sight of her own haunted reflection.

Chrissie had curled up on the sofa with a blanket and the television turned up loud until it passed. When she thought the noise had stopped she began to feel brave enough to turn on the outside light and venture upstairs to look out of her bedroom window. At first, she didn't notice what was strange in the garden until she walked

away and then turned back. It reminded her of one of those picture quizzes where you had to spot the odd thing out.

The air was completely still that night although it hadn't felt like that with all the noise and the strained atmosphere inside her home. She'd imagined there to be a raging storm outside, but it was as still and quiet as most other late summer evenings. Everything in Chrissie's garden was perfectly still, even her cottage garden plants. What was glaringly obvious when she turned back to have another look was the swing hanging from the tree. And unlike everything else, it was swinging backwards and forwards with quite some force. Chrissie tried to suppress the bile that flooded her throat, before she ran to the toilet. She only just made it to the bathroom, so her body could express all the pent-up fear of the past few weeks in the only way it knew how. Anyone else would have called the police or left the house screaming but Chrissie was used to paranormal activity. She and her sisters had been brought up in an old rectory where it was a normal occurrence. She knew

the difference between that and an intruder. Or so she thought.

The freedom of walking along the beach in the light autumnal breeze was a huge relief to Chrissie as she waited for Grace to meet her for a chat. She spotted her in the distance, walking confidently across the beach car park towards her. She was unsure whether to tell her any more of what had happened, partly because she didn't want to appear obsessed with the whole thing, having only just met her, and because she wasn't sure if she wanted to hear any grimmer details about these child murders. She found it strange that she hadn't remembered hearing about them when she was younger, seeing as she'd holidayed here for many years as a child.

"Hello!" called Grace cheerfully to her as they approached one another. "Oh, dear, you don't look your best, are you coming down with something?"

"Thanks very much!" Chrissie said, giving Grace a brief hug and kiss on the cheek.

Grace laughed and returned her greeting.

“I’m not feeling too good as it happens. I’ve not been sleeping very well. But I’m sure a lovely walk along the beach will blow the cobwebs away.”

“Have you had some more problems at the house?” Grace asked.

“Yes, and I can’t understand it. I feel like I’m going around the bend! I had my step-children to stay for a few days and I thought it would all stop while they were here or that I’d realise I’d been seeing things. But it all continued and what really freaked me out was that James and Kate experienced it as well. They couldn’t get away quick enough.”

“So, do you really think it’s haunted?” said Grace, beginning to feel slightly uncomfortable.

“Well, I can’t think of any other explanation. Maybe the things that are being moved are simply me misplacing items, but the radio dial turning, and the television switching channels are definitely nothing to do with me.”

“Perhaps you’ve got an electrical fault; it might be worth getting someone to have a look at it all.”

“Oh, come on Grace, you and I both know that the previous owners had all that major work done before I got there. And it’s not just the electrical things; the latch doors keep opening on their own and the atmosphere and temperature in the house plummets for no reason. I think it’s got something to do with that child Tim was telling me about.” Chrissie was tentative, having not wanted to bring the subject up, but talking about her problem had stirred a curiosity inside her to know the facts.

“Don’t take too much notice of what Tim says. He thinks he’s laying out the bare facts to people when in fact they’re probably slightly exaggerated; typical of a policeman.”

Chrissie paused briefly from walking.

“I didn’t realise Tim’s in the police?”

“Was, in the police, he’s retired now; done his time.”

Chrissie nodded and watched the other woman’s expression change into what looked like disappointment. She waited, expecting her to continue with what she was saying but there was a long pause. As if by saying anything further about her husband, she’d let out too

much information. And, Chrissie was right; Grace felt that if she ever started talking to anyone about her marriage with Tim, she'd never be able to stop. And it was a much bigger trauma than Chrissie could ever anticipate.

"But there was a child found in my garden wasn't there?" said Chrissie wanting to pick up the conversation again.

"Yes, there was, but I don't think it has anything to do with the problems in your house. Her body was found near the old shed right at the end of your garden, quite a distance from the house. I think they discovered her in that stream that passes the bottom of your land. Poor little love."

"What, my shed? The one I told you about? Why didn't you tell me at the time?"

"Because I didn't want to frighten you. Cause you to panic unnecessarily and put two and two together and come up with five like you're doing now."

Grace stopped and turned to face her friend, who looked even more haunted than she had when she'd first arrived.

“Look Chrissie, let’s not talk about it; you don’t need to know the gory details. Let’s talk about how we can solve your problem. Hey?”

Chrissie looked like she was about to cry; a mixture of fatigue and fear almost visibly washed over her. Grace suddenly felt very protective of Chrissie; there was a strange responsibility for her. Grace felt almost like she was partly to blame for all the catastrophic nightmares that her husband had caused. There were still new consequences to his actions, like ripples in the water appearing endlessly. And Grace felt she needed to fix what little she could.

“But don’t you think if I know all the details then I’ll be able to make some sense of what’s happening. Just because that little girl was found at the bottom of my garden doesn’t rule out the fact that she could be haunting my house. Maybe, if I trace it all back and find out who lived in the house before the previous owners, I might be able to find out what happened in the house during the time these murders took place. You did say there was more than one child, didn’t you?”

“Yes, there was more than one child. I think there were eight or nine altogether,” said Grace, continuing to stroll again as they talked. It was going to be an uncomfortable conversation, but Grace managed to detach what she knew about her husband from the whole story. That was her business, and something she didn’t want another living soul to know. Not if she was to successfully complete her plan.

Grace composed herself and relayed all the facts she knew about the children who had left this world in a way that no living creature should have to endure.

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NORFOLK 1984

Jennifer had been so excited about the birthday party she was having after school that she didn’t think twice when her friend’s father had stopped her on her

way home from school. He told her that her mother had asked him to take her in his car to the local café for a birthday treat. Make sure she got there safely.

She knew Tim quite well, having been to his house to play with his daughter, Nadine many times. Her mother had told her not to go off with strangers or even talk to them. But Tim wasn't a stranger so that made it alright.

When he locked the car door, so she couldn't get out and drove in the opposite direction which took them down some desolate Norfolk back roads, she started to worry.

"Where are we going? That's not the way into town."

"You didn't seriously think I was going to actually take you to the café, did you?" Tim glanced at her in the back of the car; his face having changed completely.

"But where are we going?" Jennifer's face was a mixture of surprise and confusion. Her first thought was that her mother had organised a bigger party for her at the village hall and kept it a secret. But fear was creeping through her stomach, telling her that all was not well.

“And I wouldn’t waste your time trying to get out of the car, it’s got child locks.” He said, spotting her hand moving towards the handle.

Jennifer, who had just turned eleven that day, stared back at the stranger who she had made the mistake of getting into the car with. The fear had reached her throat, twisting it and causing her mouth to sporadically open and close in an effort to make a noise. Her hand was white from the grip on the car door handle and she seemed incapable of movement, as the reality of who he was dawned on her. All she kept thinking was why it had to be her, and of all days her birthday.

Jennifer’s downfall had been her beautiful green eyes and curly dark hair. Her skin was as white as a lily; making her red lips and emerald green eyes stand out. She was striking and that was what had attracted Tim to her. Every victim was picked carefully but usually because they had aesthetically struck a chord inside him. A bit like two people meeting each other for the first time and falling madly in love. But not the warped, twisted, sinister way that Tim loved his victims.

Feeling warmly satisfied, Tim took some time to watch Jennifer laying in the little copse surrounded by trees, his choice of a bed for her. It was well hidden down an unused back road and along a track that not many people knew about. He rolled a cigarette from his tobacco tin as he observed her like a work of art.

She looked even more beautiful now than she had when she'd been alive. Her green eyes were still sparkling, but now glazed; they held a snap shot of the fear she had endured only moments previously.

Death fascinated him. The way a person's eyes altered, showing no emotion, becoming empty, coloured oval shaped glass. Tim loved that part, when he could reflect on the stillness of his victim like a photo in an album. All his snapshots were logged safely in the dark cellar of his mind. The bonus was that he got to keep a memory scent as well as a picture.

Jennifer lay in her cold, damp grave, her body mostly naked apart from her school cardigan that Tim had decided to put back on her after he'd taken her shirt. Mud caked her nails where she had grabbed at the ground to get away from him. Those fingers that had been so

frenetic moments earlier now lay motionless like a statue, as if they would crack and break under the slightest movement. Her distorted tiny body, paler than when she'd been alive, now lay broken like an old doll. A grey blue shade was beginning to colour her white skin. Her tiny neck was in an unnatural position where Tim had broken it from strangling her so hard.

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A few weeks later Tim knocked hard on Jennifer's mother's door, as he and his colleague removed their police hats as a mark of respect.

"I hate doing this." His workmate said, gripping his hat as if it might transport him to another time and place.

"So do I, mate." Tim could see Marion, Jennifer's mother coming towards them through the frosted glass door. He discreetly glanced at his watch. All Tim could think about was getting this over and done with and going on his lunch break.

A tearful Marion opened the door, a tissue already gripped to her mouth.

“You’ve found her haven’t you...Oh god no...not my Jennifer!”

Marion’s legs buckled from underneath her and she fell against the porch door frame, as she took in the two police officers faces, knowing it wasn’t good news. Tim grabbed her before she completely collapsed and managed to get her into her living room.

His colleague, Paul busied himself in her kitchen, glad to have been allocated the job of making her a strong cup of tea.

Tim made her comfortable on the sofa and explained how a gamekeeper had stumbled across a body on his estate. The police believed it to be that of Jennifer. Tim told her how she or another member of her family would have to formally identify Jennifer’s body and that it would probably be best if it was someone other than her because Jennifer had been put in a shallow grave but left out in the extremities for several weeks.

Tim then let Paul take over for a bit, while he busied himself calling members of her family and her

local doctor so that he could prescribe her something to calm her down.

Marion wept and wept like she'd never stop; her heart was slowly and painfully breaking. She'd become a widow, two years previously and now she'd lost her only child. She'd known something had happened to Jennifer when she hadn't come home from school that day. She knew she wouldn't have missed her birthday party for the world.

Marion had watched the clock in the kitchen as she'd flitted around the dining table laying out plates of homemade sausage rolls, coloured biscuits, and cheese on sticks.

She'd wanted it to be so special for her. Jennifer's last birthday had been filled with sadness because it was her first birthday after her father had died of cancer. His diagnosis had left him with a death sentence of six weeks, and he had deteriorated rapidly. Before Marion and Jennifer knew it, they were standing by his grave saying their goodbyes to him.

Jennifer had just begun to enjoy life again; accepting that her father wasn't coming back, but that he

would always be watching over her. So, Marion had wanted her to have a birthday party that she would never forget. Not just marking her birthday but also a fresh start. But now it would be a birthday that Marion would never forget, for all the wrong reasons.

While Marion had been busy preparing the table, she had assumed that Jennifer was held up by excited friends and maybe stopped off at one of their houses on the way home. Something she forbade her to do without informing her where she would be and what time she would be home. But because Marion was distracted with the party and it being Jennifer's birthday she'd let it pass, just this once, assuming she'd got caught up receiving more birthday gifts. She was such a popular girl.

When the party guests arrived with no Jennifer in tow and no news of her since they'd all left school, she knew that something was wrong. She also knew after the first night that Jennifer was missing that she was never coming back. Jennifer would never leave her like that and not tell her where she was going. She wouldn't leave her mother's side since her father had died. She was such a caring and protective little girl, sometimes Marion had

felt, in her deepest moments of grief that they had swapped roles and Jennifer had mothered her instead of the other way around.

It still didn't make the news relayed to her by the police officers any easier. Even though she knew Jennifer's fate already, there was still that glimmer of hope she had clung onto every day. And now it was all over.

CHAPTER SIX

Norfolk 1998

Chrissie sat at her writing desk mulling over the information that Grace had told her about the murders of all the children. She needed to concentrate on her writing, but it kept going around and around in her head. It wasn't only the horror of the story that she couldn't let go of but there was also something nagging her about it all. She was sure it was in some way connected to the strange episodes she was having in her house. Grace hadn't offered much information about who had lived in the house over the years, just that she remembered it being a holiday home for a time. What Chrissie was really

shocked at was that no one had been caught for the crimes. Apparently, the police hadn't even come close to it. Whoever it was had been extremely clever and left no evidence. The only consistent piece of information the police had was that the murderer took a souvenir from the body, usually an item of clothing, and that all the victims were children and they had all been sexually assaulted before being murdered. The police thought it was a local man because whoever it was knew the area very well, always choosing secluded places normally down the country roads that formed a bridge between villages. It made Chrissie shudder to think there was some creep on the loose who hadn't been made to pay for his crimes. Not that Chrissie could think of any type of punishment that would make up for what had happened to those poor little souls and their families. Grace had told her how it had affected the area dreadfully and even though it had all happened a long time ago it was still a very sore subject. Especially in the villages that each child came from; it was still so fresh in their minds.

What Chrissie couldn't understand was why she wasn't able to recall anything about the murders. Even

though she was a child when they'd happened, and she'd only visited the area on holiday, she surely would have remembered them being talked about, or it being on the news? Another strange thing Grace had told her was that the murders suddenly just stopped. There was talk in some of the villages that whoever committed the crimes had either died or moved away. But then if they'd moved away, they surely would have continued murdering in another area. Maybe the murderer was dead. Not a bad thing, Chrissie thought to herself, although, if it had been a member of her family she would have wanted the bastard publicly tortured and hanged.

The phone rang, startling her and interrupting her thoughts.

"Hello, Mum. How are you?"

"I'm fine thank you, darling and, how are you? I was just ringing to see how you were settling in to darkest Norfolk."

Chrissie took a deep breath and mentally counted to ten. She wasn't going to tell her mother what had been going on in the house, which would only serve to give her the pleasure of saying "I told you so".

“Very well, thank you, Mother. I’ve got some bits and pieces to do here but the previous people did the main work which has made it all a lot easier. The areas lovely and I’ve made a couple of friends already.’

“Oh, how lovely for you darling. Your Father and I are hoping to come and visit you before Christmas. Is the house habitable?”

“Yes, its fine Mother,” Chrissie rolled her eyes to the heavens, “and it’ll probably be completely sorted by the time you and Dad get here. While you’re on the line Mum, do you remember anything about a series of child murders that happened in this area? It was quite a few years ago but some of them would have been about the time we came down here on holiday.”

The line went quiet and Chrissie wondered if they’d been cut off.

“Mum, are you still there?”

“Yes, darling...I’m just trying to remember...I can vaguely recall something about it. Why?”

“Oh, nothing really, it’s just something that was being discussed in the pub the other night and I wondered

why I couldn't recall anything about it. It was obviously a major enquiry."

"Yes, yes it must have been...oh sorry darling I must go there's someone at the door. Daddy sends his love, speak soon..."

"Oh, ok, by Mum. Love to you all too..." she found herself saying to a dead line.

Sylvia didn't have anyone at her door at all, and she'd remembered, as if it were yesterday, what Chrissie was asking her about. How could she forget that her precious daughter could have so easily been one of the victims?

That was one of the reasons why she and Peter, Chrissie's father, hadn't wanted her to move there. But Chrissie had seen it as another one of their over protective episodes. They had often wondered if they should have told her when she got older, because for some strange reason Chrissie quickly forgot about the whole incident, which had been a blessing in disguise. They had watched her like a hawk and taken her to the doctors for regular checkups after the attack. The doctor had told them it was quite common for a child to

temporarily erase a frightening memory from their brain due to shock. And that was exactly what Chrissie had done. So, throughout her life she had been unaware of why her parents and her sisters were so protective of her. She had often complained that they suffocated her, when, it was because they were all still living through the terrible awareness that things could have been so awfully different and that they felt incredibly blessed to have her with them.

They had all been heart broken when she announced she was moving away and even more distressed when she told them where she was going. But they couldn't protect her forever and while they were suffocating her with their love, they all knew that they were slowly losing her.

Sylvia had thought it was best she didn't know the truth because she was frightened of how it would affect her daughter's life. Chrissie was such a free-spirited child; a trait that Sylvia was glad hadn't been shocked out of her by that horrible incident. She just hoped and prayed that after the telephone conversation they'd just had, her memory didn't come flooding back.

*

Dear Alice,

I dreamt about you again last night, but it felt different to what I normally dream.

You were in your favourite night dress. You know the white one with the embroidered panel down the front? You'd worn it the night before you went away.

Anyway, you were standing in a clearing, surrounded by trees with a field behind you. You were beckoning me to come towards you.

We hugged and hugged for what seemed like an age. It was so real Alice! The feeling has stayed with me all day like a scent that clings to your skin. I could even smell your beautiful blonde hair. We didn't speak, just held each other. The relief I felt in my sleep was incredible and I was quite upset when I awoke. I felt free for the first time in so many years. Like this massive

weight had lifted from me. Of course, when I first awoke I didn't know where I was because the dream was so vivid. I ran into your bedroom knowing I was going to see you laying there asleep. But then reality hit me like an iron wall. I sat on your bed for a long time wishing I could swap it all for my dreams.

Daddy told me to go back to bed and get some more sleep, which was what I did in the hope that I would see you again. But there was nothing.

The sleep did me good though, because when I awoke again I realised how lucky I was to have that dream. I feel that it is another sign. I think it was you letting me know that we will see you again very soon, a bit like a premonition.

Daddy is still trying to talk me into going on holiday with him, but when I suggested to him about taking one of his fishing friends with him I think he realised that I'm not going to budge on my decision, especially not after this. It isn't that Daddy doesn't love you darling. It's just his way of dealing with it all.

Anyway, he seems to be resigned to the fact that I won't go on holiday with him and he's thinking about taking your Uncle Tim with him instead.

Loving you always,

Mummy xxx

*

NORFOLK 1998

Tim sat in his draughty old shed and, pulling his coat tighter around him he took a large slurp of his hot toddy, the ratio of which was more rum than coffee. The weather had suddenly turned cold because of the bad winds whipping across from the sea. It felt like winter already and it was only September. The wind whisked around the shed making a noise that could be mistaken

for people whispering outside. But Tim was familiar with these old noises caused by the wind tunnel that was their garden. When Grace and he had first lived there, and he was just beginning to collect his memory scents and store them in his new shed, he'd thought it was a ghost haunting him. He chuckled at this thought, remembering how naïve and impatient he'd been in his younger days in comparison to the confident and relaxed person he was now.

He needed time to sit and think about his options because he was becoming very bored. Retirement had done Tim no favours whatsoever, and more to the point it wouldn't help the local community if he decided to continue with his old games. Not that this little fact bothered his conscience.

Tim needed to think carefully about the whole thing even though his urges had been getting unbearable. He had managed to take the edge off that though, by stealing a few items of clothing here and there. His best ones had been from Chrissie's place. Her smells held a special mixture of memories for him. She was connected to the past, from a time that had been filled with

excitement and danger for him. Sniffing her clothes was a bit like smelling all his victims at once from a fresh scent altogether. Although he was still sore about the fact she hadn't become another of his conquests. But he had to be grateful for what he could get now, and she was a link to tide him over for the time being.

He loved the power he had of frightening her and the fact that he could so easily get into her house without her knowing and rifle through her linen basket; stealing various items of clothing. He had so far taken a couple of vest tops and an old cardigan because it was small and reminded him of a child's pullover. Tim never took underwear. He'd never been a knickers man unless they were on little girls. The smell of a woman had never turned him on and only served to repulse him. Chrissie's dirty underwear had been removed from her linen basket with a look of disgust on his face, like he was removing a dead mouse from a trap. He'd never been able to understand those types of men who took so much pleasure from smelling women's knickers. Even going as far as buying them from people who advertised in

magazines. They were dirty perverts as far as he was concerned.

The problem Tim had was that he realised there had been an element of luck involved when he had played his games and got away with it. He knew that he was incredibly clever; bordering on genius he liked to think. But if he hadn't been in the police force he knew he would have been looked at closely like every other man in the area and remembering lies as you wove them would have made the whole process much harder. As he often reflected on it, it had all been straightforward and easy; he'd felt like a child in a sweet shop. There was one little problem he had with it being so many years on, and that was the discovery of DNA. He was always very careful not to leave anything behind anywhere, but he knew now that with technology becoming so advanced, low copy DNA evidence would soon be utilised within the forensic world, he'd read about it. It wasn't too much of a problem for him because he wasn't registered on the national database anyway, not having a criminal record. But even so, he had to be careful.

The other factor that he was worried about was the CID department and all the new police officers that he didn't know. He'd started in the police force extremely young and had served his thirty years. Most of the officers he'd worked with were also retired or had left on ill health. The new crowd were much more on the ball than when he'd been a serving police officer. In the days when he served the community it was much more laid back, especially in the villages. If you misbehaved, you got a clip round the ear or a warning. Whereas now, it wasn't just the community that was watched but you and your colleagues too; everyone was under suspicion. The fresh blood wouldn't take any notice of anyone telling them that he was a respectable, retired policeman who had served his community well.

His mind drifted backwards and forwards like a swaying ship. Jonathan, Alice, Nadine....

His thoughts flitted back to Chrissie, and he chuckled to himself as he remembered seeing her frightened face squashed up against the tiny window of her front door; full of panic and shock. If she'd had any common sense, she would have turned her indoor lights

off and looked out of her window. He thought everyone knew that you could see into someone's house when they had the lights on, and they couldn't see out unless they turned them off. He'd almost fallen over with laughter when he'd seen her scream at her own reflection. Scraping a razor blade on her windows was working a treat, but he needed to be careful that he didn't get seen there. Luckily, Grace had come home from Chrissie's the other day, saying that she had her friend Sarah arriving for a few days, so he stayed well clear. It would also look like she'd lost the plot if she told her friend about the experiences and there didn't appear to be any evidence of it.

A few days break from Chrissie's house would give him time to plan what he was going to do next.

*

NORFOLK 1987

“I’ll meet you in the garden of that old derelict house, where we went the other day? I can’t talk to you at yours, I can’t risk anyone hearing.” Nadine pushed her mouth closer to the receiver as she said the last sentence. “Yes, I’m fine. Honestly. I’ll see you tomorrow. We can get in the house through the back door; some old tramp that was living there wrenched it open. Ok? I’ll see you in the morning.”

Nadine hung up the phone in her parent’s bedroom and peered round the door to see if anyone was lurking before she ventured out.

She crept across the hallway quietly, so she could get to her room without anyone noticing. She checked again before closing her bedroom door behind her; the only person she hadn’t wanted to hear that conversation had been her father.

Unfortunately for Nadine, that one and only person had been eavesdropping on her phone call, standing in the shadows of the study. He had crept outside the door

and heard every word. He'd been watching her like a hawk since he'd caught her in his shed. He hadn't been sure of what she'd seen at first, she wasn't giving much away. But he'd felt a definite change in her attitude towards him. She'd sulked in her bedroom more than normal and had been distant and vague, distracted. Grace had put it down to hormones or that she was coming down with something.

Nadine might have been hormonal due to her age, but she wasn't coming down with anything. She was so shell shocked by what she'd seen in her father's shed. She'd looked in almost every box in there. At first, she hadn't realised what they were, but then she came across some items she recognised as belonging to one of her friends. That and the blood stains had given the game away.

If she'd run into the house as she'd first intended after making the discovery, she'd probably have survived. But Tim had caught her on her way out of the shed door. Both startled at the sight of each other. The look on his face had made him appear unrecognisable to her and it had frightened her to the core. He didn't have

to say anything, that one look in the dusky light of the evening was enough to scare her into silence in case she had discovered his secret.

Grace assumed Tim had scolded her badly for going in his shed and encroaching on his privacy.

Nadine had kept it to herself for quite a few days. There had been a several occasions when she'd approached Grace to tell her, but nothing would come out of her mouth and Tim was usually hovering nearby.

She had to talk to someone about it, which was why she'd organised to meet up with her friend.

It had been a race between good and evil. In those few days that she was trying to work things out in her head, Tim was plotting how he could get rid of her.

Unfortunately, he won the race, Nadine had spent too long mulling it over. It was all too huge for her to cope with and she'd had no idea what to do with the information she'd discovered. Apart from knowing that she had to report him, her father.

She'd arrived at the tumble-down house early, mainly due to nerves. She wandered round the garden, scuffing up old bits of pottery while she waited for her friend.

She didn't see or hear Tim coming up behind her.

She managed a few muffled screams through his large fingers that were clamped around her mouth, as he dragged her across the rough waste land. As he pushed her into the cess pit and took his hand off her mouth she screamed out 'No!'

Tim made himself scarce, as the dog walker who had passed her earlier heard her scream and ran to her aid. The cess pit was well camouflaged, and it was a few hours before Nadine's body was found.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Norfolk 1998

Grace was becoming increasingly worried about the strange change in her husband's behaviour. He'd always behaved oddly, but there had been something different about him for the last few weeks. He seemed to be distracted a lot more than normal, and he was frequently absent, not telling her where he was going. It was beginning to unnerve her because it hadn't occurred to her before that he might start looking for more potential victims again. He'd stopped all that as soon as his mother had gone into a retirement home. It had

triggered something in his twisted little brain. Grace didn't understand what, but it was the only traumatic thing that had happened to him personally and she couldn't think of another explanation. It had to be personal to affect Tim, because if it wasn't, then he was his usual cold-hearted self. Not that he showed that side of himself to anyone except Grace and his victims.

Grace thought back to the day she'd caught Tim out and the utter shock that still engulfed her as the reality had unfolded in her mind in slow motion.

It had been over a year ago and Tim had been behaving particularly oddly. Grace knew things weren't right between them and hadn't been for many years. He hadn't been near her for months, so she naturally assumed that he was having an affair. She'd searched around the house one day, but found no evidence of another woman. Then she thought about his shed; the precious place that no one was ever allowed to go. She remembered Nadine being really upset because Tim had scolded her badly for catching her in there. She sulked in her bedroom for days and Grace had wondered then why he was so touchy about it. The shed was kept under lock

and key and Tim claimed after the incident with Nadine that it was his own private domain. The only place he said he had where he could get away from nagging women. After that he kept his keys on him at all times.

Grace had forgotten about the shed for many years, understandably, because of Nadine's accident overshadowing it all. But when Grace thought he was acting strangely, she remembered how sensitive he was about his shed.

Tim probably hadn't been acting any different to normal; it was just that his personality was more noticeable to Grace because she was looking for a way out. An excuse to leave him; but not the excuse she was going to be dealt.

It had taken a long time to get the keys from him without him knowing. She'd had to wait for him to go on one of his fishing trips with his mates and come home well oiled. She laid on a hearty meal and plenty more drink for him when he got home. The idea was that he'd fall asleep, drunk in front of the television. Giving her time to get the keys and nip down to the shed.

At first when she looked around the cramped old shed, she was surprised at how tidy he kept everything. She'd imagined it to be like any other shed, full of useless old tools, gadgets and dirty magazines. But Tim's shed was different, once you looked passed all the usual things like the lawn mower, garden shears, and cans of turpentine. There were boxes neatly stacked on all the shelves that surrounded the walls of his shed. They were all marked with coloured labels; so, all the boxes with blue labels were stacked together, and all the ones with red labels were in their own place and so on and so on. She made a mental note to remember to put the boxes that she took down, back in their rightful place. She didn't want to risk him finding out that she'd ever been in there just in case she didn't discover anything.

Unfortunately, Grace decided to look in the boxes that were hidden under the wooden worktop that Tim had installed in there for what she assumed was potting. They were unmarked and easily accessible to her even though they were pushed out of the way. It took her a few seconds to realise what she was looking at in the boxes. At first, she thought they were boxes full of old stained

rags, which she thought might be covering up some love letters or photographs; but then she rifled through one of them and found a small soft toy bunny at the bottom. She took it out and stared at it. She remembered thinking how odd it was because she hadn't recalled Nadine having one like it. Then, as she shone the torch on the items she had mistaken for rags she realised that they weren't stained with varnish or wax but what looked like dried blood. Each item she pulled out was a piece of child's clothing; some were inside polythene bags. Vests, school shirts, cardigans, knickers, even hair bands. Some were stained with blood and some weren't. She had passed each item through her hands as if her arms didn't belong to her anymore and it all began to slot into place.

Grace's immediate reaction had been to march straight inside the house and confront the bastard or call the police. She didn't know which. The sad thing was that she wasn't surprised that he could do such a thing, she was just totally devastated and shocked that he had. She had wondered, fleetingly when each child was found, if he had anything to do with it. But she'd quickly pushed it from her mind, scolding herself for having such an

abhorrent thought. There had been no logical reason why she should think that about him. Tim was a complete asshole at home but whatever he was, she always saw him as an excellent police officer. Never in her wildest dreams did she think he was capable of anything so evil. He'd even come home from work and ranted to her about what a sick and twisted bastard the murderer must be and how he and his colleagues didn't know what they'd do to him if they caught him. Unfortunately, it had all been a very clever piece of acting.

Looking back, she'd been glad of the fact she'd discovered his secret while he was pissed. It left her time to think because she was unable to talk to him while he was passed out on the settee.

Grace had always felt prison was far too good for child killers and paedophiles. And as she had begun to think as rationally as she could that night in the shed, she realised that this was the perfect way to get rid of him for good. Tim had always told her the best way to get away with murder was to make it look like the victim had committed suicide. So, that's exactly what she intended to do with him. She just wasn't quite sure when and how.

She'd had plenty of time to think about it because she hadn't been worried about him hurting anyone else. The last tragic victim had been ten years ago. And that had been her sister's daughter, Alice. That discovery had hurt her most of all and she wanted revenge so much that she thought it would consume her. The sand timer appeared to be running out though, and Grace didn't want the risk of another victim because that would most definitely be something she couldn't live with on her conscience. Living with the guilt that she'd let him walk free for a year, while she figured out what to do with him, was bad enough.

*

NORFOLK 1983

Tim had placed himself strategically in his car on the sea front with a full view of the beach. He was right at the end of the harbour, so he could see everyone on the beach and had a clear view across the road and along the parade of shops. He'd been over to the newsagents to buy a newspaper and a pasty. Firstly, to make it look like he was just a normal man passing the time in his car having a lunch break. And secondly, so that on his way back from the shop he could check that the sun was shining in the right direction, shielding any view through the windows so that the car appeared to be empty. This was all so he could have full view of all the families arriving for a day out with their children. It was the summer holidays and the coast was crawling with them; Tim's favourite time of year.

He sat in the hot car for hours watching over his paper. The heat and oily stench in the car, which now mixed with his sweat and bad breath didn't seem to bother him like it would anyone else. He was used to

being shut in stifling areas for great lengths of time, another skill he had his mother to thank for.

The heat and his lunch laying heavy in his stomach were causing him to feel sleepy. Even though child watching was one of his favourite activities, he was growing bored.

That was until he spotted his next victim, like a sparkling jewel amongst some faded beads. Tim sat up abruptly. He scrambled for the dial so that he could pull up his seat which he'd previously lowered to a reasonable nap level.

Everything and everyone else turned a shade of grey, like a black and white television screen with one person standing out in vibrant colour. That one person flying towards Tim's vision as if she'd been miraculously magnified was twelve-year-old Jacqueline. She lived further up the coast in the next village with her mother and father and her older brother, so Tim had never encountered her before.

She was walking down the steps to the beach with her family, her gangly frame exposed to the sun, wearing only shorts and a vest top. Apart from being tall and

slender for her age, which Tim found immensely attractive, it was her extremely long vibrant red hair that had caught his eye. It was down to her waist, making her appear even taller than she actually was. The tones of her hair sparkled in the afternoon sun, accentuating her deep cornflower blue eyes.

To Tim, she was a stunning object of desire and he wanted her. To anyone else she was a pretty, kind hearted, innocent little girl.

He had made up his mind the moment he set eyes on her that he would pursue her until he got his way.

Jacqueline had gone from having her life spread out endlessly before her to a limit of a few days in a matter of seconds. A decision made by a stranger who was play acting god, with an ego the size of the universe.

No one told Jacqueline or her family that she had only a few days to live. Tim didn't give her that privilege, or any of his victims for that matter. Her father had taken a week off work to spend with his children and wife. They spent the days, carefree in the coastal sunshine, oblivious to the sinister stranger lurking in the back ground like the grim reaper.

Tim effortlessly snatched her as she was walking from the village where she lived to go and meet her brother, who got up before the light of day to go fishing in a nearby pond. Jacqueline had taken to joining him when she got up; leaving their parents to enjoy a lie in before they dragged them up for another day out.

Jacqueline's memory scents had been particularly special to Tim. He normally took one item of clothing and a toy if they had been carrying one. Getting a toy as well as a piece of clothing was a real treat to Tim. Toys carried stronger, different smells. Mainly because they'd come from the child's bed.

In this case though he'd taken Jacqueline's vest top, and pulling her beautiful mane of red hair together, he cut it along the nape of her neck. He tied the pony tail in the middle with the hair bobble she'd been wearing.

He sat on the soft ground next to Jacqueline's twitching, cold body and buried his face in her hair and sniffed hard. He was so astounded by its beauty that it brought a tear to his eye. It glistened golden against the

rays of light that were shining through the trees in the small wood where he had dragged its owner.

A blackbird landed on one of the branches near Tim, startling him at first. The bird cocked its head at the sight laid in the clearing as if it had seen it all before. Life and death. A dead girl, lying awkwardly over some tree roots, half naked. With a man sat next to her holding a long piece of golden hair as if he'd discovered the most precious thing in the whole world. To Tim, the line between life and death was flimsy and fickle, all part of the game he was playing.

*

NORFOLK 1998

For the first time since Chrissie had been in her new home, she'd had a completely incident free day. Sarah was arriving in the morning and she wanted to make sure it was as homely as possible.

She didn't know what the cease in activity was about, but she wasn't going to complain about it. For some reason the cottage had taken on an air of calm within its walls and the peace inside was tangible. Chrissie had spent the day soaking up the calm atmosphere, albeit slightly apprehensively. She had got used to it changing so dramatically, but today it all felt different somehow.

She'd felt safe enough to have the doors open and allow some fresh sea air to weave its way around the stagnant old cottage. Perhaps that was what had made the difference, she'd thought to herself as she put flowers in vases, lit oil burners, and unpacked the rest of her books.

She'd not seen a soul that day and had thoroughly enjoyed having some fairly nerve free time to herself.

Opening a bottle of wine and sitting down at her kitchen table with a steaming plate of pasta and fresh shellfish from the local shop, Chrissie let her new home envelope her. She'd even felt comfortable enough to play some music on her stereo, something she hadn't done since she'd arrived, having found comfort and company

in the television. She had felt the noise from it had drowned out the spirits that haunted her.

The only thing that made her jump out of her chair that evening was the sudden rush of cats through her open kitchen door, as they made chase with one another in the slightly breezy late summer evening.

*

After a shockingly peaceful night's sleep, Chrissie, having finished making the cottage as homely as possible, sat outside with a cup of coffee and watched her garden.

She loved the transitional stage between summer and autumn where both seasons amicably merged, celebrating the end of one and the beginning of the other.

As she sipped her coffee, Chrissie glanced down towards the bottom of the garden and debated whether to venture into the shady area to the old brick shed. The fresh atmosphere of the house had encouraged her to explore her surroundings and wholeheartedly embrace her property without fear.

It all appeared to be peaceful and silent and the only way to conquer it all was to face it and alter the atmosphere herself. After all, this was her house now, and whatever had happened before was in the past and that was where she wanted it to stay.

Feeling a bit more assertive, Chrissie began to wander across the grass, making a mental note of the plants and flowers as she went by, as if by acknowledging them she would be sweeping a new ownership over the entire house and garden.

As she approached the bowed trees which led to the clearing down to the stream she couldn't resist the urge to quickly look behind her. But there was nothing, no horrible feeling, no cold atmosphere, nothing.

Chrissie made her way slowly through the trees, ducking slightly to avoid catching her hair in the branches. There was the stream and the old brick shed which was secretly disguising itself as a chapel. And that's all she could detect, except for the slight anticipation in the pit of her stomach.

Braver still, Chrissie went towards the shed and put her hand on the large metal latch. She turned it and

pushed the decrepit door forwards and stared into the empty darkness. A cold, damp breeze swept passed her face and apart from the birds singing and the slight rustle of the leaves in the trees, there was a gentle silence.

Chrissie breathed a sigh of relief and leaned forward to grab the latch on the door and pull it shut. The door seemed to be caught on the floor of the shed and as Chrissie yanked it forward she looked up and noticed the top of the door had come off its hinge.

A vision, albeit brief, swept across her mind and the hairs on her arms lifted, magnetised by the sudden memory. It was of her falling through that very door and scrabbling on the ground in a panic, followed by a need to escape. From what or who she didn't know. Even though the flash in her mind had been brief, she was aware of a feeling that came with the vision that someone else was there. Someone, who she was desperately trying to escape. She sought the comfort of the cottage and ran rather than walked back to the house.

CHAPTER EIGHT

In the morning Chrissie started preparing the dinner for the evening ahead. She just about had time to make a nice autumnal casserole for the slow cooker before her friend Sarah arrived. She'd put the previous night's incident down to another psychic vision. Considering it had unnerved her somewhat, she'd still managed to have a peaceful night's sleep.

She didn't want to dwell on it too much for fear of bringing back a horrible atmosphere or attracting spirits. She didn't understand it all, but it had made her wonder whether someone from beyond the grave was trying to lead her to the guilty party.

She shook the thought from her mind and concentrated on the job at hand. A knock at the door made her realise how jumpy she'd become again.

“Goodness me, you gave me a fright! You’re early...” said Chrissie, flinging the door open to an equally startled Sarah.

“And you look like you’ve been caught doing something you shouldn’t. Come here!”

They hugged for quite some time and there was more to their embrace than two old friends who hadn’t seen each other for a while. Sarah was hugging her friend to give her comfort as though she’d just rescued her from falling down a cliff. Chrissie felt this emotion from her, and allowed Sarah to comfort her. The tears started, and she felt like they’d flow forever.

“Come on, let me get in and I’ll make us a nice hot drink and then you can tell me all about it,” said Sarah, shivering as she entered the strange cottage, unsure whether it was just from what she’d been told or a genuine sense of foreboding.

After Chrissie had explained wearily every little detail of the activities that had been haunting her, Sarah insisted on a tour of the old house. They avoided the garden for the time being because Chrissie was feeling

rather uneasy again. Postponing the garden had relieved Sarah. She hadn't liked the sound of the old brick shed that looked like a chapel, not if the house was anything to go by. Sarah didn't say anything to Chrissie, not wanting to frighten her any more than she was, but the house had the most awful atmosphere and Sarah couldn't understand what charm anyone could possibly see in the place. The garden and the look of the cottage, she accepted, was very attractive, but once inside it gave off a feeling of terrible foreboding.

"Right," said Sarah, pulling out a chair at the kitchen table and plonking herself down in it, "we need to work out whether or not these feelings are coming from you or from an outside influence."

"What do you mean? Of course, it's an outside influence. I'm not making it up."

Chrissie stared meaningfully at her best friend, praying that after all she'd told her she wasn't going to say it was all in her mind.

"Calm down." said Sarah, making herself more comfortable in her chair and tucking her blonde hair behind her ears, "I didn't mean that at all. What I meant

was it could be a memory from your past that is being stirred by these surroundings or there is some sort of spirit trying to reach you with a message. I suspect it is the latter after you told me about the child that was found at the bottom of the garden.”

“How could it be something from my past? I’d know about it, surely?”

“Not necessarily. All our memories are logged somewhere in our brains, but we aren’t always capable of accessing them. Sometimes due to fear we block them. I wasn’t referring to memories from this life, but maybe you’re experiencing something that has come from a past life. And I did just say I don’t think that is the cause.”

“I don’t know what to think anymore. Oh God, I feel like I’m going mad! You know when you feel like you’re just about keeping it all together, but one little thing could cause you to tip over the edge?”

Chrissie put her head in her hands, and Sarah sat quietly, deep in thought watching her, whilst she drained the dregs of her tea cup.

‘Why don’t you have a therapy session with me while I’m here?’ Sarah rubbed Chrissie’s arm, trying to comfort her friend.

“Do you think it’ll work or will I just be stirring up more trouble?” Chrissie squeezed Sarah’s hand and got up from the kitchen table to get herself some tissue from the downstairs toilet, so she could blow her nose. She wasn’t sure she believed whole-heartedly in what Sarah did even though she was a professional hypnotherapist, Chrissie found some of her views hard to grasp.

“Of course, it’ll help, I’m not saying it’ll be easy and it might reveal some things that you may have to confront and deal with, but if you don’t...”

A loud scream caused Sarah to throw back her chair and run to Chrissie who was still in the toilet.

“What is it!?” Sarah grabbed Chrissie.

“It’s ok... I’m ok,” Chrissie stuttered through gasps as she gripped her chest, “it’s a bloody great black spider...”

“You frightened the living day lights out of me! I thought there was a headless figure in here or

something!’ she laughed and put her arm around her friend.

“Now, that’s not funny.” said Chrissie.

“And neither is your irrational fear of spiders...”

*

Tim watched his mother as she rattled on about the issues she had with the staff in the retirement home. He couldn’t quite fathom how you could so passionately love someone but detest them at the same time. He hadn’t even loved his own daughter like he loved his mother. Loved her yes, but not with the intensity that he did his mother. He’d never been able to understand that paternal bond that all his friends talked about. He just remembered having these strange, confused feelings for her, knowing that she was his daughter and he was supposed to feel this overwhelming love for her. And he’d assumed when she was born that it would be like the love he felt for his mother. He’d waited and waited, but

nothing, other than a growing feeling of fondness because he thought she looked a little bit like him. But then she'd betrayed him and whatever love he'd had for her had dissipated like early morning mist. Unbeknownst to Tim, she couldn't have looked anything like him; it wasn't possible, as she didn't belong to him.

"You haven't listened to a word I've said have you? I don't know why you bother coming to visit me at all if you're just going to sit there and stare at the wall."

"I was listening Mother, I always do. I've told you before that if you've got a problem with the staff here then you must make a complaint to the manager when you see her."

"And what good is she going to do, pray tell? She's just as useless as them. Don't worry about it, Timothy, I'll ask Eve when she comes to visit." Daphne gave Tim one of her scathing looks and continued taking out her anger on the innocent blood orange she was peeling.

"What's she been visiting you for?"

“Her in laws have moved in here and we bumped into each other. When she pops in on them, she often comes to see me as well, if you must know.”

“Grace never said.”

“Why would she? It’s none of her business. So, tell me son, what have you been doing with yourself? Nothing you shouldn’t, I hope?” Daphne concentrated on the task in hand, not wanting to meet Tim’s empty gaze.

“Oh, nothing much, just the odd boat trip to do a spot of fishing...” Tim glanced at his watch. He was finding the visit quite strained and terribly boring.

“If you need to be somewhere, just go. I don’t want your pity and I certainly don’t want you sitting here when you’ve clearly got other more pressing things to do.”

“Ok, Mother, I’ll see you next week.” Tim chose to ignore his mother’s sarcasm and seized the opportunity to leave. He kissed her on the top of her head, harder than he’d meant. For a second he thought she was going to topple forward off her chair, but she didn’t. She just stayed where she was as if rigour mortis was paying her a visit.

Tim couldn't believe how much older she looked compared to other people of her age. There wasn't even any disease speeding up the ageing process. She'd smoked up until a few years ago, and now, she was stooped and pruned like a wizened old woman.

He could have understood it if she'd had a hard, poverty stricken life filled with worries. But apart from one trauma that had happened before he was born, she'd lived a life which many people could only hope for. While Tim was busy filling his head with thoughts of his mother, she was doing the same about him.

Daphne sat for quite some time in her little chair, staring at the segments of her blood orange, as if she had revealed the answer to all life's problems inside that one piece of fruit.

*

"I thought we'd go outside today, Daphne, get some fresh air?"

"Is it cold out, dear?"

“No, it’s unseasonably warm, which is why it’d be nice to take advantage of it while we can. I’ll fetch you a chair.”

Daphne pulled back the net curtain with her spindly fingers, smiling to herself. She loved her time with Eve, lived for it. It made her realise how much she’d longed for another daughter for all those years. And Eve had done more for her in the few months she’d been visiting than Tim had his entire life. She listened and cared, which was all Daphne wanted.

It was an unlikely match having listened to what Grace had told her about her mother-in-law over the years. But most of this had been Tim filling Grace’s head with lies so she would hate his mother as much as he did.

But a bond had formed that couldn’t be explained. Daphne had been wandering in the garden of the retirement home and had found Eve sitting on the bench deep in thought. Daphne had joined her, remembering her vaguely from family parties and the odd outing. A connection had formed from there on in.

Eve admired Daphne’s truthfulness and direct manner. This was viewed by other people as harsh and

spiteful. But Eve knew where she stood with her and there was an element of this within Eve as well. They both had an ability to be truthful however much it offended others and people didn't like it. It amazed them both how people said they wanted honesty but when they were it was met with a frosty offended attitude. Neither could understand why people wanted to be lied to. This caused them to be loners in the world. The only friends they would ever have would be like minded people.

They'd spotted this trait in one another during some banter, not long after they'd first sat on the bench together. Daphne had made some clipped, waspish comment at her. She'd waited for the usual expression of hurt, anger or dismay and instead was faced with a smile and a look of fellowship. Eve had quipped right back at her and there then formed a bond. Personality traits weren't the only things that welded them together.

Eve carefully manoeuvred the wheelchair through the open door.

“Why would you make doorframes so narrow?”

“When they knew it was for a retirement home and it needs to use wheelchairs? You say it every time, Eve!”

“Well, it’s becoming a ritual. I’ve said it so many times that if I don’t you might get wedged in the door forever!”

“You stupid girl, hurry up and get me into that sunshine. At this rate it’ll be Christmas.”

“Have you seen Tim this week?”

“Only his usual habitually forced visit. Don’t know why he bothers.”

“A mixture of guilt, habit and love, I should think.”

“Oh, I’m not daft enough to think that he loves me, Eve. That’s long gone.”

“What makes you think that?”

Daphne paused to breathe in the fresh air as Eve burst out of the double doors and into the sunshine. She likened it to being resuscitated and she savoured every moment, seeing as she spent most of the time stuck in her private room on the premises.

“Well, it finished when he met your sister, not that we were ever close when he was at home. I never bonded with him you see. He adored me, mainly because I wasn’t there much. He mistook it for love though; his motherly figure was Dora who looked after him most of the time. I suppose I would have been diagnosed with post-natal depression in this day and age. Couldn’t cope with being a mother to him, missed my daughter dreadfully.”

Eve remembered Grace telling her that Daphne had lost a baby girl before Tim came along.

“But don’t all children love their parents? Just because you weren’t there much doesn’t mean he didn’t love you.”

“Tim’s different though, sweetheart. He’ll tell you he’s always loved me but whatever was there seemed to diminish when Grace came along. I’m not blaming her Eve; it would have happened whoever had come along. However prepared you are for it, it still cuts you like a knife. It made me realise how ineffectual I’d been when he was growing up.”

Eve paused in front of some rose bushes so that Daphne could touch the flowers. She loved roses; they were her favourites in the whole landscaped garden. Eve often pondered that Daphne wasn't dissimilar to a rose, strong, honest, robust, with prickly thorns depicting her truthfulness.

"But that's not what happens to all people who get married. My brothers were still close to our mother, they still loved her."

"I know that," Daphne waved a bejewelled hand causing her rings to turn on her twiggy like fingers, "but we're talking about Tim, dear. He isn't capable of loving more than one person at a time. He focuses on an obsession. I suspect he doesn't love your sister anymore if the truth be known."

Eve was slightly shocked by this last statement; she assumed everything was ticking along nicely with Grace.

"You mean he's in love with someone else? Who?"

"That's what worries me, dear."

Eve pondered on what she'd just heard. The more Daphne told her about Tim, the stranger Eve thought he was. She had never seen this side of her brother in law. As she walked along the pretty garden, pushing Daphne in her chair, she marvelled at the various factors which made up people's personalities, like complex mathematical shapes.

*

NORFOLK 1988

Alice was in her bedroom, getting changed for the fourth time that day. She was meeting a friend, a boy from school, in a matter of hours and the panic of what to wear had gripped her. They were going to the end of term disco and she wanted to get it right. He was the most popular boy in the school and there were plenty who would have wanted to be in her shoes.

She couldn't make up her mind whether to stop at her Aunt Grace's house on the way there. She often popped in for a chat, which was something she had done more frequently since Nadine's accident. She was extremely close to Grace and had been to her cousin too. She'd taken the news of Nadine's accident very hard and she liked to check in on her aunt to make sure she was ok. They had bonded more tightly in their grief and Alice could tell, even though she was young, that her Uncle Tim wasn't terribly supportive.

Unsure of whether she had time, but so excited because she wanted to show Grace her outfit and get her opinion, she changed her mind several times whilst getting ready. That one tiny decision was to determine the rest of Alice's life. Live or die, live or die, live or die. What seemed to her a mere trivial choice was a massive universal one, only, Alice didn't know it. Choice 'A' had the 'life' tag in its box, and choice 'B' had the 'death' tag with it.

Unfortunately, she unwittingly opened the lid of box B, and stepped into the film set of the last few hours

of her life. And like Alice falling down the rabbit hole, once she'd opened the lid, she was committed.

Alice made her way to her aunt's house, after saying goodbye to her anxious mother. It was the first time her parents had let her go to a school disco, especially with a boy. But she was fifteen now, and they felt they had to loosen the apron strings at some point.

It was a beautiful summer evening, and Alice almost skipped down the road to her fate. She stopped at the crossroads and looked left and right. It was to be her last chance to change her mind. Left was a slow stroll, with time to stop at the village shop for some sweets, a quick chat with the owner, Mrs. Newton, and then on to meet Jeremy at the playing field. Right was down the road a hundred yard and right again onto the bumpy track leading to the back door of Auntie Grace's, where no one was there apart from her Uncle Tim.

CHAPTER NINE

Norfolk 1998

Dear Alice,

It saddens me to write this letter, and I don't really know how to tell you, but I think I'll just have to come out with it.

Daddy has decided that it would be best if we separated for a little while, and he has gone to live somewhere else. He's renting a small cottage in the next village, so it gives us some space between us. It's close enough though in case I need him for anything.

I don't know how to feel about it really, or what to say to you. I suppose it was always on the cards if I'm

honest. We both want different things and neither of us can meet in the middle. I just hope you understand, darling. One thing we do want you to know is that we don't blame you at all. It's just something that often happens between couples. They grow apart.

Even though we'll be living apart, darling, we will still both be here for you when you come home. And we love you just the same, even though we're not together. I still pray every night that you'll come home again.

Loving you always

Mummy xxx

*

“Dad, come over here, I’ve found something!”

“What have you found now? Another piece of pottery I suppose?”

Carl Meakin wandered over to the clearing where his daughter was standing with her hand on her hip and one foot on the spade she was using to dig with. Attitude oozed from her and she raised an eyebrow at her father’s comment.

“No, not ‘another’ piece of pottery, I’ve found a necklace actually.” Jessica said, with emphasis. She’d been out metal detecting with her dad for most of the day. They’d got permission from the farm owner, on the condition that he had a share in whatever they found. They’d started the day as always, quite optimistically, only to get towards tea time, tired, and a bit fractious with one another. He was fed up of her showing him pieces of flowery pottery and she with him for calling her over to look at rusty bits of metal.

Carl examined the tarnished piece of jewellery, soil caked in its links.

“Well, that’s a bit of a find, girl! It’s not very old, but I think its silver, and it’s got a nice semi-precious stone on it. Where’d you find it?”

“Down there in that hole in the clearing,” Jessica said, feeling quite chuffed with her treasure. “I think there must have been a small pond there, but the sun has dried the water up.”

“Yeah, there is normally water in there; it’s called a ‘mere’. You can tell by the cracks in the soil, and the slightly different shade of dirt. Let me look.”

Carl stepped down the slight embankment into the empty mere and peered into the large hole his daughter had dug.

“You should have marked out a patch with your spade like I told you to; you’ve dug far too wide.”

“I know Dad. You say that every time we come out.”

“Well, I wouldn’t have to if you did what I asked. You’re all over the ruddy place. You start with a square foot each time and then if you find anything...”

“Yeah, yeah, I know, you can widen the square. God, Dad we’re not professionals – Dad what is it?”

“I’m not sure yet love, pass me my trowel.”

Carl had noticed some strange, familiar shapes at the bottom of the hole his daughter had dug. They were like pieces of stone embossed in the flat damp pit, all linked together. Something you wouldn’t notice whilst you were digging, but was obvious when you observed it from above. Carl scuffed the soil off one of the lumps with his boot and a creamy colour began to appear.

“Dad?” Jessica passed her father the trowel.

“Just a minute, please!”

“Alright, alright!” Jessica sighed and wandered over to the patch her father was working on.

Carl jumped out of the dried up mere and stared down at the base of the hole. It appeared to be the outline of a human body. Lying almost like a curled-up foetus. Carl stepped around the hole to view it from another angle, trying to convince himself that it was an animal. But it didn’t matter which way he looked at it, it was what it was, the remains of a human being. The wiggly outline of the necklace his daughter had found was still imprinted in the mud. Jessica had, without realising it, dug down into someone’s grave. An eerie feeling crept

through Carl's stomach and into his throat. This wasn't a proper burial site, so why would the remains look like they were lying in a foetal position?

"Jessica, can you go and get my phone out of the truck please?"

"Yeah, why, what's the matter?" Jessica had noticed her father had turned an odd shade. "Have you found something really exciting? Are we going to be millionaires? You've found the King John's treasure, haven't you? I knew it was crap about it being in the Wash—"

"No Jessica, don't come over here, just get me the phone." Carl began to climb back up the embankment to prevent his daughter walking over.

"I want to see, what is it? Dad, you're scaring me..."

"No, just for once will you do as I ask!"

Jessica didn't argue with him, she'd never seen her father like this before, and scuttled to the truck to get the phone.

"Whatever you do, don't go back over to the hole you've dug, sweetheart. I don't want you to see it, and

you mustn't tread near it. Ok?" His voice softened to try and keep her calm.

"Why Dad, please tell me what you've found, you're as white as a sheet?" Jessica's eyes filled with tears, her father was frightening her.

Carl didn't know how else to say it, without scaring her. He certainly didn't want his sixteen-year-old daughter looking into the grave she'd dug up. It'd give her nightmares for years, something he was sure he would be having for the next few weeks.

"I think, we've uncovered a grave, and I need to call the police and get them to come out and check it over. Nothing to panic about, it's fine."

Jessica dropped the dirt encrusted necklace as if it had suddenly glowed like a red-hot coal. Carl bent down and picked it up, noticing his daughters look of horror.

"It's probably all above board, sweetheart and has been there for hundreds of years. Now, why don't you pour us the last of the coffee from the flask and I'll give the police a quick ring."

"But you said that the necklace wasn't very old."

“I don’t think the necklace you found has anything to do with it, so sit down there and drink your coffee.”

*

NORFOLK 1965

The boxes were all laid out neatly on the floor of Tim’s bedroom. He sat before them, proud of the little treasures he’d stolen.

Each one had been achieved by stealing from people in the village as a dare with his friends. Only, the difference was that Tim’s friends ditched theirs, the thrill having gone once they’d won the game and achieved it without getting caught.

They looked up to Tim, even though they thought he was a bit strange. But he’d gained kudos at school because of his talent for being the best thief.

His little trophies meant more to him than they did to the other boys; this was what made him such a good thief. He badly wanted what he was stealing, like a magpie with its beady eye on a prize. Tim's trophies were significant of his increasing power.

He often sat in his bedroom and surveyed his handiwork, the excitement rising in his stomach. All the boxes looked the same, so he had no idea which box held which items. He'd play a guessing game sometimes when he'd nothing better to do, or when Dora had ordered him to stay in his room. He knew better from past experience not to disobey her. She always managed to come up with a punishment that was worse than the last.

This was one such occasion. His father was at work and it was the summer holidays. Severe rain had put pay to any play time activities outside with the other boys, and Dora couldn't bear him coming home with dirty sodden clothes on. That just warranted another punishment.

He began to play his game of guessing the items in the boxes after he'd mixed them all up. He heard Dora running up the stairs giggling. Her foot fall was followed

by a much heavier one and her laughter trailing behind a far deeper anonymous male voice.

Tim hated those days trapped in his room, trying desperately to drown out the noises he could hear coming from his parent's bedroom. Noises he didn't quite understand but which he knew would anger his mother and father greatly, had they come home and caught Dora. There was no point in him telling them; his mother scolded him if he bothered his father after work and he'd long given up telling his mother anything. She just accused him of lying, making things up because he wanted her to come home. She was incapable of showing him any attention other than what she really had to. So, he moved his affections to his possessions.

When he got really lost in his game, he could look at each item, smell it and drift into another world of memories. Making up games about where the item had come from. He had quite a collection building up and some of the things he had stolen were quite valuable. He had fine pieces of jewellery, brooches, rings, tie pins, silk scarves and gloves, hats and ties, underwear and blouses. Summer was the best time to steal from people. They

tended to leave doors open and things laying about ready to be lifted. That was Tim's logic, if people took more care of their things and really wanted them, they wouldn't leave them out to be stolen. It was ingrained in him, a form of conditioning he got from his mother, that possessions were to be stored away. Tim took this school of thought to include people.

*

NORFOLK 1987

Alice excitedly picked at the layers of tape holding the floral paper wrapped around the box, while her parents busied themselves making tea and toast. It was Alice's birthday and she was sitting at the kitchen table ploughing through her cards and gifts. The one that meant the most to her was the one her father had given her. The one she'd left until last. Eve and Jon, her parents, usually gave her a present that was from them both. They'd still followed this tradition, but Jon had

wanted to get her something special that he'd chosen and was solely from him.

This had really touched Alice. She knew that dads didn't really get involved in going shopping and choosing presents, it didn't seem to be in their nature. So, the idea her father had chosen something especially for her had filled her with excitement.

"Oh Dad, how much tape did you use, I can't get it off!"

"I didn't want you snooping around before your birthday and peeking. Like you do with your mother's loose wrapping."

"Well, there's no danger of that here. Can you pass me the scissors please?"

"Careful you don't mark the box, I'll have to take it back to the shop once you've opened it."

Alice's face dropped. "Why?"

"Don't wind her up on her birthday, Jon!" Eve gave him a swipe on her way to the table with a pot of tea.

"Dad!"

“Oh, just hurry up and open it. The suspense is killing me! I’m not used to all this malarkey.” Jon pulled out a chair and joined his daughter at the table.

Silence descended in the room apart from the snipping of scissors as Alice desperately tried to prize open the tightly wrapped little box, a pained expression on her face. This was rapidly replaced with a look of elation when she finally opened the box and saw the beautiful pendant and chain hanging from the blue velvet cushion inside, a smile was quickly followed by tears, which was then chased with a scream.

Alice jumped up and flung herself onto her father’s lap.

“Do you think she likes it, Eve? I was hoping to get a refund.”

“Daddy!” Alice slapped his arm, and then showered his face in kisses, “I love it! It’s the best thing ever! I love you!”

“And I love you too, sweetheart.”

*

Norfolk 1998

“Where are you going in such a hurry?”

“I’m going over to Eve’s; Alice’s remains have been found.”

Grace glanced at Tim to see his reaction; a shadow passed across his face. She wouldn’t have noticed it if she hadn’t been married to him for so long. But there was a definite flicker of an emotion, although she was unsure of which one. She glared at him with pure burning hatred and repressed the urge to smash open his skull like a walnut in a nutcracker.

“Alice has been found? Are they sure it’s her?”

“Of course they’re sure, even you should know that! They’ve done all the tests. A local man and his daughter were out metal detecting and found her a few days ago,” Grace snapped at him.

“Oh dear. Poor Eve. Does Jon know?”

This last sentence was said with such insincerity that Grace could only stare at him for a few moments.

She was at such a loss to know what to say to him or quite any idea as to what to do.

“I don’t know, Tim, I should imagine so. Why don’t you go over there and see if he needs some support? My main priority, at the moment, is my sister. She was bad enough before Alice was found, goodness knows what this will do to her.’

Tim almost fell into the kitchen chair as he watched the back of his wife head out of the door. He was wondering who the hell had found her and why they’d been in such a secluded spot. He didn’t need to worry about that though, he just needed to act as if he knew nothing about it. That would be easy for Tim, it’d happened such a long time ago that he’d become almost completely detached from it. What he most definitely needed to do was to clear out his shed. The police would be re-opening all the cases, once they connected Alice to the others, and they would probably search the whole village again, especially now they had all that new blood at the station.

He sat for a while, trying to gauge how he felt about it. Alice had been the one that he’d carefully

buried, not wanting her to be found. The mere used to dry up in the summer and he knew that years of climate change would cause it to be permanently filled with water, but he hadn't anticipated the particularly hot summer they'd had. But then, why would he? He'd buried her quite deep in the ground, in the middle of nowhere, where no one ventured. Or so he'd thought. And he'd more or less forgotten about her, apart from the lovely memory scent he had of her.

She had looked like an angel when he'd laid her in his home made wooden box. He'd caught her stirring slightly just before he sealed the lid and realised she wasn't dead. But he didn't have time to mess about and he knew the lack of air in the box underground would finish her off quickly, if the hyperthermia didn't get to her first.

He wasn't worried about the police finding any of his DNA; he was too careful to leave anything. The bonus for any psychopath was having an Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder in cleanliness. Anyway, she'd been under the ground for far too long for there to be anything of any significance left.

The best thing he could do was to burn all the boxes of memory scents and get himself over to his brother-in-law's house and pretend like he cared. He'd have to get his thrills in some other way for the time being and Chrissie would provide plenty of those. His arrogance had reached nauseating new levels and he wasn't worried one tiny bit that he might get caught. He'd gotten away with it for this long, who was going to catch him out now?

CHAPTER TEN

“Four, three, two, one, and now I want you to look down at your feet and when you’re ready, tell me where you are?”

Sarah watched Chrissie as she floated into hypnosis and waited for her to settle and answer her question. Chrissie would either be transported into a significant time in a past life, or one more recent.

“I’m standing on a grassy cliff....no shoes...the sun is warm. We’re having a picnic.” Chrissie’s voice came out raspy and shallow and slightly childlike.

“Who are you with?” Sarah kept her voice soft and gentle so as not to startle her out of her hypnosis.

“My Mum and sisters.... Dad’s gone to the shop for ice creams. Mum’s playing catch with us...”

“Who are you?”

“Christine, I’m Christine.”

“Ok, Christine, I want you to go to the next significant point in your life.”

Chrissie stirred slightly under the blanket that Sarah had put over her to keep her warm.

“Where are you now Christine?”

“I’m...I’m on the swing...”

“Where is the swing?”

“In the garden. But it’s not our house. It’s dark...Mum’s calling me for bed...but I don’t want to come in.”

“Whose house are you at?”

Sarah watched her friend begin to stir under the blanket; her brow furrowed, and she was starting to make peculiar noises.

“Christine, where are you?”

But Chrissie seemed unable to speak and her head was swaying from side to side as if she was trying to get away from something. Her hands began to grip the blanket and tears sprung from her eyes; all that was coming out of her mouth was muffled crying.

“It’s alright Christine, I’m going to touch your arm and then count backwards from ten and bring you safely back into this room. Ten...nine...eight...seven...”

Chrissie started to calm as she slowly returned to the comfort of her living room, and her own surroundings.

“Don’t sit up just yet sweetheart. Stay where you are for a few minutes and take some deep breaths.”

Sarah went into Chrissie’s kitchen and poured them both a glass of water. When she went back into the room, Chrissie was sitting on the sofa and rubbing her face.

“Are you ok?”

“I think so. That was really strange.”

“You got as far as the swing and then you became really distressed, which is why I bought you back. What happened?”

“It was so weird, because I was there and aware of being here at the same time. Is that normal?” Chrissie asked, gratefully taking the glass of water from Sarah.

“Yes, it’s your physical self-keeping a connection with the here and now.” Sarah said, trying to be patient with her friend, but eager to know what had happened.

“I seemed to be reliving a very vivid memory, or so I thought, but I heard an animal noise by the gate in the garden where the swing was and the next thing I

knew there was a large gloved hand over my face. It was horrible.” Chrissie started to cry again.

“That’s awful, did you know who it was?” Sarah handed Chrissie a tissue.

“No, but it was definitely a man. He was dragging me along what I felt was a dark track or alleyway. It was pitch black and I just remember feeling really frightened and being unable to scream. As I was coming back into the room, I could hear my mother calling me.” Chrissie blew her nose and stared at Sarah as if she had an explanation for it all.

“Why would I have a memory of my childhood merged with what must be a past life?”

“I’m not so sure that it was a past life. You referred to yourself as Christine, which was what you were called as a child.”

“But I would remember something like that, surely? Could it have been something paranormal?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I know it sounds weird, but could it have been a spirit showing me something that happened to them.”

“It could be, but didn’t you say it was a memory from your childhood?”

“Yes, I remember the house vaguely. It could have been a holiday home we stayed in.”

“I hate to tell you this Chrissie, but you may have just recalled a memory from your childhood that you blocked out.”

Chrissie pondered on this information while Sarah made them both some fresh coffee.

“It can’t be. My parents would have told me. Wouldn’t they?”

“Not necessarily. It could explain their protectiveness of you.”

“Hang on a minute, there’s just one small problem with this whole thing! If that was a memory from my childhood, then how am I still here?” Chrissie said, jumping up from the sofa and joining her friend in the kitchen.

“What do you mean?”

“I wouldn’t be alive now would I?”

“What makes you think this memory ended in death? Perhaps you got away?”

“No, no. I think it was one of the murdered children trying to show me something. I need to explore the village to try and trigger my memory.” Chrissie drained her coffee cup. Her brain was working overtime, a feeling of excitement was creeping through her body and she really felt like she was onto something.

Sarah looked on with concern; she wasn’t convinced it wasn’t a memory Chrissie had stirred up in this life. Or maybe a past life had merged with this one. She hadn’t seen it before in all the years she had been a therapist, but it was a possible explanation.

*

Dear Alice,

So, this is it my darling. Now I finally know what happened to my little angel after all these years. And now that I know, it seems the only realistic explanation. It’s funny how you can see it all so clearly when you’re given the true facts.

I feel like someone’s dropped me into an ice-cold ocean, which has awoken me. Woken me from the world

I've lived in for ten years, where you walk through the gate and up the path to the front door.

I think I preferred that world. Although I knew deep down you were never coming home. In my moments of panic when time passed, and I constantly went to the window, I knew you'd never be there.

Ignorance is bliss, or so they say. Well, I wouldn't go that far, but I wish I could stop all the clocks and the world, so I can stay in that time where you come home. That's a poem I think...can't remember. Who cares? I can't even recall how I felt before. The atmosphere has engulfed me.

I thought I'd feel relieved, but I don't. I just feel like it's all over; over forever. I used to envy the other parents in the village who'd lost their child. Awful I know, but they had something that I never had in this whole tragic mess. They had the knowledge of what had happened to their children, instead of spending every moment going over the same scenario, and then inventing new ones to chew over.

Being privy to that information, albeit horrific, felt to me like you could somehow try and move on with your

life, if that's at all possible. Not having to wonder, and at some point, reaching a time of acceptance. Something you have no control over has changed forever, so the only solution is to live your life the best way you can.

But I don't envy those parents anymore, not with the news I now have. It's just a different type of nightmare, worse than the last, and full of unanswered and unthinkable questions. A different set of scenarios to play in the cinema of my mind, and I don't want to see the reruns. But they'll play and play, and no amount of crying or time is ever going to change anything.

Loving you always and forever

Mummy xxx

*

NORFOLK 1998

“How’s your sister?”

“As to be expected.”

“Have the police said anymore?”

“Not really.” Grace said crisply. She was in no mood for a conversation with Tim.

“Oh. I went to see Jon. He seems to be handling it ok, said he knew all along.”

“Good for Jon.”

“Have I done something wrong, Grace?”

“Bloody hell Tim, it’s not all about you all the time! My sister just found out what’s happened to her daughter after all these years. Give me a break!”

“Ok, ok!” Tim put his hands up defensively. “I was only saying.”

Grace busied herself putting wet laundry into the tumble dryer, and then began rifling through the cupboards and fridge.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m going to stay with Eve for a few nights, and I need to take some food and clean bed linen with me.”

Grace resumed her search for the makings of a cottage pie.

“What? Leave me here on my own?” Tim attempted a forlorn look.

“I’m sure you’ll survive. I’m just going to make this and wait for the washing to dry, and then I’ll be off.”

“Oh, is that for me?” Tim was enjoying winding her up. He was perfectly capable of looking after himself; he’d done it enough times on his boat trips. He was looking forward to having the house to himself. He just wanted to get a rise out of her before she left; another one of his kicks.

“Don’t!” Grace glared at him, as she pointed a gleaming kitchen knife she was using to chop onions, in his direction.

“Alright, alright! I’ll have to order in a takeaway.” Tim threw over his shoulder as he walked into the sitting room to watch the rest of the football.

Grace stood there for a time, staring at the space where her husband had been. As if staring would cause her to suddenly wake up and discover that the whole thing had never happened, and that Nadine was upstairs

in her bedroom and Tim had died in some freak accident. And Alice was at home with Eve and Jon. But life wasn't like that. While she was enjoying this vision, another film was playing in her mind. One where she had walked from the kitchen into the sitting room and plunged the knife so hard into Tim that it pierced the sofa underneath. Then she began wondering how she would get rid of the stains and his sorry corpse. And, she mused, she quite liked the sofa and he wasn't worth it. No, no, no, it was far too messy and not something that would look remotely like suicide. She snapped back into reality and continued chopping. Her sister needed her right now, and that's what she had to concentrate on. She'd have plenty of time when Eve was settled into bed to think about Tim's exit from this world.

*

NORFOLK 1988

Alice had appeared to stop breathing several times while she endured the rape of her fifteen-year-old body. And it was rape in every sense of the word. Tim was so violent with his niece that the shock caused unconsciousness like a drug induced trance. Every time she became aware of her physical self and the horror of what was happening, she was sick. Which only resulted in Tim becoming more intolerant and cross with her; he appeared to be angry and euphoric at the same time. At one point she thought she was going to choke on her own vomit, because Tim had rammed tissues into her mouth to stem the flow of sick. This only served to make her gag even more, the tissue turning to soggy pulp in her mouth.

Tim didn't like human waste of any kind, it repulsed him, and he wasn't going to let it spoil his long-awaited moment with her.

What she thought was going to be her last memory, was of her Uncle Tim looking down on her. She was standing on the other side of the room watching herself, one of those out of body experiences that she'd heard and read about.

She watched her uncle with his hands around her tiny neck, squeezing the last bit of life out of her. Her eyes bulged out of her porcelain coloured face, blood, spittle, and vomit drying around her nose and mouth.

She stood in the corner watching this scenario and prayed to die. She swayed like a piece of driftwood washed up on the shore. Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards.

Alice thought she was in her bedroom on the floor when she woke up. It was cold and so dark that even the widening of her eyes made no difference to the light. The memories of what had happened suddenly stung her like a swarm of bees and reawakened the physical pain in her body. Even her skin hurt.

Alice tried to move to get up off her bedroom floor and turn the light on, but the bang and pain of her head

hitting some wood made her realise she wasn't where she thought she was. Confusion hit her at first, and then she thought that maybe she was dreaming. The flash of her out of body experience flew in front of her eyes, and for a split second she thought she might be in hell. The pounding of her heartbeat and the goose bumps on her skin told her she was very much alive.

Alice knew she was naked even though her body felt so alien to her. She was freezing cold and breathing was becoming harder and harder. She tried again to sit up, but the same thing happened. A noise like the sound of crumbling plaster fell on her. She moved her hands beside her to feel what she was laying on. It felt like floorboards, rough and covered in splinters.

As Alice became more and more conscious and able to move her body, she quickly realised she was in a large box, which she suspected was in the ground. Her limbs encountered every side of it as she moved around; small insects began to crawl across her sensitive skin as they found their way through the gaps. And she soon discovered it was soil that was falling on her through the cracks in the wood, not plaster.

Panic hit her like a lightning strike and she screamed from the bottom of her soul. But she soon realised no amount of clawing and screaming was going to save her.

Alice gave up after what seemed like hours; her hands throbbed from banging the lid of the box and her fingers were sticky with blood from clawing at the wood. This had only served to cause more soil to drop through the cracks.

Waves of panic washed over her, and she cried and cried.

She managed to lie on her side and pull her knees up to her chest in an attempt at comforting herself. She wept for her mother and father who'd be wondering where she was. The tide of panic set in again, and she knew they'd never find her. When the tide went out Alice prayed someone would rescue her, but this tiny glimmer of optimism was short lived and after a few hours Alice began to pray again for Death. He was the only being that was going to save her from this horrific nightmare. But there would be no standing at the crossroads deciding whether to turn right or left. Not once he'd lifted her

from the box; his path would take her down a dead end. But right now, that pathway held the hope of comfort and eternal sleep.

She slipped in and out of consciousness only to repeat the nightmare of realising where she was over and over again.

Eventually, Death came to collect her. And Alice died, imagining she had fallen asleep safe and warm in her mother's arms, with the necklace that her father had bought her for her birthday in the palm of her hand.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Norfolk 1998

Chrissie and Sarah had searched most of the small coastal village. There were plenty of familiar areas, but not the place that was in Chrissie's subconscious. She felt like she was hitting a brick wall at every turn. She'd called her mother before she'd left the house, but she wasn't there, so Chrissie had left a message. She had no luck with either of her sisters, they were out too. She wanted to talk to them about her session with Sarah to see if there was any light they could shine on it. It was mainly to satisfy Sarah's theory of it all, and their absence only further proved to Chrissie that this wasn't the path she needed to follow.

"I'm a great believer in finding things when you're not looking for them, and we seem to be going around in circles." Sarah pulled the sleeves of her sweater over her hands as a chilly wind began to whistle down the street.

“Why don’t we stop in that lovely café we just passed and have a coffee?”

“Ok, but can we just try that track again? The one where we turned right, but could have turned left as well?” Chrissie wanted to explore every little area before she gave in; a foible that was every part of her nature and one that sometimes infuriated her friends.

“But doesn’t that way take us back towards your house? Why don’t we do that after we’ve had a coffee, via the beach? Come on Chrissie, I’m gasping here!”

Sarah grabbed Chrissie’s arm to stop her striding, so she could show her friend that she meant it.

Chrissie shrugged and sighed.

“Ok, you’re right. We need a break. It can’t hurt to stop for a few minutes. Come on.”

Sarah watched her stride towards the café, slightly worried Chrissie was letting this whole thing take over. Once they were nicely ensconced in the seaside café, and Sarah could slip her shoes off and discover her feet again, she decided it was time for a little chat.

“Do you think it might be better to just wait until all this unfolds naturally?” Sarah tried diplomacy, not something she was used to.

“You think I’m becoming obsessed with it, don’t you?” Chrissie said, adding more sugar to her cup.

“No. But I think you could be in danger of becoming so. I don’t disbelieve what you’re saying about the activity in the house, and maybe someone is trying to tell you something, but surely it would be a clearer message if there was one?”

“But maybe the message is clear and I’m just not getting it – and what about the therapy session?”

“Well, you know my thoughts on that. I really do think you need to speak to your mother.”

“Look, you’ve always told me to go with my gut feeling and I really feel that someone is trying to show me something. I suppose it has become somewhat all consuming, because there’s been so much going on in the house.” Chrissie suddenly seemed to come back to reality for the first time in weeks. It was as if she’d woken up from a very long sleep.

Sarah read her mind.

“Have you done much writing lately?”

“Do you know you’ve just made me realise how much I’ve allowed this whole thing to dominate my thoughts. I’ve written bits and pieces, but I’ve been unable to concentrate for any length of time and I’m so tired. It’s a good thing I don’t have a deadline at the moment. I’m supposed to use this time to settle into my new surroundings, which is exactly what I haven’t done much of either.”

“I didn’t make you realise anything, you did that by yourself, which isn’t a bad thing. Most of us spend time consumed by various matters, living in the past or the future instead of concentrating on the present. So now you’ve come to this realisation, why don’t we go and do some of that ‘settling’ in together? You need to familiarise me with the area anyway, seeing as I’m moving here as soon as I’ve found somewhere to buy.’

There was a long pause before Chrissie answered, she was unsure if she’d heard her properly. “You’re moving here?”

“Yes. I’ve been thinking about it for a long time and you being here made up my mind. I need a change. I

only moved to London because of work. Now that I'm setting up on my own, I can go where ever I want. I like it here actually, it has a nice energy. And let's face it, if I still want to move here after the ghoulish tales you've told me, there must be something enchanting about it!"

"That's brilliant news! Bloody hell! How long ago was it when we lived so near each other?"

"Far too long, and you obviously need someone here to keep you on the path of sanity, and obviously I'm the best person for the job."

"Ha, ha, very funny! But you're right – this place does hold some sort of enchantment, even though it freaks me out most of the time!" Chrissie laughed, standing up and putting her chair in. She felt more light-hearted. It had done her the world of good coming into the café. It wasn't just the change of scenery; it was the atmosphere there as well. The café was nothing special to look at, but it had an ambience that most places lacked. It could have been passed off as a 1930's railway café, with its steamy windows, metal teapots and wafts of homemade soup and pastries.

Chrissie stared at Sarah and smiled as she watched her friend carefully putting her coat on.

“What? Have I got cheese scone stuck to my face?”

“Not a chance of that, you looked like you hadn’t eaten for a week! No, I was just thinking how you have a miraculous way of knowing what other people need, even when they can’t see it themselves.”

“Huh, not so good when it comes to analysing myself though.”

“Oh, I don’t think you do a bad job. When you become aware you’re not learning anything from your current situation, you suddenly make a huge life changing decision, where most people would just stay in the same place. I love that about you.”

“Coming from the woman who just made a massive move on her own after making the brave decision to get a divorce.” Sarah linked her friend’s arm as they made their way towards the sea front.

“Yes, and you’re now doing the same thing, only you’ve done it loads of times.”

“It’s easier for me to make this move though, because I know I’m going to be near my best friend.”

They squeezed one another’s arms and then both jumped as a car beeped and pulled up by the side of the road. Chrissie could see someone looking at her through the rear-view mirror.

“Oh, it’s Grace!” Chrissie said, running over to the passenger side window which Grace had wound down.

“Hello! How are you? You haven’t met my friend Sarah. Sarah this is Grace, Grace this is...” Chrissie stopped as she took in Grace’s pale face.

“My sister has had some really bad news...well, we all have really.... Hello Sarah, sorry, that was very rude of me.”

“Not at all, you’re obviously in shock. Is there anything we can do?” said Sarah, pushing her head through the car window with Chrissie’s.

“Whatever’s happened?”

“My niece, Alice went missing ten years ago, and someone has just found her remains...the police say it’s her...”

“Oh no, Grace that’s awful! Do they know what happened to her?”

“No...no, not yet. The police suspected at the time it could have been to do with the other murders in the area, but...they’re not sure.”

Chrissie felt a sensation like ice cold water trickle down her back.

“Grace...that’s just...awful.”

“Is there anything we can do? Where are you going now?” Sarah almost demanded, always the one to organise and help.

“No, no, thank you. I’ve just been home to get food and clothes and I’m now making my way over to stay with my sister for a few days. Her husband just left her so it’s an especially...well you can imagine.” Grace said, gripping the steering wheel and checking her rear-view mirror for traffic.

“Well, that’s just...”

“Anyway Grace,” said Chrissie, nudging Sarah and cutting her off mid-sentence, knowing exactly what she was going to say about Grace’s brother-in-law. Chrissie didn’t think that giving unasked for opinions was the way

forward under the circumstances, “you must let us know if you need anything. Anything at all. And we are so sorry for your news.”

“Thank you, Chrissie, I’ll be in touch when I get home.”

“Ok Grace.”

They both waved her off and then stood there for a while, watching Grace’s car drift up the road.

“You look perplexed, what are you thinking?” Sarah began walking again and after a few seconds Chrissie fell into step beside her.

“Well there are two things, one much less significant than the other.”

“What? That Grace’s insignificant brother-in-law buggered off and left her sister?”

“No, no, no, although that is awful, but we actually don’t know the circumstances of that situation. And anyway Missy, being a therapist, you should know better than to judge when you have no background information. For all you know Grace’s sister could be a right cow.”

“Yep, she could be, but it’s unlikely, isn’t it?”

“And how do you come to that very narrow-minded conclusion?”

“It’s not narrow minded, it’s logical. You really like Grace and speak highly of her, and so it’s very unlikely that her sister is going to be the complete opposite. Anyway, we digress, what were you going to say?”

“Sometimes I really worry about your ‘logic’ mind. Well, firstly, and it isn’t anything to do with the situation, it’s just made me realise something about my therapy session.”

Chrissie stopped, so she could give more thought to what she was about to say.

“There was a smell that lingered with me after my session, but I wasn’t really aware of it until now. It was the faint smell of menthol sweets. It was a bit like Fisherman’s Friends. Do you know what I mean?”

“Yes. Lots of people get that. It’s because you’re exploring the subconscious, so you can carry something with you afterwards, such as a smell, and not be aware of it until later when that memory is triggered. You might find you remember more about the whole thing as time

goes on. Your brain will fill bits and pieces in at various times; giving you a bigger picture. What has that got to do with Grace?”

“What I actually meant was do you know the smell I’m talking about?”

“Oh, yeah, yeah I know what Fisherman’s Friends smell like.”

“Well, when I leaned in Grace’s car, I got a faint smell of them and realised the smell had been with me since my session. I had a flash of something as well, but I don’t know what that was. It was more a feeling.”

“There’s obviously stuff that’s going to come out from your session. What was the other thing you were going to say?”

Chrissie and Grace made their way down the sandy steps and onto the sparkling shell encrusted beach. The late summer sun was glowing orange and pink shades onto the clouds, making everything glisten.

“Grace and I have had quite a few long discussions about the murders in this area....”

Chrissie stopped to think again, while Sarah stared at her friend in anticipation, trying to be patient.

“What I can’t understand is why she never told me about Alice?”

“Why do you think she didn’t?”

“I really don’t know. But it feels a bit strange, kind of like she’s holding a lot of things back.”

“Perhaps she finds it too difficult to talk about. Or, like she said, they aren’t sure if it’s connected. Some people don’t like to talk about personal things.”

“It could be, but I don’t get that feeling. She’s a very warm and open person. Although, she and her husband Tim make a very odd match. I find him really strange and I don’t think she’s particularly happy with him.”

“Well, a feeling is a feeling and you must take notice of it. Maybe she’ll tell you more when you see her.”

“Yes, probably. Anyway, I’m doing it again.”

“What?”

“Talking about all that stuff.”

“It doesn’t matter, I find it interesting and two brains mulling it over are far better than one. I think the key is not to let it consume you.”

“Precisely. So, let’s get home and I’ll prepare dinner while you tell me all about your plans to move here.”

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Grace didn’t know why she’d felt the need to pull the car over and tell Chrissie her news. She supposed it was due to shock and an overwhelming feeling to just tell someone what had happened. As if she was going to rescue them all from the awful nightmare they were in, erasing it out for them. Like deleting a screen full of words and changing the whole story. But Grace knew it didn’t work like that because they were the ones floating out on the choppy sea, whilst the world carried on around them, as they slowly became dots on the horizon.

But there was more to it than just wanting to share her awful news. She’d spotted Chrissie in the street and it wasn’t in Grace’s nature to stop the car and tell someone something, especially when they were with someone she

didn't know. She'd normally wait even under such tragic circumstances. But she'd felt it was important to tell Chrissie, and she did know why deep down. Grace was finding the secret about Tim almost too much to bear. And the news of Alice had only heightened the urge to tell someone. Grace was torn between telling the police and following through with her plans. She carried an awful guilt around, knowing she was privy to information so many people were desperate to know. And would she really go through with her plans? It had been over a year already. She'd often visualised doing it to see if she was serious about it. Most of the time she was, but then she had moments of feeling scared and aware of how huge it was to take another person's life, however evil they were. To take someone else's fate into your own hands seemed quite an arrogant decision to make. Perhaps telling Chrissie wouldn't be as monumentally explosive as she thought. Maybe Chrissie would agree with her plans once she knew the full story?

No, no, no! What was she thinking? Grace nearly collided into the back of a stationary car; she was so engrossed in her thoughts. It jolted her back to reality,

and after the car had screeched to a halt, she became starkly aware of what she'd just thought, and knew she must keep quiet.

The key to getting rid of anyone, alongside making it look like suicide, was not to tell another soul. Tim had taught her that. Times changed, people's views altered and then you had to trust them not to tell anyone. The only person you could really rely on was yourself. Grace stopped herself again; she was beginning to sound like Tim. What on earth was happening to her?

She banged her hands on the steering wheel as if to jolt herself out of it, and pulled into the familiar drive of her sister's house.

All was quiet when she went in. She called to Eve but there was no reply.

She unloaded the bags onto the kitchen table and made her way through the house looking for her.

She stopped at the foot of the stairs and listened carefully, thinking that she was probably upstairs having a sleep. Eve hadn't slept since she'd heard the news about Alice.

Grace made her way up the stairs, but Eve wasn't in her room as she'd first thought. A slight spark of panic ignited in her stomach.

"Eve?"

She thought perhaps she'd gone out, but then Eve rarely went anywhere.

"Eve?" She called a bit louder as she began opening the doors to each room.

The spark was now turning into a flame and making its way from her stomach to her heart.

"EVE!!"

The last and only room she hadn't looked in loomed at the end of the corridor, like the forbidden door to the Secret Garden. Only, she didn't feel what lay behind it would be a pleasant surprise.

She moved slowly down the corridor as the door appeared to magnify in front of her. The carpet and walls became noticeable for the first time in years and Grace realised nothing had been changed since Alice went missing. The house was trapped in a time warp, with Eve in it, while everything moved on in the outside world. Or maybe it was the other way around.

Tentatively her hand came out to reach for the door handle. Her entire body filled with dread at what might be on the other side.

She seemed to float through the next few moments, as if a gentle breeze was blowing her into the room to stand next to her sister, who was lying in a ball on her daughter's bed.

Grace's hand went to her throat as she tried to gulp in air.

"Oh Eve...no Eve." She whispered like a small child.

Eve stirred on the bed, and her eyelids slowly pulled apart; sticky from crying herself to sleep.

"Bloody hell Eve!" Grace launched herself on the bed and picked her tiny sister up in her arms and sobbed.

"Grace...? What's happened?"

Grace couldn't speak, she was so relieved.

"Grace you're frightening me, what's happened?"

"I thought you were...I thought you'd..." Grace looked at the bottle of sleeping tablets on the bedside table and Eve followed her gaze.

Oh Grace. No....no! I came in here for a sleep. I took a tablet because I knew you'd be a while and I'm having trouble sleeping on my own. I just wanted to feel close to her."

Grace and Eve wrapped their arms around each other, and looking like identical twins began to cry for the last ten years that had passed without Alice.

*

Tim watched the sparks spitting from the bonfire he'd lit in the garden. It was dusk, and he'd questioned whether it was normal to have one at this time of day. He didn't want to draw attention to himself, especially as he didn't normally burn his rubbish.

The glow of the fire warmed the front of his body and lit up his face. To anyone who didn't know, he looked like any normal man enjoying a bonfire after a hard day's work in the garden. But to know him for what

he was, he was more like the devil incarnate floating up from the flames.

He sniffed the air, trying to detect any trace of a smell from the memory scents that he was burning. There were no scents; they had gone a long time ago, not far behind their owners. But Tim convinced himself there was an aroma in the air. He'd almost forgotten himself when he came out of the shed, and nearly opened the boxes to smell them, one last time. But he'd remembered he was out in the open, albeit in his garden, but still visible to the neighbours. It was imperative that it looked like he'd had a clear out and was simply burning his rubbish.

He had felt a certain attachment to all the memory scents he had kept over the years. A bit like a child not wanting to get rid of a much-loved collection of old toys.

He watched the flames fold and marry perfectly with the boxes, as one by one he gave each victim their second funeral; apart from Alice of course.

There had been no funeral for Alice's parents, or a time to say goodbye to their daughter, because they'd had nothing to say farewell to until now.

Tim didn't care about this though; it was of no significance. To him, funerals were just an excuse for people to be dramatic in public, crying because they felt guilty for not appreciating that person while they were alive. He didn't understand why people were so shocked by death. Everyone had to die, that was a sure fact that everyone grew up knowing. Once you were born you had begun the process of dying.

He felt slightly bereft, watching the fire, but not for his victims, but rather for the fact this era of his life was now over.

A tiny idea was beginning to form in Tim's head. If he could persuade Grace to move to a new house, they could set up somewhere else. No one would suspect a thing. It would take him out of the enquiry and enable him to set up a new life, and to gather new memory scents.

Come to think of it, if Grace wouldn't come with him, he'd go it alone. There was nothing between them anymore, even Grace would agree with that.

Tim sipped the beer that he was holding and stared into the flames that were showing him all sorts of visions

of his new life. There was, however, one thing he hadn't yet thought of. His mother.

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Grace tucked the blanket around her sister, who had eventually made her way downstairs and curled up on the sofa. She kissed her forehead.

"I'll make you a cup of tea. Do you want me to turn the television on for you?"

"No, but a cup of tea would be nice thanks."

Eve wanted to think about the last few days. Having a cry had helped ease things and she was slightly surprised at the change in her emotions. She didn't normally cry much, because to her crying had meant an admission and acceptance of Alice not returning. But she had realised it was just a way of releasing strong emotions when things got to be too much to bear.

"How are you feeling?" Grace handed her a cup of tea.

“I don’t know really. I thought I would feel a tiny bit relieved and similar to the way I felt all those years ago. But I don’t at all. It’s a different kind of grief and now another nightmare to face.”

“Is there some way you can try and focus on remembering Alice how she was? How you have been doing these past few years? I know its hard Eve, but she died ten years ago; it’s just that you didn’t know about it. Please don’t torture yourself all over again.” Grace knew she sounded callous, but she wanted Eve to skip the awful nightmare and move forward, because she was scared of the massive effect it would have on her. She knew there was an element of guilt hidden in her words as they came out of her mouth.

“What? So, you think I should just forget it and get on with my life?” Eve’s tone was deep and dark.

“I’m not saying that Eve. I’m not taking away the magnitude of what has happened, but I don’t want it to destroy you anymore than it has done. I really think you ought to go and see a counsellor.” Grace knew she was treading on volcanic ground. But someone had to say

something; her sister had allowed this to eat her away for far too long.

“So, because you come into my house and assume I’ve topped myself and then I cry over my daughter whose remains have just been found, you think I need professional help?”

“Oh, come on Eve. I know I jumped to the wrong conclusion, but you can’t blame me? Look at what you’ve been through?”

Grace knew she had to turn this around otherwise her sister would snap. She felt like she was trying to control a saucepan of simmering milk from boiling over.

“There is nothing wrong with going to a counsellor for help with your problems, especially after what you’ve been through.”

“I don’t want any help from strangers. I will deal with this in my own way, as I have done for the last ten years. No one can fix this, not even a professional.” Eve sipped the sugary, toffee coloured tea.

“Alright.” Grace cringed at Eve’s clipped tone; her face stung as if she’d been slapped. Eve obviously felt no one had been there for her. She had retreated into her

shell again; protecting herself from everything and everyone.

“What would really help me right now would be the police ringing to tell me that they’d caught the bastard who did this.”

Grace fidgeted in her chair, as a wave of guilt passed through her, and the enormity of the secret she was keeping slapped her around the face, and not for the first time that day. It didn’t go unnoticed.

“You know something, don’t you?” Eve eyed her sister.

“What? No! What made you say that?” Grace tried desperately to look calm.

“The police have told you something you’re not allowed to tell me. Tim knows, doesn’t he?”

“Don’t be daft! If I knew anything I’d tell you. Why would they speak to Tim about anything?”

“Oh, I know how it works in the police. They all stick together. You told me yourself he used to tell you things that other people weren’t privy to.”

“Eve, look I know...”

“Don’t try and fob me off Grace, just tell me what you know.”

“I honestly don’t know anything Eve. Really, if I did I would tell you. Come on you’re being silly, you know I wouldn’t keep anything from you.”

Grace squeezed her sister’s leg, as if by doing so it would give her lie some sort of truth.

Eve held her sister’s gaze, searching her face for clues. There was something there. Even if it didn’t have anything to do with Alice, there was definitely something on her sister’s mind. But she was too exhausted to pursue it.

Grace’s mind moved like a piece of driftwood, in and out of the shore, wanting to tell Eve, keeping it to herself. Telling her, not telling her, until the driftwood finally settled on the shore and the tide went out. The urge was gone to unburden herself, and she was left with a feeling of determination to rid the world of her sick and twisted husband.

Even though Tim didn't particularly care much for Grace's company, it kept him occupied for certain periods of time. Her absence had left him with boredom on his hands and time to whistle like the wind around the village and over to Chrissie's house.

It was time to have some fun. If Chrissie had any doubts about her house being haunted, then she certainly wouldn't after tonight.

A little sapling of an idea had grown in Tim's mind, and he began to chuckle at the thought of it. The tiny idea eventually turned into a clear visualisation in his head.

He crept silently around the back of Chrissie's house. He'd come along the track and past his favourite shed. He had the weather on his side, because even though it was quite a warm, clear moonlit night, the breeze blowing off the sea was quite strong and would impair anyone's hearing in a draughty old house like Chrissie's.

All the lights were off, and it was the early hours, so Chrissie and her friend were most probably in bed. He glanced up at the bedroom windows. Two were open. Tim crept over to the patio area and as quietly as possible he picked up the garden table and carried it across the grass to place it near the stream in a sheltered clearing right at the bottom. Then he went back for two of the chairs. Once they were in place and sheltered in front of some trees, he searched through the bag of items he'd brought with him, until he found what he was looking for with the help of his torch.

With his gloved hand he placed a child's book on the table. Perfect.

Then he moved back up to the house, checking the windows as he went, for any sign of movement. He made his way towards Chrissie's washing line which was tied from her outhouse and reached along to a large tree. On there he pegged some children's clothes. He stifled a laugh; his excitement was beginning to bubble over.

His last stop was the shed. Tim's favourite shed. There, he planned to hang an old dolly by its neck from the rafters with a noose made from a frayed piece of

rope. He felt like an excited child playing hide and seek, filled with the anticipation of someone catching him.

Only, Tim wasn't a child, and this was no game. Tim crept backwards down the garden, viewing his handy work, as he made his way towards the shed.

He lifted the rickety old door up from the floor as he pushed it open, because he remembered the hinge having come away and he wanted to keep the noise to a minimum. He shivered as he felt the cold stale air rush to his body.

Something made him look over his shoulder. A feeling, a memory, he didn't know what, but a change in the atmosphere was very slowly making the elated excitement in Tim's stomach turn to sand and slip through the timer.

He shone the torch out of the doorway, but there was nothing there. He shrugged and carried on with the task in hand.

Once he'd hoisted the doll where he wanted it, he shone the torch around the shed to make sure he hadn't left anything. Switching it off he picked up his bag, not

wanting to step out of the shed with it on, just in case someone was lurking about.

He turned towards the shed door to adjust his eyes to the altered light. The moon was shining quite brightly and there was a silvery blue light cast over everything. As his pupils dilated, he suddenly became aware of the outline of something in the doorway. He held his breath, his heart beginning to thump, thump, thump.

There seemed to be a strange kind of whimpering coming from whatever it was, and Tim let out a huge stifled breath as he realised it was either a fox or a stray dog. He turned on his torch to get the measure of what he needed to swat out of the doorway.

But it wasn't a dog or a fox that faced Tim in the doorway of the shed. It was a small child. A child he very much recognised.

Tim became aware of his heart again and gripped his torch. He opened his mouth, but nothing came out; his throat was like sand paper.

The little girl stood in front of him crying, her eyes wide and haunted.

He'd remembered the floral pinafore she was wearing. It was an item he'd just thrown on the bonfire along with all the other memory scents.

What he couldn't comprehend, as he tried to move his feet, which seemed to have turned into lead weights, was that the little girl who stood in front of him was dead. He knew he wasn't mistaken because he was the one who had killed her, with the help of a dog chain. He'd then thrown her into the stream at the bottom of the very garden he was standing in.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“I had some really vivid dreams last night. Did you sleep well?”

“Fairly well. Kept thinking I could hear things but it was just the wind.” Sarah said, pulling up a chair at the kitchen table.

“I was back in that garden. Where I was when I had my regression therapy? And I had that same feeling and smell.”

“Did you go any further with it than you did in your session?”

“A little bit I think. I was being dragged somewhere but then I woke up in a sweat.” Chrissie poured tea for them both from the pot she’d brewed.

“Are you any closer to working out if it’s a memory or a psychic vision?”

Chrissie fidgeted in her chair.

“No. I still think it’s a psychic vision.” Chrissie’s voice was clipped. Sarah thought it was best not to push

it, so she kept quiet. They both stared into the atmosphere, each in their own little worlds.

They were transported back to the kitchen table by the telephone ringing. Chrissie, jolting herself back to the present, answered it.

“Hi Mum. Have you and Dad been busy?”

“Hello darling. Yes, we’ve been out and about...are you alright?”

“Yes, fine thanks. I’ve got Sarah here at the moment.” Chrissie wandered into the lounge with the phone and stared out into the garden.

“Oh, that’s nice dear. Give her our love. Was there any reason for your message?”

“No not really. Just had some regression therapy with Sarah and it threw up some stuff we thought may have come from the past. It’s nothing, don’t worry about it. I’ve sorted it out in my head.”

“Alright darling. I’ll let you get back to Sarah. I expect you’ve got a lot to catch up on.”

Chrissie totally missed the fact her mother hadn’t asked her about her regression, as she was too distracted by the absence of her garden table and two chairs. She

hadn't been sure what was different about the garden when she'd first looked, but the two lonely chairs that were left behind had given it away.

She hung up the phone and went into the kitchen to tell Sarah, but she was already staring out of the kitchen window.

"Sarah, something strange is going on in the garden."

"You're telling me. Have you seen what's hanging off your washing line?"

Sarah's voice sounded distant and small.

Chrissie was becoming familiar with the presence of Jack Frost. He seemed to be a permanent fixture on her shoulder, ready to tip toe down her back whenever he deemed it necessary.

Chrissie wrenched on her Wellington boots and bravely went outside to face whatever it was.

There was a thin low mist billowing across the garden and the day was overcast and dull. Chrissie pulled her dressing gown around her for warmth and went over to the washing line to get a better look at what was hanging from it. She turned to look at Sarah through the

kitchen window, but she was in the porch getting her shoes on, so she could join Chrissie in the garden.

They both turned very pale and it wasn't just from the cold.

"Did you notice the table and chairs?"

"No, what?" Sarah spun round. Being unfamiliar with the garden she hadn't noticed anything was missing.

As Sarah turned to look at the empty space on the patio, she saw something moving out of the corner of her eye. The swing hanging from the tree had begun to move as if there was someone sitting on it. She was sure it hadn't been swinging when she came out. She grabbed Chrissie's arm, making her turn around and look.

"Oh my god, Sarah! Get back in the house!"

The two women scrabbled for the front door. Out of breath, they stood in the kitchen staring at one another.

"Now do you see what I mean?"

"Yes. But are you sure that's paranormal activity and not some head case trying to frighten you?"

"And who would do that around here? No one knows me apart from Grace. Maybe it's a puzzle"

“What? A baby’s clothes on a washing line? And how do the table and chairs fit in?” Sarah filled up the kettle to make a strong cup of tea.

“Whoever it was killed children, didn’t they? But I’m lost on what the table means. Where is my table anyway?”

Chrissie peered out of the window again and shuddered. It was hard to see right down the garden due to the mist. She scanned it from side to side, struggling to see anything. But as her eyes adjusted she began to make out a shape near the trees.

“Come on Sarah. We’re going for a walk.”

“Are we?” Sarah was cautious and didn’t fancy going back outside.

“Just to the bottom of the garden.”

“Can’t we have a cuppa first?”

“Come on! I need you with me.”

They found the table and chairs as Tim had left them with the child’s book placed on the top. Everything was damp from the mist and dew.

“But how did an iron table and chairs get down here?”

“How do we explain any paranormal activity? Whatever it is it’s obviously trying to get my attention.” Chrissie shivered again.

“I really think you should call the police, Chrissie.”

“It’s not what you think it is, Sarah. Trust me on this one. It’s a feeling. I know someone’s trying to get a message to me. I’ve just got to work out what it all means.”

Chrissie turned around and stared at the shed. The door was open, which was unusual. She was sure she’d shut it the last time she’d been down here. She moved over to it, feeling the usual flush of sweat prickle her forehead as her heart began to beat faster.

She held onto the frame and leaned into the dark, damp room, staring into the gloom to adjust her eyes. Everything was as it had been before. She reached for the door latch and wrenched it as best she could to the frame.

“Where does that lead to, down there?”

“Where?”

“Down the side of the shed. Look,” said Sarah, pushing her way through the shrubbery.

“Oh! I don’t know. I hadn’t noticed it before.”

Chrissie started to follow Sarah along the path, pushing down the tangle of tumbleweed as she went.

“We can’t go too far, Sarah. We aren’t even dressed, and I don’t think this is part of my garden.”

“Who’s going to come down here?” said Sarah, pressing her friend to keep going. They walked for quite a distance, delayed slightly by the sprouting plants in their way.

Sarah stopped, causing Chrissie to walk into her.

“What is it?”

“There’s a row of cottages up ahead and what looks like the back gardens leading to them. Look, up on the right.”

Chrissie squinted.

“Oh yeah. Must be my other neighbours. Can we go back now? This is still freaking me out.”

“Let’s just go a bit further and then we’ll turn back.”

Chrissie was feeling extremely peculiar and she didn’t like it one bit.

As they got closer to the row of cottages, Chrissie had a strange feeling of déjà vu sweep across her vision.

“Bloody hell, Sarah! That looks like the cottage in my regression.”

Sarah stopped and turned to look at Chrissie.

“Are you sure? I had a feeling we needed to keep going. Come on!”

And there it was, the swing hanging from the tree in the middle of the garden with the tiny gate and the path leading to the French windows.

Several visions flashed across Chrissie’s mind and a familiar scent of Fisherman’s Friend floated up to her nostrils.

“I don’t like this Sarah. This is really freaking me out. I’m going back.”

Chrissie turned and made her way up the track, leaving Sarah behind. She said hello to a man in his garden who she hadn’t noticed before.

As she stomped along the track a thought suddenly occurred to her. She turned back, meeting Sarah a little way down the path.

“Excuse me? Sorry to bother you, but could you tell me who used to live in the cottage at the end of this row?”

The man looked up from his rake and regarded her oddly as he took in her dressing gown and Wellingtons.

“Well now my beauty. No one really.”

Chrissie stared at the weathered old man, waiting for him to continue.

He pulled his cap forward and leaned back as if to stretch.

“Well someone must have at some point?”
Chrissie was becoming impatient.

“No, no, no! That’s a holiday home, love, has been for donkey’s years.”

“Oh...well thanks.”

Chrissie and Sarah turned to leave.

“What business is it of yours anyway?”

Chrissie pushed her hands into her dressing gown pockets.

“No business really. I’ve just moved into the house a few hundred yards through there,” Chrissie nodded

towards the direction of her cottage, “just getting to know the village a bit better.”

“Oh ah, the detached place with the stream at the bottom?”

“Yes, that’s right. I’m Chrissie, by the way, and this is my friend Sarah.”

“Oh, right.”

“And you are?” Chrissie extended her hand over the old man’s fence.

The man just stared at it and for a second Chrissie thought he was going to carry on raking his garden.

“The name’s Redvers. Reddy.” He shook her hand firmly.

“Nice to meet you, Reddy.”

“You want to know anythin’ about the village you’re welcome to pop in on me ’n the wife anytime.”

“Thank you very much. I’ll bear that in mind.”

Reddy dobbed his cap and continued with his gardening. Chrissie and Sarah took this as their cue to leave and made their way down the path.

“The people here are friendly in an odd kind of way. Bit abrupt but they seem sincere.”

“You’ve only met a couple of people!” Chrissie laughed.

“He wasn’t the chattiest of men.”

“No. but I’m sure his heart’s in the right place. He’s a local so he’s bound to be suspicious.”

“Right. Well. I need to digest all this weird information and I’m gasping for a cup of tea and some breakfast.”

“Yes, absolutely. Come on.” Chrissie linked Sarah’s arm.

“Are you alright?”

“I think so. I’m getting used to the creepy goings on and I suppose I don’t find them as shocking as I did when I first moved here. Either that, or I’m still in shock.”

“You can become slightly desensitized when you have recurring shocks. I think in this case it’s not a bad thing.”

They wound their way around the shed, both shivering at the same time, even though the sun had emerged from the greyness and drunk up the dew, which

in turn had warmed the mist away. It was promising to be a better day than it had started out to be.

“What’s that?” Sarah stopped in her tracks pulling Chrissie up with her.

“What’s what?”

“That. Look over there!” Sarah pointed and then began to move towards the stream.

Chrissie looked to where Sarah was pointing. She could see something pale sticking up in the grass.

Chrissie’s hand flew to her throat.

“Oh my god, Sarah! Don’t go any closer it’s a.... oh god no!”

Sarah didn’t take any notice and carried on towards the stream.

She let out a scream and turned to Chrissie with a look of horror on her face.

Chrissie ran over to her, glancing down the embankment.

“Oh shit! I thought....it was...”

“I know, me too.” Sarah said, taking deep breaths and holding onto Chrissie’s dressing gown. After they’d calmed themselves, Chrissie leant down and picked up the battered doll that was laying half in the stream.

It had looked an awful sight and at first glance they'd thought it was a baby's body. It was so grim, tangled in the long grass with its head floating in the water. One eye was missing and the other turned into its head and the reflection of the water had magnified it, making it look quite a sight to any passer by.

"I really do think you ought to call the police. This doesn't appear to have anything to do with the supernatural at all. This is a prank being played by someone. Somebody who knows you're new here." Sarah shivered, wrapping her dressing tighter around her body.

"I'm not phoning the police just yet, I need to think about it all. I can't shake off the feeling that it's a message, as bizarre as it seems."

Chrissie and Sarah collected the doll, the book and the clothes and made their way back to the house.

"I've had enough for one day. Can we lock the doors and stay in?" said Sarah, looking rather pale and ill.

"I think that's a brilliant idea." Chrissie linked her arm through Sarah's as they wandered up the garden, glad of each other's company.

“I still think you ought to inform the police, Chrissie.”

“I’ll think about it.”

*

Tim found himself standing in the stream at the bottom of Chrissie’s garden. He was exhausted, having walked around the village several times. He was unshaven with bruised rings around his tired eyes. The bottle of rum he was carrying was almost empty and he was in a complete drunken oblivion. Whenever he turned around the little girl in the pinafore was behind him. She sobbed and sobbed, occasionally tugging at the back of his coat to try and gain his attention. But she had his full attention, only he didn’t want to face her. He had tried all night since he’d scrambled out of the shed to get away from her. He’d even gone home and locked all the doors, but she was still there. Crying, crying, crying.

He thought the only way to escape it was to go out of the house with his bottle of rum. He'd walked up and down the beach several times, but she'd persisted almost as if she'd stepped into his conscience. Like a reflection in the mirror, she would never leave.

As the sun was coming up he'd staggered his way over to the stream. To her resting place, to see if that would break the spell.

But she stood on the bank sobbing, managing the odd words he could just make out, which were "want" and "Mummy".

He screamed to the pink streaked skies for help, a pathetic sight. And for the first time since he was a child he experienced the feeling of how small and insignificant he was. Just how his mother had made him feel. The realisation hit him like a door slamming in a strong wind; there was a much larger force than him to be reckoned with.

Looking skyward made everything spin and he staggered, almost losing his footing. As he looked down to steady himself he stared at a pair of hands, which he

didn't recognise as his own at first. They were dripping in thick, cloying blood.

The scream from his mouth woke him.

He sat up abruptly, unsure of where he was at first. Sweat was pouring over his body. He scrambled for the light while he tried to swallow and dampen his dry mouth.

Just a dream, he kept telling himself as the flick of the switch lit up the room. He moved to lie back down and compose himself but there she was again, the girl in the pinafore, sobbing at the bottom of his bed. One eye blackened and cut, the other completely red where he'd pushed his fingers so hard into her tiny face.

NORFOLK 1987

Karen had had a lovely time with her grandparents. She'd stayed with them overnight for the first time in her short life. Her parents lived only a few miles along the coast, but it had seemed too daunting to stay overnight

before. Her grandparent's house was so big and imposing, especially to a child.

She'd woken up earlier than she normally did and had decided to get herself dressed. Her grandparents were still in bed and the house was much too quiet for a five-year-old. Boredom got the better of her and she decided to go outside and finish playing the game she'd been busy inventing the day before.

It was a tea party for monkey and rabbit. The table and chairs were at the bottom of the garden near the stream, just as she'd left them. Her plastic tea set, and her picture books lay out on the table.

Karen placed monkey and rabbit on the chairs and began to play her game. She hadn't been expecting a fourth person for tea and she hadn't laid the table accordingly for her unexpected visitor.

*

Norfolk 1998

Grace pushed her way through the front door, her bags catching on the frame, causing her to back track. She swore as she sidled in and dropped her luggage on the hall floor. Looking up she noticed how dark it was in the house and there was a strange smell emanating towards her. Registering that it was brilliant sunshine outside, it dawned on her there was something wrong.

Wandering through the rooms, she opened all the curtains. The house was a mess. Dirty crockery in the sink and the dishwasher looked like it hadn't been turned on since she'd left, five days ago.

She sighed, desperately trying to stifle the anger bubbling up inside her. On opening the lounge curtains and turning to face the room she was sharply confronted by Tim's presence.

“What the bloody hell is going on here?”

There was a grunt coming from the sofa as Tim tried to prize open his bloodshot eyes.

“Couldn’t you have tried to keep the place tidy in the short time I was away? Obviously, it was too much to ask!”

Grace stormed out of the lounge, unable to discuss it with him for fear of caving his skull in with the empty rum bottle that lay on the floor beside a congealed plate of food.

“Lazy bastard!” She spat at him as she left the room.

It hadn’t passed her by that he looked an absolute mess. It was out of character for him not to tidy up after himself; he was so obsessed with cleanliness that it drove Grace to distraction. But after seeing how devastated her sister was over the last few days, she was past caring. Maybe he was finally going around the twist. Perhaps his conscience had paid him a visit after all these years.

“Grace! Grace.... come on!” Tim staggered into the kitchen and almost fell onto her.

“Oh my god, you stink! Go and have a shower.”

“Grace...I’ve been so...lost without you!” he slurred and pulled at her jacket.

“Piss off, Tim! I mean it! Just piss off!” She pushed him, and he fell backwards hitting his head on the kitchen cupboards.

It knocked him out cold. She stood there for quite some time holding her breath while she stared at him. She was wondering if she’d killed him but there was nothing in her being urging her to check for any signs of life.

Eventually there was movement from his chest and he groaned. It occurred to her how easy it had been to push him. If she’d done it a bit harder she might have killed him there and then.

She imagined how she would feel now if it had been a reality. How she’d go straight back to her sister’s and pretend she hadn’t returned to the house yet. That he’d got extremely drunk and slipped on some water in the kitchen; a tragic accident in their tragic family. It would have been all over as easy as that. But it wasn’t. And Tim wasn’t dead. And she was back in her house.

Grace felt surprisingly chirpy for the rest of the day. She left Tim on the kitchen floor to sleep it off and she tidied the whole house from top to bottom.

A beautiful realisation was surging through her, like the buds of a plant unfurling. She could kill him quite easily and make it look like an accident. All she had to do was encourage him to keep drinking. It was perfect.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

When Tim woke up from his drunken stupor, he wasn't quite sure where he was. His first view was of a cupboard, and as his eyes focused he realised it was the kitchen where he lived. He tried to move his cold body off the floor. He ached from head to toe, quite literally and imagined he felt like someone who had been in a car crash.

He had no recollection of what had happened, but as he got to his feet and rubbed his head he noticed the kitchen was tidy and there were fresh suds in the sink.

A bizarre thought entered his head. Maybe someone had broken in and cleaned up. He often had stupid thoughts when he was hung over.

It took him a few minutes as he sloped around the house to realise that Grace had been home. The thing was, he couldn't remember falling over in the kitchen. He thought he'd slipped on the floor Grace had mopped and it seemed the most likely explanation.

He looked around the house, but Grace was nowhere to be seen. He could feel a strong irritation creeping through his body. Why wasn't she here to nurse him better?

He got into bed, so he could try and get some sleep. This proved a much harder task than he thought. He couldn't shut down. Flashbacks of the previous two days were appearing as a jumbled mess in his mind.

A vision of Karen kept sliding into his head and he turned from one side of the bed to the other, desperate to rid his mind of the awful vision. But the vast amount of alcohol in his system had over stimulated his body.

His urge for some sympathy and the battle he was having in his mind got the better of him. Grace wasn't around so the only other place to go was his mother's.

*

Chrissie had just waved Sarah off when she spotted Grace coming down the track towards her house.

“Sorry Chrissie, you’re still in your dressing gown!”

“Don’t be silly, it’s lovely to see you. Come in. Sarah’s just left, and I haven’t got my arse in gear yet. Coffee?”

“Oh. I should have rung first. You’ve probably had your fill of company. I’ll call back another day.” Grace turned in the door to leave.

“Excuse me I’ll be the judge of that. You don’t need to ring first. Now get your bottom back in here right now!”

Chrissie grabbed Grace’s shoulder and marched her into the kitchen. It wasn’t until she pushed her onto a kitchen chair that she realised Grace was crying.

“What’s all this? Oh Grace, come here!”

Grace stood up and Chrissie held her in her arms. She seemed so small and vulnerable compared to what she normally appeared to be.

Grace had felt so elated after she’d finished cleaning the house, but fatigue had gotten the better of her and she’d collapsed with a bang. She’d suddenly become aware again of how monumentally huge the

whole thing was. She nearly voiced this to Chrissie without thinking.

“It must be so hard supporting your sister when you’re grieving too, you poor thing.”

“I just...I...can’t...I...”

“It’s alright Grace. There’s plenty of time. Just take some deep breaths.”

Chrissie patted her friend’s hand, her heart tightening at the sight of her in such distress. The whole situation was so tragic.

Grace composed herself while Chrissie made a pot of coffee. She took off her coat and hung it on the back of one of the kitchen chairs. The draught from the coat wafted a smell under Chrissie’s nose. Fisherman’s Friend. There it was again.

Chrissie paused as visions she couldn’t quite grasp flashed across her mind. She sniffed hard to try and recapture it.

“Are you ok?” Grace asked, wiping her nose with an old tissue she had up her sleeve.

“Yes. Sorry. For some reason I keep getting a waft of some sort of menthol sweet. Fisherman’s Friend I

think. It's triggering all sorts of memories. I had some regression therapy with my friend Sarah. The one who was staying here? Ever since then, well...anyway, you don't need to hear all about that. Tell me what's been happening."

"It is Fisherman's Friend. That's Tim's wax jacket. He keeps them in his pocket. It was the first coat to hand in this awful weather. What came up in the therapy?"

Grace knew she was being nosy, but she had a strong urge to find out for some reason. It would also distract her from talking about herself. It was a mixture of not wanting to say too much in her emotional state and revealing her shaky, mixed up mind. She felt like an old rag doll that had been sewn up over the years, only to come undone again. Something she could ill afford now. She had to keep the seams together.

*

Daphne eyed Tim over her bowl of congealed apple crumble and custard. The smell of it, mixed with urine and disinfectant, was causing Tim's face to flush from holding down the contents of his stomach.

"Why have you come to see me looking like that?" Daphne's hand flicked towards him, catching the edge of the bowl. The spoon clattered against it causing Tim to flinch. It echoed right through to his very core.

"I wanted to see you. Does it matter what I look like? Can't I just pop in on you now?"

"Not looking like that you don't. It's not how I brought you up."

"We both know exactly how you brought me up, don't we Mother?" Tim spat, leering slightly across her dinner tray. "Or shall I rephrase that. Didn't bring me up."

Daphne chose to ignore this.

"Been up to your old tricks again, Tim? Was that my fault as well? I know what's got to you, my boy. They've found that girl. Grace's niece."

Tim was caught speechless for a start. Not sure how to take what she'd said. He ignored it and chose to

turn the conversation around. He'd come here for some comfort, although, he now realised he'd been chasing her for that all his life. A picture of who he wanted her to be which never actually matched who she truly was. This had caused him to be permanently disappointed. Not accepting her for who she was had set him up for failure time and time again. Why hadn't he noticed before? Maybe the alcohol had made it all clear.

"I am a bit upset Mother. It's been an awful time for the whole family. We've been busy supporting Eve and of course, Jon."

Daphne paused to observe him. After a few minutes she clapped her gnarled old hands together, like two pieces of bracken.

"Well done son. I'm sure you'll pass it off to the police when they come and question you. You can't pull the wool over my eyes though."

They stared at each other for a very long time, neither one wanting to be the first to give in.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mother. You're obviously in one of your moods. I'll leave you for now and I'll come back when you're feeling better."

Tim got up rather unsteadily and left the room without even saying goodbye properly.

“I know you better than anyone.” She whispered to herself.

Tim ran from the building. He couldn’t cope with her today. He reassured himself she was just testing him. Who would believe a mad old woman in a retirement home? But his hangover and past events were making him feel dark and uneasy.

*

Grace listened carefully to Chrissie’s news about what she’d found in the garden and the regression therapy she’d had.

“This is getting really serious Chrissie.”

“Tell me about it. I’ve barely slept since I’ve been here. Does any of what I’ve told you fit.... oh, Grace. That was really insensitive of me. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s fine. Don’t worry. You’d be amazed at how many people feel they’ve said the wrong thing. When my daughter died, people crossed the street, so they didn’t have to talk to me. They just didn’t know what to say. I’d rather people put their foot in it than say nothing at all.”

“I didn’t know you had a daughter.” Chrissie’s voice was small and distant. The tragedy in Grace’s family just got worse.

“I just assumed that you and Tim didn’t want children or perhaps couldn’t have any. What happened to her?”

Grace fiddled with the old bit of crumbling tissue she’d found tucked in her sleeve.

“She had an accident. A terrible accident whilst she was out playing with a friend.” Grace paused and took a deep breath, not used to discussing Nadine with anyone. “She fell into a cess pit, the entrance of which was hidden in a derelict garden. There was nothing anyone could do.”

“That’s awful, Grace, what with Alice as well.”

“Yes, well. At least I have a tiny amount of comfort in the fact that Nadine died relatively quickly,

and not at the hand of a monster, something my sister must live with.”

“I can’t imagine comfort from anything, at a time like that.”

“No. Quite.” Grace took a deep breath and straightened herself in her chair, physically ironing out the pain in her heart.

“So, where are these things you found in your garden?”

“Are you sure you want to look at them?”

“Yes. Two heads are better than one and I know more about what happened back then than you do. I might be able to shine some light on it.” Grace hated lying to Chrissie, but she had to go along with it all.

“I really do feel that someone is trying to get through to me about the murders. And I’m more determined than ever to piece it all together. Tim said something about one of the victim’s being found in my garden. Is that true?”

Grace flinched at hearing Tim’s name.

“Yes, it is, I’m afraid. A little girl called Karen. She was very young. Five or six I think.”

“Whoever it was really was sick.” Chrissie shook her head. “What I can’t understand is how the police never came close to finding the culprit, especially with so many victims in the same area.”

Chrissie went into the utility room to get the child’s book and clothes. She decided it was best not to show Grace the doll with the broken face, under the circumstances.

“A criminal mastermind.”

Grace’s sarcasm was lost on Chrissie.

“Do you think so?”

Grace didn’t answer. She was staring at the items Chrissie had in her hands. She could feel the blood literally draining from her face.

There was silence as she went through the motions of looking through them. She couldn’t let on to Chrissie that they were Nadine’s. She lingered, trying to think of something to say.

“Are you ok, Grace? You’ve gone awfully pale. Let me get you some water.”

Grace was so close to telling Chrissie everything, for what reason she wasn’t sure. Maybe she was looking

for an ally; someone to help her rid the world of the bastard, a friend to lean on so she didn't feel so impossibly alone.

Grace was trying to swallow the fact that Tim had been in Chrissie's garden causing mischief with their precious daughter's childhood possessions. How much further would the man go?

"I'm fine, Chrissie, just a little tired. You won't throw these things out, will you?"

"No, of course not. I thought you were going to pressure me into going to the police. That's what Sarah thought I should do when I first found them."

Grace leafed through the hard-back book Nadine had loved so much as a child. Tears sprung to her eyes.

"And now?"

"I don't know really. I know she thinks you should always follow your gut feeling. And that's what I'm doing."

"Go with your gut feeling, Chrissie. The police won't take much notice I wouldn't have thought. I don't think these things belong to one of the victims."

Grace felt bad saying this to Chrissie, knowing that any good friend would tell her to report it.

“It is really weird, though isn’t it? Where could they have possibly come from? I mean, I’ve heard of people experiencing paranormal activity but nothing like this, especially not with a stranger’s possessions. Sarah says it could be some kind of poltergeist, but I don’t even want to think about that.”

Grace was deep in thought again. A tear trickled down her face.

“I’m sorry, Grace. My mouth runs ahead of my mind sometimes.”

“It’s not you, Chrissie. I’m just very emotional. I want to hear about it, I really do. I may be able to help you solve the puzzle so please don’t hide it from me.”

Chrissie reached across the table and squeezed Grace’s hand, unable to hold back her own tears.

*

After Grace left, Chrissie was relieved to have some time on her own. She sat on the sofa and stared at the book she'd found on her garden table.

"Bedtime Stories," she said out loud to the room, as if it might come back with some answers. She flicked through the pictures. They were ironic really, depicting another world. A whimsical world where there was Good and Evil. A place where Good always triumphed over Evil, not like.

Just as she was pondering on these thoughts, the phone rang.

"Hello, darling. It's Mum."

"Hi Mum, are you alright? Is Dad alright?" Chrissie suddenly panicked, not used to hearing from her mother two days in a row.

"Yes, everything's fine. I wanted to talk to you about something. Have you got a minute?"

"Yes, several. What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, there's just something I need to tell you."

"Mother, you're frightening me. What is it?"

Sylvia relayed everything that had happened on that awful night at the holiday cottage when Chrissie was snatched. The line at Chrissie's end went quiet for a very long time.

“Chrissie, darling? Are you ok?”

Chrissie slumped back on the sofa; nausea rising in her stomach.

“Why didn't you tell me?” Chrissie almost whispered.

“I'm so sorry, Chrissie. You suffered some sort of amnesia afterwards. The doctor said it was because of the shock and for the time being was for the best. We just wanted you to have as normal a childhood as possible after that awful incident.”

“Did he touch me? Did he...you know?”

The line was quiet again.

“Did he touch me?!” Chrissie shrieked down the phone.

“Not as far as we know. We don't know if it was a man, darling. It was dark, and you didn't have a description. You just said you thought it was a man and

he smelt funny. Darling, we kept it from you because we love you.”

“So, did the police think it was the person who killed all those children?” Chrissie snapped at her.

“They couldn’t be sure. There was a huge police hunt, but they couldn’t find anything. The point is, darling, you survived.”

“I know that Mother, but you can’t just ring me with this monumental news and expect me to immediately focus on the bright side.”

“But you mustn’t dwell on ‘what ifs’.”

“You’ve obviously had plenty of time to get used to this information over the years, whereas I haven’t. So please allow me to have some time to adjust to what you’ve just told me, instead of doing what you always do – stick a plaster on it and hope it’ll go away!”

Chrissie slammed the phone down. Her mother had the good sense not to phone back, thinking it was best to leave her daughter to calm down.

Chrissie felt so angry. But she didn’t quite know who with. She could see why her family had kept it from her, although it was typical of them. But then maybe all

their protectiveness over the years had stemmed from this incident. She needed time for all this information to filter through her mind.

The thought that as a child she might have been so close to such an evil monster made her feel physically sick. Her mother was right. She was immensely lucky to have got away.

A thought dawned on her. The shed. The memory of the flashback flooded her mind. That was why it was all so familiar. Perhaps that's where he had taken her. She shivered, thinking of poor little Karen, who probably took her place. She didn't want to sit with those thoughts. It was all too much. She decided to get dressed and sort out the jumble of her mind by walking along the beach.

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“I went to see Chrissie today, you know, my friend in the village?”

“Oh yeah.”

“She’s still having some really strange things happening at the house and it’s now spread to the garden.”

“Really.” Tim was dead pan and sarcastic. He didn’t even look up from the newspaper crossword he was doing.

Grace continued to channel hop. She needed to choose her words carefully.

“She found some children’s clothes and a book in the garden. She’s not sure whether to go to the police, what with everything that’s happened with Alice.”

That got his attention. The paper lowered slightly.

“It was really strange. For a few minutes after she showed me what she had found I thought they were Nadine’s things.”

“What has that got to do with Alice and why would she go to the police?”

“All this activity in the house; I suppose she thinks it’s got something to do with all those murders from years ago. She thinks one of the victims is trying to get a message to her about the killer.”

Tim chuckled and continued with his crossword.

“It would be amazing if it did though.” Grace pressed further.

“If it did what?”

“The messages from beyond the grave; if they led her to the killer.”

“Grace, I don’t know what you’re waffling on about. The police won’t take any notice of your nutty friend, especially if she keeps going on about silly ghost stories.”

He looked quite calm. Grace couldn’t tell if she’d rattled him or not. But then she supposed that was how he’d managed to become a serial killer.

She had without realising it rattled him quite a bit. He hadn’t thought of the scenario that Chrissie might go to the police. He didn’t want them tracing the items to his house. It was drinking too much that had caused him to make that error. He had to keep a clear head, especially when there was a new police investigation going on.

“Will they open up a full investigation like they did all those years ago?” Grace asked, trying to sound naive.

“I should imagine they have done already.” Tim muttered almost under his breath.

Grace settled on a repeat of an old drama programme, as a slightly uncomfortable silence landed in the room.

“Better get the sheds cleared out.” Grace said, keeping her eyes on the television screen.

The paper lowered again.

“What’s that got to do with anything?” Tim’s voice became dark and cold.

“Oh, nothing. I was just thinking the other day we ought to have a clear out before the winter sets in. Tidy the garden up a bit.”

Grace knew she needed to go steady. She could see it had hit a nerve with him and she didn’t want to push him too far.

*

“I know you’re very angry with us at the moment, darling. But I’ve just called to tell you we did what we thought would be best for you at the time. We decided to

tell you because we didn't want you finding out through someone else, especially as you were having some therapy.

Daddy and I were so thankful every day that you were spared, and we still are. We didn't want it to be a black cloud over our lives. So, we tried to carry on as normal. It made us appreciate all three of you so much more, even though we didn't think that was possible. It wasn't an easy decision to make, not telling you. And I know you think we've suffocated you over the years, but now you know why. Anyway...that's all I wanted to say on the matter. We love you very much and we hope you can see our reasons for keeping it from you...."

Chrissie turned off the answer machine. Despite the situation, she chuckled to herself. Her mother had sounded so matter of fact and defensive. She did that when she was wounded.

Chrissie, having calmed somewhat, called her mother back to put her mind at rest. The fresh air from the sea had done her the world of good.

They had a much better conversation about it all even though Chrissie still felt extremely sore and upset. It

was as if someone had allowed her into a room of memories where the door had been locked for so many years.

Her mother was right. It served no purpose to dwell on “what ifs”. She hadn’t been aware of it for so many years and had got along in her life quite happily. Something her mother thought she wouldn’t have done had she remembered the awful incident.

But she couldn’t whole heartedly throw herself into this carefree attitude. She needed some time. Every moment she thought about what could have happened, her stomach turned over. She felt like she’d been rescued from falling off a cliff, but she was still standing on the edge. Each time she looked over her shoulder she was staring down a sheer drop.

Chrissie decided to call Sarah before she settled down for the night. She wanted to let her know she’d been right about the childhood memory. She still couldn’t believe it. A whole part of her life seemed to have been erased; like a piece of puzzle that didn’t belong in the whole picture.

The anger Chrissie felt earlier began to bubble up inside her. It made her realise who she was angry with. The person who'd tried to snatch her. How dare they? How dare they put her and her parents through that awful trauma? Her lovely, kind parents who'd strived to give her and her siblings a magical childhood. Something that, in Chrissie's opinion, should be set in stone, not something you had if you were lucky. And how dare they try to cut her life short; what right had they, to make that decision.

These feelings gave her the determination to work out the messages she was being given and the will to work out who it was who committed these abhorrent crimes.

*

Grace knocked at her sister's door but there was no answer. She'd brought her some shopping, knowing she wouldn't have been out of the house. She put the bags

down on the door step and let herself in. All was silent apart from the buzz of the refrigerator.

She went through the rooms calling her, but there was no answer. She remembered the last time she'd freaked out and scolded herself for even thinking it. Eve was just upstairs taking a nap.

She switched on the kettle to make a hot drink for them both and began to unpack the shopping, whilst reassuring herself everything was fine. But the atmosphere felt heavier than usual and she couldn't shake off the feeling of foreboding. She scolded herself again and finished putting the shopping away.

As Grace put the last of the things in the fridge and cleared the kitchen table of bags, she noticed an envelope with her name on it.

At first, she thought Eve had gone for a walk and left her a note. But then the logical side of her brain told her that Eve would have scribbled on a piece of paper, rather than go to the trouble of putting it in an envelope.

A sick feeling began to rise from the pit of her stomach as she opened the carefully folded letter.

Dear Grace,

I'm so sorry...

Grace didn't get any further. She scrambled up the stairs so fast she fell up them. She recovered herself immediately and within seconds she was barging through Alice's bedroom door.

A loud scream made her jump. She turned around to see who it was and then realised it had come from her mouth.

Eve was laid on Alice's bed, a deathly shade of white. For what felt like a few seconds Grace was rooted to the spot.

Brain in gear, she checked for a pulse, but she was shaking so much, she wasn't sure if she could feel one or not. She ran downstairs to call for an ambulance. She tried to calm her breathing, so she could relay the address to the operator on the end of the phone.

“Grace? Whatever’s happened? I heard a terrible scream.”

Grace turned in the hallway to find Eve’s next-door neighbour, Dennis. He was a close friend of the family and a retired Detective Inspector. He’d been at the forefront of all the murder investigations and had been a huge support to their entire family during their time of need.

“Oh Dennis, she’s upstairs.... she’s in Alice’s bedroom...”

Dennis sprinted up the stairs two at a time with Grace following closely behind him.

“Christ, Eve!”

“Is she still alive, Dennis?” Grace said, as Dennis checked Eve for a pulse.

“There’s a faint pulse.” He leaned his face near to hers to see if he could feel her breath on his cheek.

“It’s weak, but she’s still with us.” Dennis moved her carefully into the recovery position in case she was sick. He picked up the bottles of tablets she’d taken, and examined the labels.

“Just try and keep calm, Grace, the ambulance will be here in a minute.”

“Oh god, Dennis! What was she thinking?”

Grace sat on the end of the bed, her head in her hands.

“She’s not been right since Alice went Grace. You know that.”

“But to get in this...that’s the ambulance!” Grace raced back downstairs to guide them to the correct house, not wanting to waste a second.

Grace and Dennis followed the ambulance to the hospital, leaving the crew space to bring Eve back to life.

“Try not to worry, Grace. I don’t think she’s taken enough. She’s in the right hands now.”

“But I wasted time making a drink and unloading the shopping,” Grace sobbed, “I just thought she was having a nap as normal.”

“You’ve got nothing to reproach yourself for. It was inevitable it would come to this, she’s been in such turmoil.”

“If it was inevitable, Dennis, then I should have looked after her better.”

“Look, you can’t watch someone twenty-four hours a day. She’d have found a way at some point.”

“I clearly wasn’t watching enough. I just assumed Jon was on top of it all. But now, as I reflect on recent events, he obviously wasn’t.”

“Grace, you need to remember you had your own loss to deal with. In my experience, when people plan this sort of thing, they’ve gone beyond accepting any sort of help.”

They parked out the front of the hospital and watched as the ambulance crew deftly unloaded Eve and rushed her through the emergency doors. Grace and Dennis followed. They were sent to the family room by an austere but friendly nurse, despite Grace’s protests to be with her sister.

“Let them do their jobs, Grace. Sit there and I’ll get you a drink.”

Grace was going over and over things in her head. Her mind was like a washing machine running through a cycle. Round and round. All she kept thinking was what

if she'd reported Tim or followed through with her plans earlier. Maybe this wouldn't have happened.

Perhaps Eve would have coped better knowing who it was, even though it would have been such a shock finding out it was her brother in law. This thought caused little sobbing noises to escape her mouth; she was so knotted up with it all. When Dennis came back in with their drinks she was rocking backwards and forwards in one of the weather-beaten chairs.

Dennis put the cups down and grabbed Grace by her shoulders.

"Grace, this is not going to help Eve!"

"You don't understand," Grace sobbed again, "you don't understand."

"Hey, come on. It's ok. She'll be alright." He sat next to her and pulled her body towards him. She gripped his shirt, having always found him more of a comfort than Tim. She relaxed in his arms and cried and cried.

Once she'd calmed, Dennis got her to drink the coffee he'd brought. She seemed to be much calmer after she'd released all her pent-up emotion.

She smiled at Dennis and then frowned as she looked at his tired face.

“Are you alright? You don’t look your usual sprightly self.”

“I’m just tired, Grace. Too much golf and gardening.”

“Are you sure that’s all it is? You look a bit pale.”

Dennis was the picture of health. He was in his fifties, the same as Grace, and as the years had been kind to her, so they had to him. He’d had his fair share of admirers over the years and he was the healthiest police officer Grace had ever known. In her experience they were usually overweight smokers with a drink problem. But she’d known Dennis long enough to know there was something weighing heavy on his mind.

“Honestly. I’m fine. By the way I’ve called Jon and he’s on his way. I tried Tim as well, but there’s no answer.”

“Thanks Dennis, but I don’t want him here.”

“Good job I didn’t get hold of him then.”

“I’m not being ungrateful. He’s just the last person I want to see right now.”

“Not getting on?”

“Just the usual. You know what we’re like; you’ve known us long enough.”

Grace almost choked on the words. What she’d wanted to say was, “he’s a fucking bastard and I want him to suffer a slow and painful death and never see him ever again”, but this was hardly appropriate.

Dennis half chuckled and sighed to himself.

“You’ve never had what could be called a ‘blissful’ marriage, have you?”

“Far from it, Dennis. Far from it.”

“My parents were like you two. Bickered all the time, but really loved each other. When my mother died, my father was a broken man.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t go that far, Dennis. There’s no love lost between Tim and me.”

Dennis frowned.

“Is he really that bad, Grace?” Dennis laughed, “I’ll take him on another fishing trip. We haven’t been for a while; get the old boy out of your hair for a bit.”

Dennis nudged Grace, trying to cheer her up, which probably wasn't going to work under the circumstances.

"That would be great. Give us a break from each other."

"You've got a lot on your plate at the moment. You're bound to rub each other up the wrong way."

Dennis patted Grace's knee.

The doctor that had been dealing with Eve came into the room.

Grace held her breath. Good news or bad, doctors always appeared to have that sombre "I have tragic news" look on their faces.

"We have managed to stabilise Eve's condition, but she's in a very fragile state. We don't believe enough has been absorbed into her system to cause any permanent damage to her organs."

"So, will she be alright?"

"We've stabilised her, as I said, and she's in the best place. You found her just in time. She's very lucky"

“But surely, if she hasn’t taken enough to do any permanent damage to her organs, then she hasn’t taken enough to kill herself?”

“It’s a little more complicated than that. If Eve hadn’t been found then the tablets would have completely dissolved into her system, which could have been fatal. We have managed to pump quite a lot out of her stomach. Now we must let her body do the rest. She’s being monitored.”

“Can we see her?”

“The nurses are just getting her settled into a side room on the Sandringham ward. Give them a few minutes and then you should be able to go and see her. Only for a few minutes though, she’s very weak.”

The doctor nodded reassuringly, smiled and left the room.

“They never seem to answer the bloody question.” Grace frowned.

“Sounded pretty clear to me. She’s very bloody lucky.”

“Let’s hope she sees it that way when she comes around.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Chrissie had been lying awake for quite some time. She was watching the sun come up through her bedroom window. It was slowly lighting up her garden and giving it a warm glow.

Strangely, she'd had the best night's sleep since she'd lived in the cottage. After the shock of the news from her mother and all the pieces she'd linked together, she'd thought that would have caused her to have a very bumpy journey through the night. But it was quite the opposite and she felt very calm. It was as if by solving part of the mystery, her mind could relax. Like she'd let go of something.

Everywhere felt calm. Chrissie knew it hadn't stopped there. That there would be another part to the puzzle she would have to solve. She promised herself

that from now on she wouldn't rule out any possibilities, however outrageous they were or however much she didn't want them to hold any truth. She'd done that over the regression therapy and Sarah had turned out to be right.

Since the session and her mother telling her what had happened, the memory had become clearer in her head. Little bits and pieces were coming back to her, mainly about that particular holiday, rather than anything to do with the actual incident. Most of what she remembered was of it being very dark and that she'd felt absolutely petrified.

A thought hit Chrissie like an electric shock. Something her mother had said replayed in her head.

"You just said you thought it was a man and he smelt funny..."

What smell?

Chrissie ran downstairs to call her mother. It was some time before Sylvia answered the phone and Chrissie wondered if she was still in bed.

"You're up and about early, darling. Are you alright?"

“What smell did I say he had?”

“Sorry?”

“You said yesterday that I thought it was a man who snatched me, and he smelt funny. Did I say what smell?”

“Oh, yes. Umm...let me think...it was something herbal, but I can’t remember what. It was such a long time ago. Darling, I hope you’re not torturing yourself with all this?”

“No Mum. I just need to work something out. Was it Fisherman’s Friend?”

“That rings a bell. It might have been. Why is it so important?”

“My therapy session brought up the memory of a smell and it’s been bugging me. It was Fisherman’s Friend.”

“Oh. Well. Do you feel better now?”

“I do now I know what it is. I’m just not sure I know what it means.”

“Probably nothing, darling, I’m sure there are hundreds of people who ate and smelt of those sweets. You must remember that you were very young at the

time and memories get muddled. Now go and do something nice with your day and try not to dwell on it.”

Chrissie had decided not to tell her mother about what had happened in the garden. It would only worry them. They wouldn't think it was someone with a message from beyond the grave. They'd think it was some psycho stalking her. They'd only talk her into phoning the police, or worse still, call them themselves.

Chrissie's mind rested on this thought. Having dismissed the regression therapy theory of it being a childhood memory and not a past life, maybe she shouldn't ignore this either. After all, Sarah and Grace had suggested it might not be a paranormal message.

A disturbing thought entered her mind. If it was the serial killer who had snatched her, was he still in the village, and had he recognised her? Had all the paranormal activities been a clever trick in order for him to frighten her? She plonked herself down on the sofa after turning on the television. She needed some background noise, some attachment with the real world to drown out the eerie atmosphere that was descending on the house again.

She went through all the people she'd met since she'd arrived in the village. Then she went back over the paranormal activity. Some of it couldn't have been orchestrated. But then, when she thought about it, some of it could have. Did someone know about the paranormal activity and think it'd be funny to frighten her further?

For some reason Chrissie's mind kept picturing Grace's kitchen, a clear vision in her head. Grace and her husband Tim were the only people who knew about the incidents, unless they'd told someone else about it, which was doubtful.

Chrissie's mind settled on Tim. Fisherman's Friend. No. He wouldn't play games; he's a retired policeman; Grace's husband.

But the more Chrissie's mind settled on Tim, the more he felt familiar to her.

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What was she waiting for? Grace didn't know. After the day's events she had become acutely aware of the knowledge she had about Tim. If a friend confided in her and told her this story, she'd scream at them from the steeples that they had to go to the police. But this was her and not someone else.

The guilt was beginning to weigh heavily on her. She'd kept the information to herself for over a year, even though it only felt like a few weeks. Sometimes when she thought about it all, she felt completely in control and confident she was doing what she believed was only right and just. But a lot of the time she felt like a frightened little child who was completely out of their depth. And that maybe she'd spent the last year hiding away from the truth. Not wanting it to come out because of the repercussions it would cause. She soon snapped out of it, knowing she wasn't that much of a coward. She wouldn't have kept the information to herself purely because of the fear of everyone knowing it was her husband and the stigma that carried.

Grace kicked the bottom of the bed with her heels. She was sitting in Alice's bedroom, having left Eve to

rest. Dennis had dropped her off. She didn't ask him in, just told him she needed some time on her own.

She'd eventually got through to Tim and then wondered why she'd bothered. He hadn't been fazed by any of it. She told him she didn't know when she'd be home. He'd said nothing.

Her resolve returning, Grace began to think about her plans. She found this immensely therapeutic and it kept her mind focused; a means to an end, a life for everyone again without Tim.

She got up from the bed and turned Alice's bedside lamp on and the overhead light off. She didn't like glaring main lights on in rooms. Apart from making the atmosphere impersonal and stark, it brought back sad memories for Grace.

She remembered when her mother had died, how she and her siblings had sat around the family kitchen table, the main light glaring down on them all, the bulb high-lighting everything like a big fluorescent pen marking out a sentence. They had sat there to discuss things after their mother's death, and again after her funeral, and again when they were sorting out her paper

work. All under the overhead light and it had made it seem so stark and raw.

It was one of those things in life Grace hated. She remembered being distracted because the whole time she sat there, all she could think about was turning the light off and putting the lamps on. Making it cosy, just as it had always been. She supposed it was because she needed the comfort, wanting things to stay the same, as if by turning the lamps on it would flick another switch.

After she'd turned the lamp on, Alice's bedroom felt totally different. Grace sat on the bed and closed her eyes. She imagined Alice walking through the door with a cup of hot chocolate and a book, ready to jump into bed and read. Alice loved books. She and Nadine had always swapped novels.

Grace opened her eyes and stared around the room. It was exactly how Alice had left it. Apart from the fact everything was faded, the posters, the spines of books, photographs and curtains. It was as if they'd faded out alongside Alice.

Grace casually opened the small bedside cabinet. A pile of envelopes cascaded onto the floor. They were all addressed to Alice.

She picked one up. It was sealed. She tried another, frowning. They were all sealed and franked.

Grace didn't want to pry, but she was intrigued that all these letters had been sent and put away unopened. She looked at the dates.

As far as she could tell, all the letters had been sent after Alice went missing. Why hadn't her sister opened them?

Grace tapped an envelope on her hand, trying to decide if she should open some. She didn't normally read people's letters, but she was concerned that they might hold some important information.

They all looked like they'd come from the same person; they were identical apart from the sizes and colours. The address on the front of each envelope had been typed, so she couldn't glean any clues from that.

She was surprised the police hadn't found these in their investigations, especially as the case had been

reopened. She decided it could be important and ran downstairs with a handful to open over a steaming kettle.

There was no soft lighting in the kitchen, so she had no choice but to use the glaring one over the kitchen table. It was to be another sad memory stored in her mind, tinged yet again with the starkness of the light.

She made herself a hot drink and then kept re-boiling the kettle, so she could steam open each letter. She sat down at the kitchen table and examined one of the envelopes again before she removed its contents. She was still undecided. She was very particular about privacy and didn't like it when anyone encroached on hers.

Curiosity and anxiety got the better of her. She pulled the carefully folded paper from one of the envelopes. A familiar feeling arose in her stomach. Some miniature paper stars and hearts dropped onto the table.

She opened the letter and began to read. Then she looked at another and another. They were all from Eve. One of them was a birthday card to Alice with a silver charm bracelet in it. They were all decorated with

something and were so lovingly written. Some even had photographs of family events.

Grace thought she would choke on the lump in her throat. An immense sadness descended on her like a veil. She gulped down the tears; she was so exhausted from crying.

Once she'd finished her drink, she put all the letters and items back in their envelopes. Another wave of guilt passed over her. She felt bad for opening the letters and stealing a private moment that Eve had been sharing with her daughter.

She took the letters back upstairs and put them in Alice's bedside cabinet where she had found them. She flicked through the other envelopes to see if they were all the same. They all matched.

Perhaps Eve had felt that by posting them, it would break some sort of spell and bring Alice home. Grace had no idea. It dawned her that there was quite a lot she hadn't known about her sister. Eve had been right when she'd implied she'd coped with it all alone. Grace's face stung with shame. She'd been so wrapped up in her own grief for her daughter and her niece that she hadn't been

there for Eve. It was something they could have shared, a grief that would have brought them closer together. Instead, Eve had turned to the only person there was and that had been Daphne. But as Grace had shut away her pain of losing Nadine, she'd not really wanted to approach Eve's over Alice. She'd done exactly what she despised in other people, avoided the issue. Not wanting to talk about it, because it was all a bit too dreadful. She'd been happy using the excuse that Jon was there supporting her, and they wouldn't want busybody do-gooder's interfering in their private time.

This was Grace realised, what she had wanted, to shut everyone out. Deal with it the way she thought best, stoically and privately. The awareness of the fact that this behaviour may have resulted in her not having dealt with her daughter's death at all began to creep over her skin. She physically shook herself and her guilt away, something she would have to face later. Feeling herself coming undone again, she jumped up off the bed.

She looked in Alice's wardrobe. Her clothes were still hanging in it, just as they had done all those years ago. Grace felt a pain shoot across her heart. She pulled

back the clothes to reveal piles and piles of Jackie magazines, all dated after Alice went missing.

“Oh Eve.” Grace whispered, realising the enormity of her sister’s pain.

There were some boxes neatly stacked on the shelf at the top of the wardrobe. She pulled them down and looked inside. They were all filled with unopened letters, all addressed to Alice. Grace looked all over the bedroom and found boxes and boxes of the same thing. Hundreds and hundreds of love letters Eve had sent her daughter in the hope she would one day come home and read them.

A thought dawned on her. She was sure the police would want to search Alice’s bedroom again. She didn’t want them going through these. She decided to bag them up and put them away somewhere. She didn’t want her sister dealing with that. They’d open and read every single one of them.

She knew exactly where they could be kept safe. Dennis would understand.

She decided to take them over there that evening, just in case the police turned up first thing in the

morning. He wouldn't mind. He'd told her if she needed anything or felt like a night cap, she only had to call.

The letters were safely put away at Dennis's, a task which had taken them both a couple of trips back and forth because there were so many boxes. Then they sat together in his living room and had a night cap. The trouble was that one nightcap led to another, and another, which then led to something else.

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Tim had drunk too much again. The longer Grace stayed away, the more bored he became. There was a strange atmosphere between them that was unnerving him. He felt like he was losing her, even though nothing tangible had changed. The truth was, Tim had lost her a long time ago, he just hadn't noticed. Mainly because she was always there, and he'd taken her for granted.

The days and nights she was away left a void and a feeling their marriage was over. Tim was feeling quite bereft about it all. He'd never have imagined he would feel like that about Grace; she just irritated him most of the time.

Tim shrugged as he sat at the kitchen table and picked at the label on the almost empty rum bottle. When he thought about it, it seemed that ever since Chrissie had turned up, Grace's attitude had changed. It was shortly after that she'd turned distant and cold.

Typical bloody women, he thought to himself, sitting around gossiping and convincing each other that there was a better life elsewhere; the grass was greener and all that.

Tim sighed, bored with himself and his life in general. But however fed-up he was, he wasn't about to go to Chrissie's again and start messing about. The last time had been enough. He knew that drink had a lot to answer for, but he knew what he'd seen, and it was no drunken illusion. Never in all his time as a police officer had he seen anything like that. He didn't believe in it.

Load of old clap trap, he thought normally, rum or no rum.

He had been tempted to go around there when Grace had told him that Chrissie might go to the police. Shake her up a bit to make sure she kept her mouth shut. But he'd reasoned with himself that he'd deny all if the police traced anything back to him. He'd just say that someone must have stolen the clothes from him and Grace, or that they were being set up. He doubted she'd go to the police anyway; she thought it was ghosts playing tricks with her.

Tim chuckled to himself. There was only one woman he needed to sort out, and that was his mother. He didn't need her mouthing off about him, especially if she was going around the twist and having spontaneous outbursts. He couldn't have anything said about him that might connect him to the murders. Even if it did sound ludicrous, someone might just take notice if she went on about it for long enough.

Once the police connected Alice with the other murders, there'd be a massive investigation, which would spread nationally. The urge to move away and start a new

life overwhelmed him again. It was becoming more and more apparent to him there were more positive points to leaving than staying.

He had no memory scents, which was his first reason. He'd even burnt the ones he'd stolen from Chrissie, and considering what happened last time he was in her house, there'd be no chance of getting anymore.

He could start all over again if he moved away. Get some new memory scents. Take himself out of the picture before things got too heavy with the police.

His mind wandered back to his mother and settled like a gnat on a potential piece of flesh. What he couldn't work out was how she knew what he'd done. He'd searched her face for a clue, because he hadn't been sure if she was calling his bluff. That it was just a wild guess because she knew him so well. It must have been. How else could she know?

It was a mother's intuition, Daphne thought as she sat in her magnolia overdosed room, watching the telly. Coupled with the fact she knew him so well, she'd been able to piece it all together. She had seen his elation each

time a body was found. His excitement when he relayed the details to her, and how he revelled in the facts.

All through his life he'd stolen obscure items of clothing from people. She just thought it was a phase he was going through and it would pass as he got older. But it didn't.

Ever since she'd told him about his sister Verity being murdered when she was seven, before he was born, he'd become obsessed with clothing. She'd kept Verity's bedroom as it was the day she was taken. Not a thing was touched, even her clothes still hung in her wardrobe, the pain so great that Daphne couldn't face getting rid of them. She'd caught him in there a few times, sniffing her clothes. The door had been locked throughout his childhood and the room passed off as a storage area, but after they'd told him the truth she'd permitted him in there once to have a look. After that, he'd regularly stolen the key, so he could unlock the door and go inside the mysterious room. She put it down to him grieving for the sibling he'd never had.

He'd had an unusual fascination with the details of his sister's murder, wanting to visit the library to read

newspaper cuttings. This was the only way he learned the facts of what had happened because Daphne wasn't prepared to discuss it with anyone. She'd only told him when he turned twelve because she didn't want him finding out from someone else, and he seemed to be mature enough to take the news. She told herself she hadn't wanted him poisoned by it as a child; for him to be aware of the black cloud that hung over the family. The real reason had been because it was all too painful for Daphne to speak of.

When the police reported that each child had a piece of clothing missing, she'd had a feeling. It had felt like being plunged into a pool of ice cold water. But that idea of knowing had quickly altered in her mind, as denial set in.

She knew the thrill he got out of producing his own crime; she could see that much. And in some perverse way, she thought he could justify his acts, because it was keeping the local police force busy, a bit like a manufacturer producing the goods. An atrocious thought to have, but she knew how his mind worked. She

had thought of every excuse conceivable, anything to protect her son and herself from this whole ghastly mess.

Then her denial took over, convinced her she was wrong about it all, and she'd swatted it away like an annoying fly.

It was the discovery of Alice's body that had stirred it all up again. She knew the area they'd found her remains very well. It had been the area that had given the game away. That and how he'd reacted to what she'd said when he visited the other day.

The place where Alice had been found was, to anyone else, just a rural piece of woodland. No footpaths or bridleways marked out. You wouldn't know it was there unless you stumbled across it accidentally.

And that's exactly how Daphne had discovered it, chasing the family dog when they were all out for a walk and a picnic. It had become a favourite place for them. Undisturbed, unspoilt.

His reaction to her words the other day had almost broken Daphne's heart. She'd seen it all in his eyes, those

eyes she knew so well, because they were like looking into her own.

Her dilemma now was where to go from here? He was still her son after all. But Daphne saw herself as an upstanding moral citizen and she remembered only too well the pain she had suffered all those years ago when it had happened to her. Ironical she should be the mother of a victim and then perpetrator years later.

Thinking of his privileged upbringing, she wondered how he'd turned out to be such an abhorrent human being.

Because I wasn't given enough attention, Tim thought to himself.

He was pondering over his bottle of rum why he hadn't achieved more in his life. He was convinced it was his mother's fault, always leaving him with Dora who shut him away for hours in the cellar. When his mother was there she was always entertaining people and telling him to go to his room and stay out of the way.

His father was hardly around so it was unlikely he'd ever known. He remembered so clearly the times

when Dora had left him with some friend or another, while she went off on “business”. He realised now, looking back, that “business” had been her having an abortion.

She’d always told him, but he’d never understood.

“I’ve got some business to clear up,” she’d leer at him; “I don’t want a little bastard like you, do I?”

The words moved around in his head, as clear as if they’d just been said to him. Dora had been like a mother to him and it had cut him like a knife. She’d picked him up and dropped him as she’d pleased. All he’d wanted was some attention from his mother. And his father, who was so wrapped up in his work he didn’t have a clue what was going on. He always knew his mother had been so disappointed he’d been a boy and he could never live up to Verity. She always gave him a look of dismay and dissatisfaction, even when she was being kind to him. As the years had gone by she’d become more bitter and twisted.

The memories were jumbled. One thing was clear to him; he’d been such a horrible child she hadn’t wanted

anymore. He thought about all the lost siblings he had never had the chance to know.

Somehow, and it was hard to tell when it had happened, but Tim's emotions towards his mother had shifted. Drained away like water through a sieve. Tim put it down to his survival instinct kicking in, which may have happened when he realised she knew his secret. And now he just felt cold emptiness for her, as he did for most people he'd ever known. He needed that detachment towards her to get rid of her without remorse.

*

Chrissie knocked on Grace's back door, tentatively. She didn't like calling round to people unannounced, but she'd been out for a stroll and found herself nearby.

Thinking Grace was out and not wanting to risk Tim answering, she began to walk away. When it opened, and he peered through the gap like a wizened old man,

Chrissie jumped slightly and the hairs on her arms began to rise.

He looked dreadful, and for a few seconds Chrissie found herself staring at him.

“Yes?” he snapped at her.

“I’m Chrissie, Grace’s friend. We met in the pub for lunch?” Chrissie was a bit taken aback by his rudeness.

“Yeah?”

“Um, well.... I just called by on the off chance that Grace was in? But I see she’s not. I’ll call round another time.” Chrissie moved to walk away again, not wanting to be near him any longer than necessary. She hadn’t remembered him being so vile.

Tim opened the door a bit wider. “She’s at her sister’s house, if it’s urgent.”

“No, it’s not urgent. I was just wondering how she was.” Chrissie said, staying rooted to the spot. She suspected he smelt as bad as he looked.

“I can give you directions if you want to go over there. Come in for a minute.”

Tim hadn't wanted to invite her in when she'd first arrived; he'd got a stinking hangover. But her perfume and the smell of her body were riding on the breeze that had travelled through the open door and now he was desperate to get her inside and smell her.

"It's fine, thank you. I'll see her another time." Chrissie shoved her hands in her coat pockets and turned on her heel.

"Why don't you come in for a bit and wait for her. She'll be back soon." He hadn't a clue when she'd be back, but he was willing to try anything to get her in the house, his urge to smell her getting the better of him.

Chrissie turned, frowning at him.

"No. Thank you. Just tell her I called." Her voice was clipped, but she managed a smile.

"Suit yourself." He muttered and slammed the door.

"Weirdo." Chrissie said back to him through the closed door. She shivered. There was something peculiar about him. As she closed the gate behind her, Grace pulled up in the car.

“Oh Chrissie, am I glad to see you! What a spot of luck.”

“I know what great timing. Tim did ask me in to wait for you. He said you wouldn’t be long.”

“Did he?” Grace frowned.

“Yes, but I told him I’d call another time.” Chrissie noticed the frown and she didn’t want Grace to think Tim had been suggestive.

“Well, actually, he wouldn’t know because I didn’t tell him. I’ve just popped back for some things.”

Chrissie continued to frown.

“Don’t worry, I’ll tell you everything later. Have you got time to come in with me, and then I’ll take you back to my sister’s?”

“Err...yes, yes ok.”

“Oh sorry, I’m being terribly bossy. Was it a flying visit?”

“No, not at all. I was hoping for a pot of tea and a chat?”

“I can do better than that. How about supper and a bottle of wine? If you haven’t any plans?”

“At your sister’s?” Chrissie didn’t want an evening with Tim.

“Oh god yes. I wouldn’t inflict him on you any longer than necessary.” Grace flicked her hand towards the house.

“Yes, that’d be lovely!”

“Good, I could do with the company. Right, let’s get this out of the way. Excuse my husband and please excuse the mess he will have left the house in.”

Chrissie waved her hand and told her friend not to worry, as she followed her back up the path to the house.

“Hello, again.” Tim leered at Chrissie more from the amount of rum he’d had than from anything else.

Grace glared at him.

“I’ve just come back to get some fresh clothes and things.”

“Oh, I thought you were coming home?”

“No.”

“Oh.”

They stared at each other for quite some time, which made Chrissie feel very awkward. She looked at Grace’s face and saw an absolute look of hatred. It

changed the look of Grace altogether and it unnerved Chrissie slightly.

“Shall I make myself useful and put the kettle on?” Chrissie said, trying to break the excruciating awkwardness.

Tim and Grace broke away from their silent conversation.

“Yes, that’s a good idea, Chrissie. I won’t have one, but I’m sure Tim could do with a strong coffee.” Her voice was clipped, and she didn’t take her eyes away from him.

“Thank you, Chrissie. I’ll have a cup of tea.” Tim looked at Grace pointedly.

“Right then I’ll sort that out while you do what you need to do.”

Chrissie walked between them in the hope it would shatter the invisible frosted screen that was hovering in the middle of them. Tim sniffed hard as she walked passed. Grace glared at him harder and Chrissie stopped in her tracks. A flash of the pathway at the bottom of her garden down the side of the shed flittered across her

vision. She shook it off, putting it down to another random flashback. Sarah had told her she'd get those.

Grace went off to pack some more things while Chrissie made herself and Tim a hot drink. Chrissie could feel Tim staring at her and she was desperately trying to think of something to say to break the silence. The atmosphere was unbearable. It didn't help that all the curtains were shut, making the place look dingy, coupled with the fact it looked like it had been burgled.

Chrissie placed two mugs of steaming tea on to the old kitchen table where Tim was sitting. Chrissie prayed as she gripped her mug for Grace to be quick.

"So, have you settled in Chrissie?"

"Yes, just about." Chrissie wasn't one for making small talk to people she didn't like, so she picked up the newspaper that was laid on the table.

"Do you want to do the crossword while you're at it?" Tim leered at her again, throwing a pen in her general direction. It rolled off the table and onto the floor. Chrissie glared at him and reached down to pick it up. As she did, he leaned down towards the floor with her and sniffed her hair. Her hand hovered over the pen as

the memory of him flooded her vision, like the shock of cold water hitting her skin.

Her fingers felt for the pen as she looked up into his face.

The smell, his voice, everything, it was all slotting into place and the film began to run freely in her mind, without the pauses and the editing.

She quickly composed herself, wanting to digest the information without him noticing. Not that he was capable of noticing anything, the state he was in.

Grace breezed back in, dispersing the icy moment.

“Are you ok?”

“Yes. Fine. Why?” Chrissie was finding it hard to take her eyes off Tim.

It was all too huge to digest. She can’t have just discovered something in a few seconds that the police had spent years trying to work out. She must be getting muddled with someone else. She was finding it hard to connect the information that if he’d snatched her when she was a child that could quite possibly make him the serial killer. Or was she mistaken? She couldn’t be sure of anything at that moment.

“Are you ready?” Grace’s voice broke her train of thought.

“Yes, I’m ready.” She wanted to tell Grace she needed to go home, but the words wouldn’t come out of her mouth. Something inside Chrissie was urging her to go with Grace. She needed to talk to her, to glean some sort of information from her without her knowing what she was doing.

“Get this place cleaned up.” Grace snapped at Tim on her way out of the door.

“I’m going fishing at the weekend. I’ll do it when I get back.” He slurred, not bothering to get out of his chair.

“Oh, do what you like!” Grace snapped, and slammed the door.

Chrissie’s mind was whirring, flitting from one memory to the next, as she felt Grace’s footsteps behind her on the path. They got into the car, both silent.

Chrissie reasoned with herself that the Fisherman’s Friend and the rum smell could belong to anyone. But there was something else. A familiarity when she’d got close to him.

“Has Tim said something to you?”

“Um...Sorry?”

“Tim. Has he upset you?” Grace was trying to figure out the change in her friend.

“No not at all. Sorry Grace, he just reminded me of someone. Have you left him?”

The question startled Grace at first and it was a few seconds before she answered.

“I’m not sure. I think I’ve done it without realising it.”

Grace filled Chrissie in on what had happened with her sister as they made their way to her house. Chrissie was finding it hard to pay attention to what was being said, but as Grace rested on telling her about Tim, she noticed a change in her tone.

Chrissie was beginning to wonder if Grace knew what her husband had done, but then she realised what a ridiculous thought that was. If she knew she would have reported him, surely?

Chrissie physically shook herself; the whole thing was ridiculous. He was a retired police officer, an upstanding member of the community. He didn’t even

look like a serial killer, Chrissie thought to herself. But then it dawned on her; what was a serial killer supposed to look like?

“Are you sure you’re ok?” Grace said, again.

“I’m fine. I just had some news from my parents that disturbed me a bit.”

“Oh. What?” Grace pulled the car into her sister’s drive.

“I told you about the regression therapy and all that? Well, Sarah told me it could be a childhood memory, a theory that I dismissed until my mother phoned. But it turns out its true, only I got away. From whoever snatched me, I mean.”

Grace was silent as the information penetrated her mind.

“You’re Christine, the one that got away.” Grace’s voice was almost a whisper. It was all rushing to her like a head on collision.

“How did you know that?”

“It was all over the papers. Why hadn’t I connected it before?” Grace was talking to herself more than to Chrissie.

“That’s why you’re so familiar to me. I recognise you from the pictures.”

A flurry, a bit like a snow storm flittered through Chrissies mind and fragments of memory melted as they landed in her head.

They sat in silence for some time before they made their way into the house. There was so much said in that silence. They were both going over the same thing in their heads, only from completely different directions. But eventually their minds would bring them onto the same path. It was just a matter of time, which of them was going to say it out loud first.

Grace sighed, knowing they both knew the same thing.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

For what he thought was the last time, Tim pressed the buzzer on the double doors of the retirement home. One of the usual voices greeted him over the intercom; Veronica, the home manager. But instead of buzzing him in as she normally did when she heard his name, she asked him to wait there.

Tim frowned, wondering what was going on. Perhaps one of the residents had had an accident, he thought. Tim could see Veronica coming down the corridor, an air of authority wafting around her. He found her a little bit intimidating, which was unusual for Tim. She was always dressed in a power suit, immaculate nails, makeup, and blonde hair tied up in a chignon. She looked totally out of place there. She would have looked more fitting in an expensive restaurant.

“Hello Tim. Step into the office, would you?” She was pleasant, but there was obviously something very wrong.

All sorts of things were moving through his mind, but he wasn’t panicking. He thought perhaps she’d died, and they’d been trying to get hold of him while he was on his way there.

Veronica proffered for him to take a seat, as she positioned herself in front of a large leather-bound desk.

“Is there something wrong, Veronica?” Tim put on his best calm and concerned voice and linked his hands on his lap like a vicar might.

Calculated cash sums were already running through his head.

“I’m really sorry to have to tell you this, Tim...”

Tim didn’t hear anything else Veronica said. Elation was sweeping over him. The old witch had finally died of her own accord. That was until he caught the last words out of Veronica’s mouth.

“...she doesn’t want to see you at the moment.”

“Sorry, what did you say?”

“Unfortunately, your mother doesn’t want to see you now. We must respect her wishes, Tim. Did you have some sort of difficulty with her last time you were here?”

Tim snapped back to reality.

“No. Why? What did she say?” Tim’s face appeared to darken.

“She has just requested not to see you at the moment. She’s made an official request, which means I can’t let you in to see her. I’m really sorry.”

“Well, she’s obviously had another stroke or she’s going senile.”

“I’m afraid not. The doctor’s been in to see her and he says she’s doing quite well and appears to be of sound mind.”

“Appears to be? That’s not good enough. I want some more tests done. You can’t stop me seeing my own mother.” Tim was becoming irate. His brain was trying to grasp the concept that someone, a woman, was telling him what to do.

“It’s not us, Tim. Your mother has requested we don’t let you in and we have to respect that.”

“I don’t have to respect anything. She’s my mother, for fuck’s sake!” Tim banged his fist on the desk, causing Veronica to flinch slightly.

She looked at him properly for the first time since he’d arrived and noticed how rough he looked. Unclean, unshaven and there was a smell of stale alcohol wafting across the desk to her nostrils with each word he spat.

“I don’t know, and I don’t want to know what problems you’ve had with each other, but I suggest you go home and call us in a week’s time. See what the situation is then.” She stood up, walked to the door and gestured for him to leave. She didn’t like his aggressive behaviour and wanted him off the premises as quickly as possible. She was starting to see what Daphne had been talking about.

“You can’t do this! She can’t do this!” Tim shouted.

It had no effect. Veronica continued to stand by the door, willing him to leave.

Tim gave in, feeling like a scolded child under her glare.

“Bitch!” he spat at her as she saw him out of the main doors.

She alerted the other staff to his behaviour and made sure that under no circumstances was he to be let into the building. She had felt something sinister from him, something she hadn't noticed before.

Tim used the incident as another excuse to drink himself into oblivion. He'd taken his anger out on the house by throwing a few things around when he got home. Some of his anger and violence was aimed at Grace too.

The rum coursed through his veins, making everything feel better. It was the hangovers and tiredness that made him feel violent and vicious. The alcohol calmed him down, taking him by the hand and leading him to the drunken fuelled daze he liked to exist in.

He sat at the kitchen table trying to work out a way of getting to his mother. He wasn't allowed to talk to her and he didn't know what she'd said to the people in the care home, so breaking in to the place wasn't an option. They'd know it was him and he didn't want to draw attention to himself.

Verity's face swam in front of his vision. Picture after picture of her smiling, her with his mother, her with his father, pictures of happier times when he wasn't around, when Verity was still very much alive. It ran through his head that he'd have killed her had she still been around today.

"Verity, fucking Verity!" he shouted to the blank wall.

It was the losing that infuriated him more than anything, the fact that his mother had got there first. She was one step ahead of him and he hated that. He had never liked anyone getting one over him.

As the rum mellowed him, he realised he needed to appeal to her better nature. He was, after all, the apple of her eye, well, the only apple left. Once he got back in her good books, he'd be allowed to see her again. It wouldn't take long for her to give in, he just needed to play his cards right.

The only way he could get through to her was to write her a letter. She liked letters; she'd be impressed by that. He was sure they'd pass a letter on to her in the

retirement home, especially if he posted it. They wouldn't know it was from him until she opened it.

That night, Tim sat at his kitchen table and wrote the most heartfelt letter he'd ever written in his life. Convincing himself as he did so, that it was all an act to reach his ultimate goal.

*

Grace had stayed at Chrissie's for the weekend. They needed time in each other's company for Grace to be able to relay everything she needed to Chrissie.

Grace had started with the beginning of her marriage and led right up to what she found out about Tim all those months ago. She felt it was important for Chrissie to know everything from the start to fully understand her plans for Tim.

Chrissie had listened attentively as Grace had relayed every little detail. They spent most of the weekend going through every imaginable emotion

together. Finding out Tim had tried to snatch Chrissie and that she had briefly known Nadine and Alice, had linked them together more so than they had been before.

Had someone else told Chrissie they knew their husband was a serial killer she'd have run from the house and straight down to the nearest police station. But this was different, as things always were when they affected you personally. Grace had shown her the bigger picture, and she now felt like she'd watched a horrible film. Only this was real. And Grace had convinced her that her way was the better way of dealing with it all.

Chrissie had never thought in her wildest dreams that she would ever plot to take another person's life. But in her eyes, he wasn't worthy of living.

Chrissie thought that going out of the house and away from their big secret, she'd wobble, and reality would hit her. But it didn't. She felt the same about it when she was around other people as she did when it had first been talked about.

She was still feeling a cocktail of emotions: anger, disgust, devastation and sadness, but also a strange feeling of relief. It was as if she'd always been aware of

the whole situation, which she probably had in her subconscious. She was desperate to talk to Sarah about it and she hated keeping secrets from her, but she knew she could never tell another soul. Grace had been very clear about that.

Her relationship with Grace had changed along with her relationship with the house. It was no longer a house to her, but a home as well. Both had grown much stronger in a matter of days, and the secret she now shared with Grace would bind them forever.

An atmosphere had descended on the house which Chrissie recognised from when she first viewed it. Whatever it was that had been haunting her had stopped, and there was a tranquillity that had landed like a summer mist. Chrissie put this down to the fact that all the blanks had been filled in, as if it had pushed her onto the path she was about to take.

Chrissie and Grace had realised they were cut from the same mould. Their minds followed the same thought processes. When they discussed killing Tim, it appeared to be a straight forward process. And as the days passed, the thought of it became less and less shocking. It was

easier to digest because it involved him having an accident.

Unfortunately for Tim, his drinking habits hadn't gone unnoticed by either of the women and this was what they had decided to use to make his death look like an unfortunate accident. They had agreed to go ahead with their plans once Tim came back from his fishing trip. He was going to have a drink fuelled tragic accident.

Grace didn't really need Chrissie's help doing it, she just wanted her support. Telling Chrissie everything had felt like the most natural thing in the world, and the relief had been immense. It hadn't worried her that she might tell someone or report it to the police. Grace was past caring, she just wanted the whole sorry situation to be over. But it wasn't the reason she'd told Chrissie. She'd told her because she trusted her. Something she'd not felt about anyone for a very long time. There was also a feeling of Chrissie being a stepping stone to her daughter; a link to the past, a much happier time.

Grace also felt that Chrissie needed to know, after she'd found out she was the little girl that Tim had tried

to turn into one of his victims. She knew their support for each other would last a lifetime.

Even though they had spent most of the weekend talking about such a sinister subject, Grace had enjoyed the best few days she'd had in years. She felt free. Not as free as she'd feel once she got Tim out of her life, but even so, she felt better.

The weekend was coming to a close and Grace decided it was time to get back to Eve's house; she'd be coming home soon. The police, having been there the last few days had assured her they had finished their investigations for the time being.

She needed to go back and start letting the neighbours know she'd left Tim. That living with an alcoholic had become so unbearable. It would give her a good alibi, when his twisted, broken body was found at the bottom of their stairs. A lonely alcoholic whose wife had left him, being unable to cope, he'd drunk himself into a stupor and lost his balance on the stairs.

Everyone would understand her leaving him as no one liked him much anyway; they were just too polite to say. His drinking hadn't gone unnoticed in the village

either. It was all a perfect build up for there to be no suspicion about his death.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Dear Mother,

I don't understand your reasons for refusing to see me, but I must respect your decision. I am writing to you because I have no other way of communicating and I am desperate to reach you.

I want you to know how much I love you. Our relationship hasn't always been easy, I know that. But you are the closest person to me. You know me better than anyone and you understand me more than anyone ever has.

I want you to remember, Mother, that we are one and the same. I am merely a male version of you. Please know that whatever I do, I do it because of my love for you.

I can't live with the knowledge you hate me. Please, Mother.

*Your ever-loving son**Tim*

Grace gripped the kitchen table, turning her fingers white she was so filled with rage at the news that had just been relayed to her. David Croxton, the family liaison officer, poured her a glass of water, reading her response as upset and shock.

The atmosphere in Eve's kitchen was solemn. David Croxton and his colleague PC Ian Walsh stared at the floor. Here they were again, delivering this poor woman and her family yet more bad news, and they felt desperately sorry for her.

"Is there anyone we can call for you?" David said to Grace, as she loosened her grip on the table and fell rather than sat on one of the kitchen chairs.

"No. Yes, actually. Yes. But I'll do it. I have a friend who will come over. Are you sure they searched the whole area?"

“They’ve been searching for more than two days, Grace. The weather is too bad to continue. It’s extremely unlikely...under the circumstances...”

Grace nodded and put her hand up to stop the policeman talking.

“I’d like to be left alone please.”

Grace needed to think, and sympathetic faces were of no help to her whatsoever.

“We’ll be in touch if there’s any further news. In the meantime, you know the number to call if you need anything.” He hesitated. “We will have to come and ask you some questions, Grace, when you’re feeling up to it.”

David gently pushed the leaflets about bereavement counselling across the table towards Grace.

“Oh, piss off!” was what she wanted to say to the two officers, but she managed to keep it to herself.

After the door closed behind them, Grace took in the feeling which was always left by having uniformed people in the house. Even when they weren’t delivering bad news, a feeling of anticipation was always left behind. That was probably what made them good police officers.

Grace got up from the table and phoned Chrissie, asking her to come over. Chrissie had been waiting patiently since the weekend for any news. Grace hadn't wanted her to come over until she knew anything. She'd wanted the time on her own to think about the fact that Tim might be dead.

It wasn't the news he was dead that had upset her when the officers had arrived. It was the sickening letter to his mother they'd found left on Grace's kitchen table at home. Coupled with the fact that it appeared to be a suicide note and the bastard had got there before Grace did.

She, like him, didn't like people being one step ahead of her. She couldn't think properly, she needed to air it.

Chrissie burst through the door within minutes of the phone call.

"Have they found him?"

"No, they've called off the search. They say the weather is too bad. They don't think there's any possibility of finding him alive now."

“Are you ok?” Chrissie walked over to Grace and put her arms around her.

“Silly question. Of course, you’re not ok. Can I do anything?”

Grace picked up the alleged suicide note and handed it to Chrissie. She waited while her friend read it silently behind her. Chrissie slumped into one of the kitchen chairs.

“Bloody hell,” was all Chrissie could manage.

“I know. What a bastard, hey? The police want to know if I knew of any reason why he might want to kill himself.”

“Did you have any idea he was building up to this?”

“No. I might have if I hadn’t had Eve to think about. But even then, I’m not sure. This just isn’t Tim. He wouldn’t kill himself; he regarded himself too highly to do anything like that.”

Chrissie held Grace’s limp hand which was laid on the table. She stared at her as if seeing her for the first time since she’d walked in. Both arms were resting on

the table with her palms supine. She looked like she was meditating.

A smile crept onto Grace's mouth. Chrissie thought she was going to start crying and as she rushed to get a tissue out of her pocket, Grace began to laugh.

"Grace?!"

"Oh, come on, Chrissie! He saved us a job. The bastard's dead!"

"Even so." Chrissie looked around, at who she didn't know, just in case someone heard their conversation.

"Just before I called you, I'd got myself all caught up in the fact I hadn't been the one who'd killed him. That he'd got there first and taken that away from us all as well. I was so angry. But it just dawned on me that it doesn't matter. The point is, we're all free, and he can't hurt anyone else. I've just been lowering myself to his standards, by plotting to kill him."

"Well, I wouldn't go that far." Chrissie frowned, unable to think of Grace as being on the same level as Tim.

“The point is, Chrissie. He’s gone. Dead. It doesn’t matter if he killed himself or if it was an accident. The bastard’s dead!”

The word “dead” appeared to be highly amusing and Grace started laughing all over again, which infected Chrissie with the same fit of giggles. Their laughter filled the room, something the house hadn’t been used to for a very long time. It seeped into every room, including Alice’s, as if someone had spray painted it with light.

“I think I’m going to like it here!” Chrissie managed to say through the laughter. This caused a new fit of the giggles and they continued until they were both wiping their streaming eyes. But the laughter was soon followed by tears. It overwhelmed Grace and the enormity of it all hit her.

“I should have told the police when I first knew shouldn’t I?”

“Why do you think that?” Chrissie was shocked at the change of emotions.

“Because I’ve deprived those families of having a choice. They might have wanted him to go to prison. Now they might never know who killed their children.”

Chrissie banged her hand on the table, making Grace flinch in her seat.

“That’s enough! You are not responsible for this and what would it have achieved in the long run? We went over all this at the weekend and we agreed that a protected life in prison was not what he deserved. It was taken out of your hands, thankfully, and it’s over.”

“I know.”

“Look forward, Grace, not back. Concentrate on you for a change. Eve’s coming home soon, and she needs you to help her get through all this.” Chrissie got up to give her a hug.

“I know you’re right. But what I don’t want to happen is for Tim to be made into a hero because he died at sea in a tragic accident.”

“How is that ever going to happen?” Chrissie asked bewilderment plastered all over her face.

“You’re forgetting that it’s only you and me who know about Tim. You know what people are like when someone dies, especially in a village.”

“I’m confused. You told me that no one liked him.”

“They don’t. But people’s views of someone can change completely when that person dies. Even if they think he committed suicide, they’ll make up some tragic story about him.”

“So, what are you trying to say? Are you going to tell the police what he’s done?”

“I might not need to. Apparently, they paid him a visit before he went on his fishing trip with Dennis. They asked him a few questions about the disappearance of Alice. They told him that it was ok to go on his fishing trip, but he wasn’t to leave the country and they’d be back on Monday with a search warrant.”

“Bloody hell, Grace! But you’ll get into trouble for not telling them! Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“Because I’ve been getting it straight in my own head. All of it.”

“I know, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to snap at you. But this is huge. Do you think they’ve found something from Alice’s remains?”

“I don’t know. They won’t tell me anything like that. This is why I’m starting to wonder if he did actually

commit suicide. That would be typical of Tim. He'd definitely kill himself rather than face the consequences."

"Oh Grace, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know yet. One thing I do know is that when they search the house and garden, they're going to find all the boxes he kept. They'll know straight away it was him."

"But you can't tell them you knew. You'll go to prison."

"Oh, I've got no intention of telling them I knew about it. I'm not going to prison for that bastard. I'll deny it all and tell them the marriage broke down years ago. I just hope his death was somewhere near the suffering he put his victims through."

"I doubt it. It's most likely he drowned and that's supposed to be the most painless and calm way to die. I can't imagine wanting to kill myself...oh, Grace I've done it again!"

Grace put her hand up to quieten her friend.

"Stop worrying about what you're saying. It's fine. Most people can't imagine doing it. I felt a bit like doing it when Nadine died and for quite some time afterwards."

“What changed?”

“I couldn’t actually see myself physically doing it. I’m a bit of a coward deep down. And then the feeling started to fade away. Mainly because I found a friend I could talk to and trust.”

Chrissie blushed. “You must have other friends in the village?”

“I do. But no one I’ve ever felt I can trust. It was difficult being a copper’s wife. There were certain expectations and complaining about him wasn’t one of them. I had better friends who lived away, but no one close by. Meeting you felt almost like meeting Nadine again after all these years, you so remind me of her, of what she would have become. She’d be about your age now.”

“Well, I feel very privileged to be your friend and you have been a great comfort to me, being new to the village.”

They sat quietly for a few minutes sipping their cold cups of tea.

“Do you have any idea what you’re going to do?”

“No. Just sit tight for now and weather the storm.”

The irony of this comment brought on a fresh bout of laughter, even though the situation was far from funny.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The last thing Tim had been aware of was sitting on the deck of the boat with Dennis, enjoying a drink. Now everything was black and cold, and he couldn't move. His head was pounding. He thought perhaps Dennis had put him to bed because he was so drunk. But the bunks on the boat weren't anywhere near as uncomfortable as where he was laying now.

He tried to sit up, but his arms were stuck to his sides and he only managed to bang his head on something hard, which did not help his impending hangover at all.

Fear and nausea began to creep through his stomach and up into his throat. There was something wrong. Very wrong indeed. He shouted to Dennis but there was no answer.

After quite some time wriggling and trying to move from his situation he began to wonder if perhaps he'd died. But he quickly decided he couldn't have because he wouldn't be able to feel the pounding in his body, which was causing him a lot of discomfort. Then he wondered if, in his drunken state, he'd fallen over in the cabin and somehow wedged himself under one of the bunks. Or maybe they'd been caught in a storm and the boat had thrown them around. On this thought he tried to move sideways, but he was jammed tight.

He could hear someone moving around.

“Dennis? Mate? What's going on?”

Still no answer.

He tried desperately to keep his heavy eyes open and his spinning head still, so he could think clearly. He racked his painful head to try and work out what had happened. He remembered fishing with Dennis for most of the day. They didn't catch much because the weather was too changeable. They'd eaten a measly fish supper because their unlucky catch and then chatted over a few drinks. Flashes of Dennis's face near his, passed fleetingly across his mind's eye.

He began to sweat, and he was finding it hard to breath. He stared into the blackness to try and adjust his eyes to the light, but it didn't work. Where ever he was, it was pitch black. He felt as if he was tightly wrapped in something. He had worked out quite quickly that he was in a very tight, small place because his breath was circulating back to his nostrils, coupled with the fact he could barely move.

The smell of his warm, stale alcoholic breath was turning the insides of his stomach. He was catching another smell in his nostrils apart from stale alcohol and that was stale urine. He tried to move again but it was pointless. He began calling again but there was no answer. He knew he was still on the boat as he could feel the movement and vaguely hear the lapping of the water.

A sick feeling rose in his stomach, so much so that bile reached his mouth. He turned his head to vomit, which was all he could do. He desperately needed to sit up but his reflex reaction to vomiting had proved to him again that he was unable to do so.

He hadn't felt this hung-over for ages, not even after his most recent benders.

He coughed and spluttered, trying desperately to clear his throat. His arms were flexing automatically, as they would have if they'd been free to allow him to sit up properly, but they were stuck fast to the sides of his body.

He began to feel as if he'd been flipped over. Everything was circulating in his mind's eye, making the sickness even worse. The movement of the boat and the lapping of the waves were almost unbearable. But as unbearable as it was, Tim had to endure it. After a few minutes of panicking, he passed out.

When he awoke again a couple of hours later, he opened his eyes to daylight and found himself gasping as fresh sea air hit his lungs. Relief flooded him as he realised it had all been a bad dream. Until he became aware of the fact he still couldn't move.

He looked from side to side, only to be faced with rough wooden slats. He tried to glimpse down his body but pushing his chin down to his chest and straining his eyes brought on a new wave of nausea. All he could see was that he was wrapped in black tape and was in a wooden box.

The familiar feeling of fear that was there before burst into his mind like an unwanted visitor.

“Help!”

“I wouldn’t bother if I were you, Tim.” Dennis’s frame appeared, blocking the sun light from Tim’s eyes. “No one will hear you out here. It’s just you and me.”

“What’s going on mate? Is this some kind of joke?” The relief at seeing Dennis’s face was almost tangible in his voice.

Dennis laughed. “Trust me, Timothy. This is no joke. Or perhaps you find killing children absolutely hilarious?”

Sweat pricked Tim’s forehead and his mouth opened and closed like a fish trying to take in air.

“Not so funny now though, is it Timothy?”

“I.... don’t.....come on Dennis, this is ridiculous. I haven’t killed anyone.”

Tim thought that acting casual would get him out of this awful situation.

“Oh dear, Timothy. I hope you’re not mocking my intelligence again?” Dennis tutted and walked up and down the deck, back and forth past Tim’s box.

“Do you like your box, Timothy? I tried to model it on the one I imagined you put Alice in. The absurd thing is you helped me load it onto the boat. You even helped me unload all the provisions from your very own coffin.”

“Dennis, please? Get me out of here. We can talk about it. Whatever it is that’s on your mind.”

“What? Talk about all the children you’ve killed, including my daughter.” Dennis kicked the box.

“Your daughter? You don’t have any children.”

“Oh, Timothy! You’re not the sharpest tool in the box, are you? If you’ll excuse the pun,” He laughed again, “but then that’s probably why you were only ever a PC.”

Dennis continued to wander around the box. He put his hands into his jeans pockets, beginning to enjoy himself.

“Did you really, seriously think you’d get away with it?”

“Get away with what?”

“You’re doing it again, Timothy.” Dennis squatted down and leaned into Tim’s face. “Listen to me, you

fucked up little bastard, you haven't got a choice about what happens next. So, I suggest you start telling me the truth."

Tim had only ever heard Dennis talk like that when he was dealing with paedophiles or rapists at work; his voice was dark and angry, and it frightened him. He knew he was in trouble.

"I really don't know what you're talking about, Dennis. Come on! We've known each other for years. You can't seriously think I'd do something like that? I worked on those cases. Get me out of here and we'll talk about it over a drink."

"You did door to door enquiries, Tim. I'd hardly call that 'working' on the cases."

"Whatever. Just get me out of here. I'm an innocent man."

"Oh dear, Timothy. You're making me angry now. I know and have known for a while that you killed those children. I've just been trying to work out what I was going to do with you; prison's far too good for the likes of you."

Tim knew then that the chances of him getting out of this situation alive were slim, so he tried to buy himself some time in the ridiculous hope someone might pass them and realise what was going on.

“What did you mean when you said one of the children was your daughter?”

“Come on, Timothy! You must know that Nadine was mine?”

“Nadine? My Nadine?”

“Yes, that Nadine, but not yours, mine.”

“But she can’t be yours.”

“Oh, she was mine alright, which is the main reason you’re in that box. Nobody hurts my flesh and blood and gets away with it.”

Tim thought about what Dennis had said. There was no point in telling him she wasn’t his – it would only serve to make him even angrier. It didn’t surprise him; Tim had known deep down she belonged to Dennis. He often caught glimpses of him in her face. When he’d found out that Grace had had an affair with Dennis all those years ago, it hadn’t taken him long to work out the

mathematics of it all. Yet he'd convinced himself it wasn't true.

"You know I didn't kill her mate, it was a terrible accident."

"We both know that's not true. There wasn't any evidence, but I knew it wasn't an accident. That she'd been killed by the same person who killed the other children. I just didn't know who it was at the time. But it didn't take me long to start getting suspicious. You got rid of her because she found out your dirty secret."

"That's not true! I loved Nadine, and even though..."

"Do you know something, Tim? I don't want or need to hear your bullshit or your pathetic reasons for killing all those children. I'm just going to tell you what's about to happen."

"How did you know it was me?" Tim tried to change tack and thought that by admitting it, he'd give himself a better chance. Appeal to Dennis's better nature.

"How did you know it was me?" Dennis mimicked Tim's pathetic childlike voice.

The hysteria in Dennis's voice was beginning to really unnerve Tim.

"I didn't really. It was just a hunch to begin with. Copper's nose. This caused me to watch you for a while. Then I had a cosy little chat with Grace over a few night caps, just after Eve tried to take her own life. She told me all about the dirty, sordid secrets you were keeping in your shed. She said she'd discovered them about a year ago."

Tim registered this information. Waves of fear drifted backwards and forwards in his body in time with the movement of the boat. He was finding it hard to let his mind rest on anything other than the fact he might die.

"If she found out all that time ago then why didn't she report me or say anything?"

"Because, Timothy. Grace thinks like me, and she wanted to deal with you in her own way."

"You mean she's in on this sick plan?"

"Well.... sort of. She had her own plans for you, but I couldn't be sure she wouldn't get caught. So...I thought we'd go on a nice fishing trip together. I don't

want the love of my life going to prison once I've got rid of you, do I Timothy?"

"She doesn't want you, she never wanted you!"

Tim spat, jealousy raging through his veins.

"Well, actually Tim, she does. We've rediscovered something while you've been busy getting pissed all the time. Thanks to Eve in a strange way. If she hadn't tried to take her own life then...well, who knows? They say that don't they? When one door closes another door opens. Although, your situation is more like that poem.... *triumph and disaster, and treat those two impostors just the same*...or something like that. You get the general gist of it."

"You're lying! You bastard!" A mixture of vomit and spittle splattered across Tim's chin as he screeched at Dennis.

Dennis was enjoying himself now. He'd hit a nerve. Tim didn't like having anyone or anything taken away from him. He saw everything around him as his own possessions. His memory scents. Only, this time he didn't have a choice.

“Here’s what’s going to happen, Timothy. I’m going to put the lid on your special bed, seal it and then push you over board. Then you will sink to the bottom of the sea because the very thoughtful air holes I’ve placed in the box. And no one will see you ever again.”

This last statement renewed Tim’s panic like an electric shock and he squirmed again, desperately trying to get free.

“I’d save your energy for your breath, Timothy. You’re going to need it.” Dennis laughed deeply.

“After a couple of hours, I’m going to call out an emergency on the radio, saying that I’ve only just got out of bed, because a boozy night, and I can’t find you anywhere. They’ll be a search which will be called off because a storm in about a day and a half. I’ll pretend to be devastated. Everyone will believe me, and no one will have to think of you ever again. And I’ll live happily ever after with your wife. Does that sound fair, Timothy?”

“You won’t get away with this! They’ll find me, someone.... please Dennis? Please?” Tim began to cry, his face red with shame. He’d never cried in front of anyone apart from his mother and Dora.

“Oh, come now, Timothy. It’s only fair after what you put all those children through. Just be thankful your death will be far quicker than any of theirs was, especially Alice’s. I did think about sailing you out to one of the small islands and burying you alive. But then that would make me as bad as you.” He laughed again.

“You are as bad, if you do this!” Tim sobbed like a small child, snot running down the side of his face.

“I don’t think so, Timothy. Have you forgotten what you did to all those children? Do I need to remind you?” Dennis leaned in Tim’s face.

“No. I thought not.”

“Dennis, please? Don’t do this! Let me go and I’ll move away. You and Grace can have the house to yourselves. I won’t cause you any trouble. I’ll just leave quietly.”

Dennis picked up the lid to the box and placed it over Tim as if he’d pressed the mute button to his mouth. As if Tim didn’t exist and Dennis was merely sealing a crate of fishing gear.

He ignored Tim’s protests. He’d dealt with enough tossers at work to know how to switch off from them

when they protested about being arrested or going down to the cells.

Dennis lifted the lid back up, remembering something.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Tim gasped, “I knew you wouldn’t do it.”

“Wrong, Timothy! I found something in your coat pocket that might come in handy. There you go. Nighty, night, Timothy!” Dennis threw a packet of Fisherman’s Friends onto Tim and banged the lid back down.

He chuckled to himself. Tim’s Fisherman’s Friends weren’t going to help him out of this situation.

Dennis took a few moments to think about what he was doing. Relief and panic swept through him simultaneously, albeit briefly.

*

Eve peered around the door of Daphne’s room to see if she was in.

“Hello? Daphne?” she spoke gently in case she was asleep; she didn’t want to startle her.

Daphne was sitting in her chair, staring out of the window, her back to the door.

“Hello Eve, I haven’t seen you for a while. How are you?”

Eve wandered in slowly and laid the flowers she’d brought for Daphne, on her table. She was still feeling fragile after recent events.

“I’m ok, thanks.”

Daphne turned from the window to look at her.

“Oh, my goodness, have you been poorly? You look ashen.”

Eve perched herself on Daphne’s bed and examined the old woman’s troubled face.

“And you’ve been crying. What’s wrong?”

There was a long pause as they both locked eyes with one another.

“Memories sweetheart, that’s all. Now then, I asked you first.”

Eve took a deep breath. “It all got the better of me Daphne. That’s all.”

Eve chose not to tell her she'd tried to kill herself. It wasn't that she couldn't, she just didn't have the energy to talk about it. She was bored of her life being one trauma after another and she was slightly ashamed that the last one had been self-inflicted. It was like a perpetual nightmare.

Daphne reached out to Eve and grasped her hand.

"I know sweetheart, I know. You feel like your whole world's collapsed, like someone's catapulted you off it and there's no point going on." She patted her hand.

Eve stared at her, sensing she was going to say more.

Daphne picked up the fresh roses Eve had cut from the garden and buried her face in their fragrance.

"They're beautiful. Your garden?"

"Of course. I didn't steal them!" Eve laughed.

"Well you never know dear, I thought you might have taken a fancy to old Mrs. Newark's prize flowers on the way!"

They laughed together. For a moment the atmosphere lifted but was soon smothered by the dense emotion that had been there moments before.

“My daughter, Verity was murdered. Seven years old she was. I didn’t want to go on, after they found her, didn’t see the point really.” Daphne sat back in her chair and gazed out of the window. She was mentally travelling back in time, back to an era she’d locked away since it’d happened.

“I had no idea...I mean I remember Grace saying you lost a baby before Tim was born but...”

“I’ve never talked about it, that’s why you didn’t know. It became too unbearable. The longer I left it, the harder it was, so in the end I locked it away.”

Eve stared at her. Shocked she’d become so close to this woman and had never known she’d experienced the same awful trauma. Something began to shift inside Eve. She knew of the other people in the area who had lost their children in the same way, but they had seemed distant because she didn’t know them well enough. It had made her feel terribly lonely. And here she was, sitting in front of someone who was carrying the same battle scars as her. A kind of relief flooded her, causing her to blush with embarrassment. It wasn’t something she’d wish on

anyone, but she was glad of the company in her lonely, cold world.

“Did they catch who did it?”

“Oh yes. He was caught a few months afterwards, hanged for it.”

Eve frowned.

“It was 1950. The death penalty was still punishment for murder.”

“How did that feel? Knowing who it was and seeing them hang for what they’d done.”

Daphne turned away from the window to look Eve in the eye.

“Empty. It made me feel empty. At first there was a strong urge to see him get what he deserved. I wanted him to feel the fear he’d put Verity through. I wanted to kill him with my own hands. But then it was all over and there was nothing. I knew it was for the best, that he wouldn’t be able to harm anyone else. But he was free of it all and we were the ones left with the whole nightmare he’d caused.”

Eve nodded, understanding totally what she was saying. She’d run through the scenario in her head many

times after Alice went missing. Not that she had ever voiced it out loud, that would have meant admitting Alice had been murdered. Death was the easy option in her eyes, which was why she'd tried to end it all only a few days earlier.

"I know there's no excuse for what he did, but was there any explanation?"

Daphne sighed, her eyes watery with tears.

"She smelt nice, he said; took her school shirt as a souvenir. He mutilated my beautiful little angel all because she smelt nice. All I could think about afterwards was that we were halfway through 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. It's strange what goes through your mind when you're in shock."

"I'm so sorry..."

Daphne flinched at the words she hadn't heard for so long, hadn't wanted to hear, especially not from Eve. She put her hand up to stop her saying anything else.

"But I am Daphne, you've listened to me endlessly talking about Alice, which must have been excruciating for you, and you never said a word."

“It wasn’t the right time to tell you and I wasn’t sure if I was right.”

Eve frowned at this last sentence, wondering if she had missed part of the conversation and they were now talking about something else.

“Eve, I’ve got something to tell you and I need you to listen carefully. Don’t interrupt me. I can tell you, now he’s dead.”

“Who’s dead? Daphne, what are you talking about?”

“Tim, who do you think?”

“Tim’s dead? Dead? Don’t be daft, Daphne!” She stared at her, for the first time seeing her as a fragile old woman. She wondered for a few moments if she was going senile.

“Yes Eve. It was all over the news. Lost at sea on one of his fishing trips, you must know, Grace called me. Where ever have you been?”

*

After the dramatic events of the last few days, Chrissie had felt much more settled in her new home. She couldn't quite believe Tim was dead and she wasn't totally sure how she felt about it all. Everything that had happened since she'd lived in the house was hitting her like pelting hailstones. She'd been so bombarded, she could have been told that the village was being wiped out by a plague and she would probably have shrugged it off.

In the last couple of days, she'd had time to digest it all. She felt relieved and calm but there was still a slight uneasiness surrounding her. The activity in the house had almost stopped but there were still a few strange things occurring. The radio continued to have a mind of its own and things kept going missing. She'd spoken to Sarah about it over the phone, which had resulted in her inviting herself over for a few days, firstly to support Chrissie, and to take the opportunity to do some house hunting.

Sarah had felt that the ongoing activity could be caused by Chrissie's anxiousness or maybe an unsettled spirit not willing to move on. She'd promised her some

therapy sessions during her stay to help her to come to terms with it all. Chrissie was having a problem going into the garden, especially down the bottom near the shed.

The trouble was, it didn't matter how many times Sarah told her it was all ok, something still wasn't sitting right with her. She couldn't shake off the overwhelming feeling that someone was trying to get through to her. She brushed the thought away as if she was swatting an insect from her arm; she just needed to let go of it all.

She busied herself preparing supper for Sarah's arrival, trying to concentrate on the task in hand. A movement outside caught her eye and she put down her vegetable peeler and strained her eyes to see through the window.

It was hard to see; the rain was thrashing down, and the clouds had shed a premature darkness over everything. Thinking it was probably the wind blowing the trees, she continued peeling her potatoes, taking deep breaths to calm herself.

There was a creaking noise from the far end of the house which caused her to drop her peeler again. She

went to the kitchen door to see if it was Sarah; she was beginning to feel uneasy. She strained her eyes to look through the window of the stable door. She was hoping to see car lights coming from the drive at the end of the house, so that she could explain it all away, but there was nothing. Telling herself she was being silly, Chrissie locked the door. Better to be on the safe side. Glancing up at the garden as she turned the key, she caught sight of someone sitting on the swing. She quickly glanced back but there was no one there. The swing was moving violently backwards and forwards as if it was possessed by the wind. Chrissie could have sworn she saw a child sitting on it. She shivered and rubbed her arms, taking a few moments to scan the garden. A shadow passed the small door window and it wasn't coming from the outside. The screeching of a wooden chair across the tiled kitchen floor startled her. Chrissie turned slowly.

“Hello Christine.”

There sat a very soaking, dripping, dirty Tim.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Dennis and Grace held each other tightly for what seemed like forever.

“Do you know what my first thought was when the police knocked on the door?”

Dennis kissed her forehead. “No, what?”

“That you were dead or missing too. I was more worried about that than I was about Tim.”

Dennis got up to get them both a drink.

“You know they’ll find him, don’t you? Alive I mean.”

“No, the police called round yesterday and said it was unlikely now.”

“Grace, listen to me. I’m telling you, he’ll be found alive.”

Grace was digesting this news; she wasn't thinking about why or how but the fact she'd felt quite elated by the thought that he was dead. Grace sat down on Dennis's sofa, her head in her hands. The heavy feeling she had carried for so many years began to descend over her body like a black cloud. After quite some time she took a deep breath that seemed to start at the very bottom of her stomach.

"What happened on the boat trip, Dennis? I mean really? I thought you said you were going to deal with it – not that I wanted you to."

"And I have dealt with it. I let him think he was going to die; gave him a taste of his own medicine." Dennis saw Grace's look of dismay, "The one thing I've learnt from being in the police force is that death is the easiest way out for someone like Tim."

"But we agreed."

Dennis laughed and sat down next to her on the sofa.

"I didn't agree anything. I just said I didn't want you to worry about it and to leave it to me."

“But I didn’t want you dealing with it. I could have made it look like a simple accident and it would have been better for everyone concerned. He’s my stupid alcoholic husband.” Grace knew she was being childish which wasn’t becoming for a woman of her age, but she couldn’t help herself, the disappointment was so great.

“I’m really sorry, Grace, but he still is.” Dennis laughed.

“I’m glad you find this all so amusing!” Grace started to cry.

“Listen to me. He’s had the most horrible experience of his life; one he’ll never forget. Very soon he’s going to wake up on someone else’s boat, which is moored in the harbour about a mile from here, further along the coast, with an empty rum bottle in his hand, totally unscathed, apart from being a bit smelly and dirty.”

“But why, if you were going to make him suffer, why didn’t you just finish him off?”

“Because my darling, death is too kind for him and in the next few days the police will find evidence to convict him of all the murders he committed. I for one

want to see him in court. He's going to prison for a very long time, which is where, I suspect, he'll end his days. This way we can all live with a clear conscience."

Dennis searched Grace's face to see if she understood what he was saying. He needed her to think about it all rationally; otherwise the consequences could be horrific.

"I nearly did do it you know? I came so close to pushing the box I'd put him in over the side of the boat."

"You put him in a box?" Grace sipped the brandy Dennis had poured her.

"Sure did. Frightened the living daylights out of him; he actually wet himself."

A smile crept across Grace's mouth, nudging her eyes to follow suit. They sat in silence for a while.

"I told him about Nadine."

Grace stayed very still, unable to look at him.

"He tried to deny he'd killed her but when he realised I was going to throw him overboard, he just gave in."

Grace felt as if the room and everything in it, including her insides, was rushing away from her.

“Can you repeat that?” It came out more as a whisper and Grace felt for a moment that the words had come from someone else. “What did you just say?”

Dennis watched the colour drain from her face and then the enormity of what he’d said dawned on him.

“Nadine. Oh Grace, please tell me you knew? I thought when we talked the night you brought Alice’s letters over you knew he’d killed her. I thought it was your main reason for wanting to get rid of him.”

“I was going to do it for Alice, for all the others. He can’t have killed Nadine. It was an accident.” Grace stared at him, waiting for him to tell her he’d made a mistake.

“It was recorded as an accident but there was a strong feeling throughout the station that she may have been murdered. The dog walker who heard her scream also heard some muffled noises and he thought she shouted at someone.”

“Yes, she shouted for help.”

“No Grace, there’s a difference between shouting to someone and shouting at them. The witness couldn’t be sure, and we knew it wouldn’t stand up in court. I’m

so sorry Grace, I thought you knew. I suppose I assumed Tim told you all the details of the case. Of course, he wouldn't have. How silly of me to even think it."

"Well, he wasn't ever going to reveal that little bit of information, was he? He knew I would have pushed for further inquiries; that I might have worked out what he'd done."

"Are you ok?"

"I don't know. I just feel numb and... I don't know. I just don't know." Grace fell into Dennis's arms and cried.

She cried herself to sleep while he stroked her hair. Then he gently moved her onto the sofa and covered her with a blanket, while he made them both some lunch. He knew she'd go through all sorts of emotions and she'd still want to kill Tim for a time, but he knew he'd done the right thing. He knew from experience that all those families would want to see justice, would want to see the face of the person who killed their child. It helped people through the grieving process; a face and a name, a real life human being. He knew Grace would see this in time and he understood what she was feeling. He also knew

strong emotions would fade over time and eventually the guilt would set in regardless of what that person had done. Moral standards always got in the way and there was a lot of truth in the saying that two wrongs don't make a right. He didn't feel he had the right to make that decision on behalf of all those parents who may have different views.

Even though he knew it was the correct and clear way forward he was still left with the urge to have pushed Tim over the edge of the boat and the satisfaction that would have brought. But he consoled himself with the fact that coppers were hated in prisons; if Tim had ever thought about killing himself in the past, he'd soon be wishing he'd done it before now.

He just hoped Grace was stable and strong enough to get through the next few weeks of gossip and nosy reporters.

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Grace placed the handset back in its bed and with a frown contemplated where her sister could have got to. She'd spoken to the hospital and they'd discharged her that morning. It was now mid-afternoon. Grace had been waiting to go and pick her up. She'd been on pins since her conversation with Dennis. She'd sat by the phone, willing it to ring and the person on the other end to tell her they'd found and arrested him. But there had been nothing.

Every avenue she'd followed to try and keep herself busy had led to a dead end. Dennis had told her to act normal, play ignorant and keep herself occupied. Now she was worrying about where Eve had got to. She'd rung round everyone she could think of, but no one had seen her. She couldn't believe the hospital had just let her go without checking if she was with someone. A rather no-nonsense nurse had told her tersely over the phone that you couldn't watch someone twenty-four hours a day and they'd seen this sort of thing before. In other words, thought Grace, if she was going to do it, she'd find a moment. Not exactly what she wanted to hear when the hospital had no information on her

whereabouts. But this wasn't primarily what she was worrying about. She knew that Eve wouldn't try it again, she'd hit rock bottom and she was slowly on her way back up.

What was concerning her was the vision of Tim in the back of her mind, drifting around like a piece of wood on the water. She shook it off realising there was no reason for Tim to go looking for Eve or for her to go searching for him, for that matter. She reassured herself that once he came to, he'd find his way home first, before going anywhere else, and by that time the police would have caught up with him.

It suddenly dawned on her like light bursting through a crack in the curtain. Daphne. That was it. She'd gone to see Daphne. Grace was aware of how close they had become. She couldn't understand why, she thought the old woman was vile and always had done.

She jumped up from where she'd been sitting in Eve's kitchen, grabbed her keys and was out of the door in seconds. She wasn't quite aware of what she'd do when she got to the retirement home; she just knew she needed to go there. She hadn't seen her for a long time

and felt that after the false news she had delivered her, she owed her a visit.

Daphne had seen all about how Tim had gone missing on the news. Grace had called her with the developments, but the phone call had been strained, neither woman having much to say to the other. Grace felt a pang of guilt that Daphne had been told her son was dead, since he wasn't. Although, she hadn't appeared to be overly distraught but then it wasn't easy to tell over the phone. Grace thought maybe she hadn't understood; Tim had said he thought she was losing the plot.

She pushed open the doors of Poppy Field's as she was buzzed in and ran down the corridor. Just before she got to Daphne's room she slowed down and walked. There wasn't any point in causing a panic and she wasn't quite sure why she was in such a hurry. Something was wrong, she could feel it.

"Daphne?" Grace tapped on her door which was ajar. There was no answer.

"Daphne, its Grace can I come in?" At first, she thought there was something wrong with her; there were strange noises coming from her chair. Then she

wondered if she'd had another stroke. She wandered into the room and leaned over the chair Daphne was sitting in.

“Oh Daphne...” Grace pulled another chair up close to the fragile old woman and sat down. She picked up her bony hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. Grace sat quietly with her mother in law and allowed her to cry. She'd never seen her like this before, not even when Jack died. She'd always thought her a strange old fish; cold and harsh. But looking at her now was like sitting with someone else. Someone she knew, not a stranger, which is how Grace had felt towards her in all the years she'd been married. The woman sat in front of her now had emotion in her face, making her look softer, more vulnerable.

Grace suddenly realised she'd never spent the time getting to know her. She'd always taken Tim's word that she was a vile human being. Eve obviously saw someone different.

This thought reminded her why she was there, and a shot of panic entered her heart.

“Has Eve popped in for a visit today?” Grace kept her voice light and casual.

Daphne looked up at Grace, squeezing her hand slightly.

“What is it, Daphne?”

“I’ve told her everything.”

“What do you mean you’ve told her everything?”

“Everything.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Chrissie was frozen to the spot; three things were circulating around in her head. Firstly, she thought that the person sat in her kitchen was dead, but he appeared to be very much alive. Secondly, she was going to die. And thirdly, it had been him trying to scare her out in the garden all along.

Chrissie looked from him to the clock on the wall, which seemed to be ticking louder than normal, warning her that her time was almost up. She prayed that for the first time in Sarah's life she wouldn't be late. The silence gave her time to think, to work out how she could get out of the situation alive.

She lifted her arm slowly up her back to try and reach the key behind her in the lock. She was watching Tim the whole time. He continued to stare at the table, picking at an old candle wax mark. She expected him to say something else, but he didn't. Her fingers found the key and she held her breath as she desperately tried to get her fingers to work without making too much noise. She

bit her lip hoping beyond hope that the latch wouldn't fly back, making a loud clunk like it usually did. She mentally pictured herself turning quickly, opening the door and running out. She felt slightly like she had done as a child when she and her sisters had been playing chase with one another and she was trying to get away from them. Only this wasn't a game and she felt much, much worse.

Tim continued to pick at the table and stare at nothing; his eyes were glazed; he'd stepped into another world. She could hear the thumping of her heart beating in her ears, almost in time with the loud ticking of the clock.

Clunk, click. She grabbed the door handle; a whimpering escaped her lips as she heard the screeching of Tim's wooden chair across the tiled kitchen floor. She banged the door against the wall and ran screaming down the path that led to the bottom of the house, the driveway, the footpath, the whole time anticipating a hand grabbing her. She dared not look behind her; she just knew she had to keep going. Get into an area where there were other people. She didn't want to knock on anyone's door; she

couldn't risk them not answering. Great gulps of breath were straining her chest and neck.

She kept going until she got to the seafront and dared to turn and look behind her before she stopped running. She'd had an idea when she got to the main street in the centre of the village that maybe Tim wasn't following her; she couldn't hear his foot fall behind her. She hadn't wanted to risk it though just in case it was wishful thinking. She looked behind her; there was no one to be seen in the pouring rain, only the passing traffic. She placed her hands on her knees to catch her breath; the rain was pelting down on her, running down her face. She turned around and around frantically looking for him, expecting him to jump out and grab her.

A car beeped and screeched to a halt on the side of the road, startling her. It was Grace. Chrissie checked around one more time before she got in the car. Once inside she pressed the central locking and stared at Grace, her eyes wide and full of fear.

"You're soaked. What on earth are you doing out in this weather?"

“I...I... Tim...” Chrissie was still trying to catch her breath. She was shivering, shaking, crying and absolutely petrified all at the same time. “Tim’s at mine...Tim... I’m not seeing things...I promise.”

“Shit! We need to phone the police, Chrissie. Is he still there?”

“No. I don’t know. He came in the house. I thought he was going to hurt me.” Chrissie’s breath was coming back, and she was finding it easier to talk and breathe.

“Are you ok? He hasn’t hurt you has he?” Grace looked Chrissie up and down.

“No, I got out and just kept running.” Chrissie wiped her face on the sleeve of her damp sweater. “I thought the police said he was dead?”

Grace sped off while Chrissie stared through the car windows looking for Tim. She was waiting for Grace to continue what she was saying.

Grace glanced at her. “Sorry Chrissie I’m looking for Eve, the hospital discharged her, and I haven’t been able to find her. I’m getting really worried.”

“I assume you’ve looked in all the likely places she would go?” Chrissie was still shivering.

“Yes but no one’s seen her. At least I know she’s not with Tim.” Grace paused as she digested her own words. “Oh my god! You don’t think he’s already seen her?”

All Chrissie could do was stare at her; she needed to think.

“Right, ok. Let’s think about this logically, I’m sure she’s fine. There’s no reason why Tim would have come across her.”

“I’m not so sure. The thing is Chrissie, there’s quite a lot that’s come to light the last couple of days and I haven’t had a chance to tell you. Let me get you back to Eve’s. We can check to see if she’s there, find you some warm clothes and then I’ll ring the police.”

*

Tim wandered through the open door and out into Chrissie's garden. The rain seemed to be coming down in sheets; the grass under foot was already beginning to drown with the amount of water that had already fallen. Tim lifted the collar of his coat, tucked his hands in his pockets and made his way across the garden to Chrissie's swing. He sat down on it and gently pushed himself.

In his mind he was twelve again and not in Chrissie's garden but in the garden of his childhood. He was back in the moment when his mother had sat him down and told him the truth about his sister, Verity. She hadn't died when she was a baby as he'd always been led to believe. She had been murdered when she was seven. It was a day that had changed his entire life forever.

There was a room in the house he was always forbidden to go in and it was kept locked. Daphne had told him it was a storage room and wasn't to be played in. But that day, Daphne had unlocked the door to the mysterious room and allowed him to enter. It was Verity's bedroom, his sister's. He remembered when he walked into that room how the mysteries of his short life had all become clear in that one moment. A bedroom to a

life he'd never known about, a life he hadn't been permitted to know; one that had existed before him.

The room was like a scene in a museum, except the life like plastic figures were missing.

He'd been allowed in there that one and only day, with Daphne. It was a clear and vivid memory that had stayed with him all his life. He hadn't been allowed to touch anything; he was just allowed to have a look. It had been Daphne's way of making it real for him, to hopefully dampen the shock of finding out the truth about his sister. She and Tim's father had wanted to protect him, so that his childhood wasn't tainted with the ghastly truth they had to live with. This had only proved to have the opposite effect, and in truth the real reason had been that it was too painful for either of them to talk about.

Before Tim was permitted to go into the room, he wouldn't have been shocked to see Verity lying on the bed, a preserved waxen effigy in the little time warp his mother was exposing him to.

As he twirled round on the swing he clearly saw the memory of watching his mother standing in Verity's bedroom, checking that everything was in its place. He'd

wondered at the time if she was looking to see if Verity had come back and moved something, a sign she might still be around somewhere. He could still recall the clinking of the keys in his mother's hand, tears filling her eyes as she moved forward to shake the dusky pink eiderdown. Everything was clean and tidy and perfectly placed. Tiny hand printed roses flecked the walls, the rugs on the floor were flat as if they'd been painted on, their fringes immaculately straight on all sides.

Tim had looked around and noticed how everything had been carefully chosen. Perfectly picked for Verity, unlike his own room which looked like it had been made up for an unexpected guest.

It hadn't been the fact his mother had told him his sister had been murdered that bothered him. It had been the realisation that he'd come face to face with his competition. His sibling rival.

He'd always known there had been something untouchable standing in his way; he just hadn't realised the extent of what it had been. It was like finding a missing piece of an old puzzle long since packed away; a vital part of the whole picture.

Verity was the reason his mother didn't want him. His mother and father had had a life with her before him. He realised this whenever he had revisited this memory. He'd been too young at the time to understand it all then; too young to analyse it. Re-running the footage throughout his life had made it become clearer in his mind.

It had been raining the day she told him, as it was now, soaking him as he sat on the swing under the willow tree. Huge droplets of water were sliding off the leaves and landing on his head, as though he was being smacked by hundreds of tiny cold hands.

He'd become aware as he grew up that his mother and father had tried to recreate their life after Verity, but it had backfired on them because Tim had been born a boy. And from that day forward he had never been wanted. His feelings the day he'd stood in Verity's room, had been a mixture of disappointment, pain and anger. Verity had upped the stakes and even though she wasn't alive, Tim had felt she very much was. Competing against a dead baby had been hard enough but a

murdered, pretty, clever little girl had seemed almost impossible.

He and his mother had stood in Verity's bedroom for what seemed like hours. He had mainly watched his mother's reaction, studied her heartbroken face. Devastated and contorted at the loss of her first born, still in that era, locked in a time when Verity was still alive. He'd stretched out his hand, hoping beyond hope she'd clasp it with her own. Instead, she did something that caused a crack to run through the centre of his tiny heart; she flinched. Then she busied her hand with finding a tissue in her sleeve so that she could wipe the tears from her face.

Tim pushed himself off the swing, his salt and pepper hair plastered to his head by the rain water. He took a deep breath and began walking down the garden to the old brick shed. His special shed.

A car pulling into the driveway jerked him into the present day, causing him to stop in his tracks.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Grace had arrived back at Eve's with a much-shaken Chrissie. There was still no sign of her sister, although she had been back at some point because Grace noticed her bags in the hallway. She checked round the house, but she was nowhere to be seen. This had eased her concern; her hospital luggage showed there was some sign of life, but Grace was still worried. She called the police telling them that Tim was very much alive and had paid her friend a visit, giving her quite a fright. They told her to stay exactly where she was while they looked for him, and a police officer would be over to them soon. They also promised to send some police officers out to look for her sister. Grace played ignorant to the fact she knew anything about Tim, but the officer on the other

end of the phone sounded far too serious for it to be purely to do with Tim's disappearance. She knew the news was all over the police station and they'd be pleased if they did find him alive. A case could be put together and some sort of justice would be done. It made Grace realise that Dennis had been right; death was far too easy an option for Tim. She just hoped they had enough evidence to convict him for the rest of his life.

Grace put the phone down on the kitchen table, mentally deciding she would tell the police that her mother in law had told her everything that day. It was something Daphne had agreed with her. They'd shared their secrets that afternoon and bonded in the process. Grace hadn't been sure about using her as a scapegoat, even though Daphne had insisted, but now, as she clicked the red button on the phone, she surrendered to the offer. For the first time in many years, she felt safe and protected, pleased that someone else was shouldering some of the responsibility.

She got Chrissie a warm sweater and blanket out of Eve's airing cupboard and, after settling her with a hot

drink, brought her up to speed with everything that had happened.

“It just gets worse, Grace. I couldn’t make it up to write about.” Chrissie sipped her hot sweet tea, still shaken from her encounter with Tim. Being in such proximity to him had brought back a barrage of feelings and fears from the past.

“I know. It’s a lot to take in. I still can’t quite believe it myself.”

“Oh my god!” Chrissie jumped up, throwing the blanket off her shoulders. “Sarah is coming over tonight; she’s probably at mine already!”

“Oh shit! Quick, ring her!” Grace thrust the phone into Chrissie’s hand.

After several attempts and no answer from Sarah’s phone, the two women decided to jump in the car and go straight to Chrissie’s house and wait for her. They didn’t want to think about the various scenarios that could face them all, and they weren’t prepared for the one they hadn’t even thought of yet.

It was a strange sight as they pulled down the track towards Chrissie’s house. There was no way they were

going to be able to park in her driveway. There were police cars everywhere; some of them still had their lights flashing. Chrissie sat bolt upright in the car and strained her neck to see what was going on. The sight of Sarah's car caused a jolt of shock to pass through her. She jumped out of the car before Grace had stopped moving, and ran up the driveway. She was stopped by a police officer before she'd even got halfway to the house.

"What's happening?" Chrissie desperately tried to see passed the young police officer.

"I'm afraid you can't go in there."

"It's my house! Is Sarah in there?"

The police officer was slightly taken aback, and he wasn't quite sure what to do or say next. He was new to the job and his lack of experience and confidence showed in his worried face.

"Wait there, I'll just go and get someone."

Grace had joined her, and they were waiting patiently in silence, both straining on tip toe to see what was going on.

After what seemed like half an hour but was only a few minutes, a plain clothed officer came out of Chrissie's house.

"Hello. I'm Detective Sergeant Jane Spencer." She flashed some identification in front of their startled faces.

"Are you Christine Newman?"

"Yes." Chrissie's voice sounded small and quiet. So, she tried again after clearing her throat. The Detective Sergeant stared at her like a strict school teacher chastising a child; her serious blue eyes boring into Chrissie, letting her know that time was of the essence.

"Yes, I'm Chrissie."

Chrissie pulled her shoulders back and stood tall, preparing herself for the shocking news she was anticipating; like a sea wall waiting for a strong tidal wave.

"Can you come into the house please; we need to ask you some questions."

A prickling sensation was beginning to spread across her neck, threatening to burst into a rash; nausea was rising in her stomach.

“Where’s Tim?” Grace said. Seeing Chrissie’s distress, she squeezed her arm.

“And you are?” Detective Sergeant Jane Spencer peered at Grace as if she’d only just realised she was standing there.

She wasn’t at all friendly and Grace could completely understand how she’d got to the position she was in. Everything about her was cold; from her short blonde hair right down to her pale grey trouser suit.

“I’m his wife, Grace Charlesworth.”

The Detective leant back slightly, unable to hide her surprise.

“You need to come in as well, there’s been an incident concerning your husband.”

At this last comment, Chrissie and Grace stared at each other, both with the same panic-stricken faces. They followed the Detective Sergeant Jane Spencer into the house.

*

The rain had finally stopped, and the sun was bursting through the early evening clouds, touching everything in its sight with an orange glow. The wind blowing off the sea was making it hard for Sarah to hear what Tim was saying. It was vital she heard every word and responded to him in the right way.

Tim was stood on a grassy verge on top of a cliff, not far away from the edge. He was talking to Sarah, who was a few feet away from him, oblivious to the fact he was surrounded by police, albeit quite a distance from him.

He was in another world again, a different era, another time and place. All he could see was Sarah, only to him she wasn't Sarah, she was his mother. Daphne was dressed in a pretty, floral 1950s dress, which was white and splashed with vibrant cerise pink roses. A navy clutch bag was clasped in her gloved hands, which were crossed and tucked, as always, under her breast. A navy shrug matched her navy shoes and her shiny bleached blonde hair was perfectly pinned on top of her head. She

looked exactly as she always did, with her immaculate makeup, like she'd just stepped off a film set.

It hadn't taken Sarah long to work out that the man in front of her thought she was someone else and it was likely to be his mother. She'd seen it many times with the clients she counselled.

She'd found Tim in Chrissie's garden, although she didn't know it was him. She'd been told by Chrissie that Tim had died whilst out on a weekend fishing trip. She'd approached the stranger to ask him what he was doing, but he'd just stared at her, a glazed look in his eyes. She'd noticed Chrissie's door was wide open, panic had hit her, and she'd run all over the house looking for her. Half peeled potatoes on the table and the radio blaring caused Sarah to think she'd left the house in a hurry. She called the police and then followed Tim from a distance, as he wandered aimlessly down the garden. She thought there might be a chance he would lead her to Chrissie. Her instinct was telling her it was Tim, but logic was telling her she was wrong.

And now here she was, standing on top of a cliff, her blonde hair whipping and irritating her face,

pretending to be some strange man's mother so that he didn't jump off the cliff.

"Dora shut me in the cellar while you were out. She said I'd been naughty, but I wasn't, was I Mother?"

"Of course you weren't. You've always been a good boy." Sarah hadn't any idea who this Dora was, but she was going along with it anyway.

"Why did you leave me then?" He was crying now, sobbing like a small child, snot running down his lip.

"I didn't leave you, sweetheart. I'm here."

Tim edged backwards, causing Sarah to put her hand out to him, fearful that if he took any more steps he'd be falling into oblivion.

"Don't lie! You were never there. You didn't want me!"

Sarah couldn't help feeling there was a parent somewhere, living or dead, who was responsible for this mess, someone who should have been facing up to all this crap instead of her. She thought of the evening she was supposed to be having with Chrissie and how much she'd been looking forward to it. Curled up on the sofa

with a glass of wine, a hot meal and her best friend, a far cry from what she was doing now. Sarah made a mental note that when she moved here she wouldn't offer her services within the village; perhaps she'd stick to ten miles distance from it.

"Come over here towards me so we can talk about this properly."

Tim stared at what he saw as his mother, unsure whether to move towards her or not. Daphne stretched out her arms towards him, encouraging him to come forwards. Tears were dragging her makeup down her face like an unusual art technique on brilliant white paper.

"But you don't love me; you always wanted Verity instead of me."

Sarah was beginning to lose her patience. She didn't want to be standing on a cliff, the cold wind chilling her bones, trying to coax some crack pot from jumping to his death. As heartless as this thought was, in her experience they usually ended up finishing themselves off, one way or another, especially when the damage was so deeply ingrained. But she knew she had to keep talking to him, he may have some knowledge of

where Chrissie was, and she was her main concern now. She was hoping he'd just frightened Chrissie, causing her to flee from the house, and that she was tucked up somewhere safe and warm. Her instinct said so, but it was also telling her she needed to keep this man alive, whatever state he was in.

"I loved you both the same and I still do very much. Now please, darling, come away from the edge."

This was the worst sentence Sarah could have uttered to Tim. Being unaware of the facts and having to ad lib as if she was on a stage playing a part she hadn't rehearsed, Sarah had unintentionally flicked a switch in Tim's head.

He took a deep breath and stepped backwards, his foot sliding through the air instead of hitting the earth, and he was gone.

Sarah screamed and ran forward; she hadn't anticipated him going through with it right there and then. The next thing she knew there was a blur of police officers running towards her and the cliff's edge.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Eve found herself outside Grace's gate, which was the entrance leading to the front of her cottage. The house where the man who'd killed her daughter lived. Alice probably came through this gate the night she died, thought Eve, full of innocence and trust, not for one moment imagining her Uncle Tim would hurt a hair on her head. She shook the image from her mind and it dispersed into the background ready, Eve was sure, to reappear later.

She'd been back to her own home a couple of times that day, hoping to see Grace, but there had been no one in. She had been occupied with many other things and assumed that Grace would be at her own house sorting out Tim's affairs. She'd been putting off going to Grace's house all day, it was the last place she wanted to be, but the concern for her sister had grown throughout the day and she knew she had to put her own needs aside for the time being and offer her some support. She was

astounded at the amount Grace had had to cope with while she'd been in hospital. A spark of guilt prodded her heart as she thought of her own self-inflicted trauma.

Eve was unsure about all the information she had received that day; she supposed she was feeling a bit numb. The feeling of shock and horror hadn't lasted very long, as if it had hit the surface of her body but had been unable to penetrate it.

There had been a weird sense of comfort that had replaced all those feelings, an odd sense of relief that it had been a family member, someone they all knew, rather than a stranger. It was something she could get the measure of, having known him for so many years, although she realised she hadn't known him very well. It didn't stop her feeling angry or outraged or guilty that she hadn't spotted it, but it was preferable to seeing a blank figure in her mind's eye. She couldn't explain these strange feelings, so she was just accepting them as they greeted her. Any sort of comfort now was a light relief from the storm that had been raging on inside her for so many years.

The news that had upset her the most had been hearing that Tim was dead; she had so many things she wanted to say to him, scream at him. For a short while she'd wanted to be the one who had killed him, in a violent and painful way, not the way she imagined, where the sea swallowed him up, filling him with salty water and calming him within minutes to drift into an eternal sleep.

She'd spent quite some time with Daphne after being told everything she knew. They'd cried together, having tried to make sense of it all; Daphne blaming herself and Eve telling her she wasn't to.

After she'd left Daphne she'd spent the rest of the day on her own; she needed time to think. She'd walked for most of it; had gone to the area where Alice had been found, forcing herself to face it all. Then she'd made her way to the beach for a walk and to take in the fresh cold sea air. Even though the news that day had been mind blowing, she felt different for the first time in a very long time.

Something had shifted inside her, she no longer felt in absolute desperate despair; having some answers

to such monumental questions had somehow liberated her. And even though she was still hurting and completely aware she would have many more feelings to deal with, she was free. All in the space of a few hours she'd been thrown into moving forward with her life. No waiting for Alice to come home, no wondering anymore.

After walking for quite some time before being forced to stop in a cafe due to the ferocity of the rain, Eve decided to go and see her husband Jon. He had the right to know what she had been told, and she wanted to talk to him more than anyone else. They had shared a beautiful human being, whom they had produced together; Alice had been a part of them both.

His face went from shock to concern to love when he saw the small figure of his wife on his doorstep. Her light brown hair was tied back from her face, showing up the unusually dark brown eyes she shared with her sister, Grace. Those eyes now had a spark of life in them; they'd been like flat pieces of granite since Alice had gone missing. She looked like someone had breathed the elixir of life into her lungs, saving her from dying out altogether.

After she told him all she knew, he was understandably distressed, and she stayed with him, letting him talk it all out. It was roles reversed for the first time in their married life; he had always comforted and protected her, and he'd become so heavy with it he'd had to leave for the sake of them both.

By the end of their tears and conversation together, they had found an equal footing, a way forward to working on their future together.

Having laid many things to rest that day, Eve wanted to see her sister. And here she was stuck at the gate like a statue, unable to lift the latch with her stone fingers and walk up the garden path to the front door. She felt ridiculous. Especially after all the hurdles she'd faced that day, this should have been relatively easy. She knew she'd have to go in there at some point and she knew that Tim wasn't there anymore.

Just as she was mustering up the courage and feeling like her whole body was turning from stone to flesh again, a police car pulled up behind her.

"Are you Eve Thomlinson?" the officer called through the wound down window.

Eve turned slowly from the space she had occupied for many minutes, dread filling her entire being. Grace had been missing all day and fear was now reaching out and gripping her throat.

“Yes...why?”

“Your sister, Grace has been looking for you. I’ve just had a message on my radio saying she’s at a Christine Newman’s house. She’s quite worried about you. Jump in and I’ll take you over there.”

Relief flooded her, and it felt like it was leaking into her bones. The feelings startled her slightly, it dawned on her that she hadn’t had any feelings about anyone else since Alice had gone missing.

The journey in the police car gave her time to reflect on how dead her life had been. She suddenly felt very ashamed; Alice wouldn’t have wanted her to live her life like that, and she’d only just realised it.

*

Chrissie, Sarah, Grace and Eve spent the evening after their eventful day talking right into the small hours. It was an odd combination, seeing as they weren't all familiar with each other, and at times was awkward and excruciating but it worked. They shared many emotions together and it caused a bond to form that would last for the rest of their lives.

The fire was lit, the outside world had been shut out quite some time ago and stiff drinks were flowing along with the conversation. They were all completely exhausted but somehow managed to stay awake to counsel one another.

For the first in a very long time Chrissie's house took a deep breath and let out a very large sigh, as a veil of serenity and peace landed on the whole area, dispersing the cold, sinister atmosphere as easy as someone blowing on a dandelion head.

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The guilt had been too overwhelming for Daphne to bear, and she had passed away two years to the day since she had unburdened everything she'd known about Tim. But aside from her despair she had lived the best two years of her life. Not only had she gained a friendship with Eve and Grace, but she developed one with Chrissie and Sarah too. Chrissie had wanted to interview her for research for her new book and Sarah, having newly arrived in the village, had wanted to come along and get to know a few people. For Daphne it had been like gaining four daughters where she had lost one. They consoled her through her bad moments, telling her she wasn't to blame for Tim's behaviour. But it didn't matter how many times she heard it, she still felt guilty. He had been right about the fact she hadn't wanted him. He'd arrived far too soon after they had lost Verity, well too soon in Daphne's eyes. She had been unable to bond with him and she remembered so clearly feeling like a child being given a new toy to replace a much loved old one. Only, this hadn't been a toy she'd been dealing with and she was no longer a child. The bond she had

expected and thought every mother was supposed to feel hadn't arrived.

People had thought a boy had been better than having another girl, which they thought would highlight the fact she wasn't Verity and could never replace her. A boy signified a fresh start, a new chapter in her life, but Daphne didn't feel any of those things, she'd just felt more miserable than before and worse still, she'd felt trapped.

Over and over in her head she would run memories, wondering if she could have tried harder, spent more time with him, loved him more.

She knew that Verity's murder had been the trigger for all the crimes Tim committed, but she had been the catalyst for it all by making him feel so unwanted and unloved.

Eve and Grace told her time and again that if Verity hadn't been murdered she wouldn't have felt like that towards him, so therefore it had been the fault of the monster who'd cruelly taken her daughter. They assured her he wouldn't have been aware of her feelings, that lots of mothers went through the same thing, only it was

diagnosed as post-natal depression today rather than ignored as it was back then. It wasn't an excuse for him to go around killing innocent children; everyone had a choice in life, no matter how badly they had been treated.

Even Daphne telling them she suspected Dora of abusing Tim couldn't convince them that it was all her fault, or how horrible she felt she'd been to him because she simply didn't like him. They loved her and couldn't imagine she would intentionally hurt anyone, even with her harsh prickly exterior.

Sarah even tried to talk to her on a professional level, to reassure her that she would have done the very best she could for her son and she wasn't to blame herself any longer; that they had both been victims of tragic circumstances. There was no rhyme or reason for it and Daphne beating herself up wouldn't change any of it one little bit.

Absolutely nothing would convince Daphne otherwise; it eased the guilt and softened the pain for her, but it didn't dissolve it. It was something no one could take away from her and she knew they were just being kind. The guilt of her son's actions would stay with her

forever. Daphne felt, she and Jack had chosen to bring him into the world, and it had been their duty to guide him in the right way.

Their support and loyalty helped her though and it was like having her daughter back with her again, only in four separate people. She felt extremely privileged to have them around her, fussing over her, genuinely interested in what she had to tell them.

Daphne passed away peacefully with all four of them around her. She was no longer scared or bitter about her life and she left, feeling quite peaceful and ready to go home.

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Tim was found guilty of the murders of Jody, Karen, Jennifer, Jacqueline, Lucy, Jonathan, Nadine and Alice. He was sentenced to life in prison for each murder.

He had survived his attempted suicide because he hadn't anticipated the ledge that broke his fall halfway down to the sea. And it quite literally broke his fall, by

snapping his spine in two places, leaving him paralyzed for the rest of his life.

His pleas of insanity at the time of the murders had fallen on deaf ears and he was removed from the court after a long hearing. There wasn't one parent, family member or friend in the area who wished he'd died that day on the cliffs. Everyone wanted him to serve his sentence in full for the rest of his life, because they knew how much he wanted death to come and relieve him.

He was put on a hospital wing in prison and watched by the staff determined to keep him alive. He appealed against his sentence, much to the shock of everyone concerned, but it was understandably thrown out of court. He felt that the sentence was immensely unfair because he'd been damaged as a child, but as the judge had pointed out to him on his day of sentencing, he'd had a choice. Everyone has the freedom to choose their actions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gayle lives in Norfolk with her husband. She writes her books from a caravan in the garden and draws her inspiration from supermarkets.