

A tense psychological
thriller full of twists



EVERY LITTLE BREATH

How much could one phone call
change your life?

KERI BEEVIS

EVERY LITTLE BREATH

KERI BEEVIS



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Also by Keri Beevis

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A note from the publisher

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CRIME THRILLERS

M for Murder (#Book 1)

D for Dead (#Book 2)

To Daniella Curry
A friendship made through a mutual love of books is a precious friendship
indeed.

PROLOGUE

Most people think it is the disposing of a body that will get you caught. I mean, how do you ever truly make someone disappear? Unless you have access to a crematorium, it is almost impossible.

A regular fire isn't hot enough, while acid baths might work in the movies, but you have to get your chemical mix right. And even then a body can take days to dissolve. Plus you have to factor in the stench it will cause. Pigs can chew through bone, but even they leave evidence. Same with your trusty, but very noisy and extremely messy woodchipper.

No, the best way, in my opinion, to get rid of a body, is to bury it deep in a place where no one will ever look for it.

Which brings me back to my first point.

It's often not the disposing of the body that will get you caught, it's your connection to the victim, and if the police find a way to link you, you're screwed.

So you have to be smart. Pick strangers, random encounters, be aware of CCTV cameras, and never ever prowl too close to home.

Here is how I do it.

Popular vehicle, neutral colour. I use a Volkswagen Transporter, dark grey, as it's easier to hide any suspicious marks. Nondescript (there are thousands of these vans on the roads), fake plates. Now this is important. If you are seen and they get your licence, it's game over.

That's why you use a disguise too.

Wig, beard, glasses, different clothing to what you would normally wear. Put steps in your shoes to make you taller. And padding too. Make yourself older, fatter, walk with a limp. You want to appear harmless.

Work on at least a sixty-mile radius. Don't ever be tempted to take

anyone closer.

Keep to the back roads where there are less cameras, make sure your vehicle is in good working order (you don't want to be pulled over for a broken tail light or risk breaking down) and adhere to the speed limit.

Avoid cities, stick to rural villages (less cameras again) and try to hunt at night when there are fewer people about.

Now we come to our victims. You'll have a type and that is okay.

I'm a boobs man, so I always go for females. Youngish, long hair (helps that it's easier to grab), slim. I don't have a preference for blondes or brunettes. I took a redhead once because I heard they were feisty and I do appreciate a struggler, but the stupid bitch cried the entire time and didn't put up any fight at all.

So be fussy, but not too fussy. When the opportunity comes along, you don't want to miss it because she didn't have the right colour eyes. I have only ever once returned home empty-handed from a hunt and frustration doesn't cut it.

With no outlet, the craving grows, and that, my friends is when you are more at risk, as you will start taking chances to get that release. You cannot afford to be sloppy.

Find your target, watch her for a bit, make sure she's alone. Dog walkers are okay (though for God's sake don't leave the dog running about loose, as the alarm will be raised quicker), walkers and joggers are better. Cyclists can be taken down easily with a jolt from behind or the lone woman waiting for a bus (just be sure the bus won't show up while you grab her). If you can take them by surprise it gives you an advantage, but if not, make the limp more pronounced, give them a friendly smile, win them over with charm as you play the hapless, elderly, lost motorist.

You want to incapacitate her as quickly and quietly as possible. I use a sharp slice with the side of my hand to the carotid artery in the neck. Move in quick and your victim will be on the ground before she realises what has happened.

Now you only have a few seconds before she regains consciousness, so you need to get her into the van fast. Doors closed, tape up her mouth, put a hood over her head, bind her wrists behind her back and her ankles together (cuffs are quickest and easiest). With practise you can have her secured before she wakes up.

I have a bench seat in the back of my van. A wooden crate nailed to the

floor. The top lifts off providing the perfect space for a human body. It's padded with thick foam inside, which helps quieten any struggles, though it has a couple of air holes, and once the seat cover is on, no one is any the wiser to what's inside.

Once you have her in place then you're on the home stretch. Take it slow and steady, though, as you head back. You're going to be excited, eager to play with your new toy, but it's important to maintain the façade until you are home.

Don't make any unnecessary stops, again stick to the B roads, and whatever you do, don't rush. You've got this.

And that is how it is done. No connection, different county, no way to link her back to you. So when the alarm is finally raised, there is no need to panic. You can rest safe in the knowledge that they will never find her.

And that is when your fun can really begin.

THEN

It's not you, it's me.
I just need some space.
We're on different paths right now.
We can still be friends.
Urgh!

Casey Fallon gripped the steering wheel of her cherry-red Beetle, eased a little off the accelerator, aware she was just a mile away from Strumpshaw and still didn't have her break-up speech right. She had practised this for days, knew she couldn't be a coward and end things with Gareth over the phone. He deserved better than that.

Her reasons sounded so clichéd, though, and she just knew he was going to think she had met someone else at university.

She hadn't. Okay, maybe she had looked. But truth was she had changed.

Her first year at Derby had been filled with new friendships and experiences that made her realise she was too young to settle down. She was only nineteen for chrissakes and she wanted to be free to explore, to experiment and to have fun, and yes, to meet new people, and her relationship with Gareth had become strained as he didn't want her to change. Couldn't understand why she couldn't just be happy with her life back in Norfolk.

Over this last term her confidence had soared and he hadn't liked that one bit.

He was older than her and had always been a little bit controlling, had freaked when she had told him she was going to university, and even though they were hundreds of miles apart, she still felt like he was smothering her. His texts and phone calls, demanding to know where she was and who she

was with, were relentless, and they were starting to get on her nerves.

Casey needed to put an end to it before she started to resent him.

She really didn't want to resent Gareth. He had been all of her firsts. Her first boyfriend, her first kiss, her first lover, and her first love. If she finished things now, she hoped they might be able to remain friends.

And this break-up wasn't just for her. It was for Gareth too. She no longer loved him and he deserved to be free to find someone new.

That all sounded great in her head, so why was she finding it so hard to put it into words?

As she passed the village sign, she knew the long driveway to the house would appear around the next bend, and her stomach knotted with nerves.

This was an impromptu visit and Gareth didn't know she was coming.

She had arrived home late yesterday, so planned to surprise him, keen to get this over with so she could actually enjoy the rest of her summer break. Truth was, she was scared of how he was going to react to the news. He had flipped over Derby. How was he going to take being dumped?

Ignoring the urge to turn the car round, she indicated, pulling off the road into the driveway. She was here now and she wasn't a coward. Her nerves would not get the better of her.

The house was set back off from the road in a couple of acres of land. Gareth's dad, Steve, had often mentioned that he liked the seclusion, being away from any prying neighbours.

Casey wondered if Steve and Julie would be home. She had chosen to break up with Gareth at his house in the hope they would be there, because she knew he wouldn't be able to lose his temper too badly in front of his parents. She would also be able to leave when she wanted to. What she hadn't thought about was how awkward it might actually be.

In the four years they had been dating, she had got to know his parents well, liked them both and knew they approved of her. Steve Noakes was the perfect dad, laid-back and friendly, always up for a chat and a laugh, while Julie, although quieter, went out of her way to make Casey feel welcome. How were they going to react when she broke up with their son?

It was a hot July day and her bare legs were sticking uncomfortably to the leather seat. She knew it wasn't just from the heat. As the house came into view she spotted that the driveway was empty, both relief and anxiety twisting in her gut.

Was Gareth out? She had presumed he would be home and it hadn't

occurred to her that she might have to wait.

If he wasn't there, she would just make her excuses and go.

Coward.

Getting out of the car, she slipped her keys in her bag, ran anxious fingers through her hair, and took a step towards the house.

The place was huge, mostly because Steve, a builder, continued to extend it. Once two separate cottages that had been knocked together, he had added to it over the years; a games room, a bigger kitchen, a conservatory, and it was probably worth a fortune now.

Casey rang the front doorbell, pushed her sunglasses up onto her head and smoothed the creases out of her denim miniskirt. The smile she had painted on her face faded to a frown when there was no answer.

Maybe the whole family were out.

She took a step back, noted the open bedroom window. Surely they hadn't gone out and left it like that. She tried the bell again, waited a little longer before giving up.

As she was toying with leaving and driving back home, wondering how cowardly it would be to break up with Gareth by text, she remembered the neighbouring house that Steve had bought, his intention to fix it up and sell it for a profit. Casey had seen it when it had first been purchased, remembered it had been in a state of disrepair and Julie had been worried it was going to be a money pit. It was a father-and-son project, with Gareth helping his dad do the place up, the idea for Gareth to make enough money to get a sizeable deposit for his own place, house, and he had mentioned in recent messages that he had been doing some work there at weekends. Perhaps he was there.

The house was only a little further along the road. She should go check and see.

Climbing back in her car, Casey pulled out of the driveway, heading further out into the country. Even though the road was empty, she indicated, turning left on to the dirt track that she knew led to the property.

Steve's van was parked outside, though there was no sign of Gareth's car. Still, they had probably come over together. She pulled up outside the front door, keen to see what work they had been doing.

Steve had bought the place at auction after the former owner had died and it had been in a sorry state at the time with cracked windows, missing bricks and weeds growing out of the gutters. Already the outside was looking better and a skip stood on part of the driveway, filled to the brim with rubble. She

wondered what they had done to the inside.

She got out of the car and knocked on the front door, curiosity getting the better of her when there was no answer, trying the door handle and assuming her guess that they were here was correct when the door eased open.

‘Gareth? Steve? Are you in here?’

She thought she heard a shuffle, stepped inside, her attention immediately drawn to the staircase that had been stripped of paint and lovingly restored to natural wood.

‘Gareth? Where are you?’

She wandered through the house, looking at the work they had done. The wall that had separated the kitchen had been knocked down and there was now an archway to the living area. It needed plastering and there was a lot of mess everywhere, but Casey could see the potential.

She looked out of the wide window across the back lawn, spotting the outbuilding that had come with the property. Was it possible that they were in there? She remembered them talking about the outbuilding when Steve had first bought the place and he had yet to decide what to do with it. Maybe he had made up his mind. The door to the building was ajar, which suggested someone was inside.

Deciding to go and investigate, she let herself out of the house and followed the stone path round to the back garden, crossing the lawn to the outbuilding and peering through the door. It was dark and musty inside, the room mostly filled with junk, and the air was ripe with a damp, unpleasant odour.

‘Gareth, are you in here? Steve?’

From her position by the door, she could see there was a separate back room, but she was reluctant to venture further inside, aware there could be spiders or, God forbid, rats.

Gareth and Steve obviously weren’t in here. Well, at least she had tried.

As she turned to leave, a noise came from further back in the building. It was faint, sounded like a groan, but someone was definitely there.

Had one of them had an accident? Did they need help?

‘Gareth? Steve?’

This time she didn’t hesitate, rushing into the outbuilding, half expecting to find Gareth’s dad on the floor having suffered either a heart attack or some kind of accident.

She spotted stairs leading down on the far wall. She hadn’t realised the

outbuilding had a basement.

‘Gareth? Steve? Are you down there?’

Another groan, this time louder and definitely from below had her running for the stairs.

A dim bulb lit her way down the stone steps, the temperature dipping. The room she found herself in housed mostly tools. There was a large chest freezer and the stone walls were covered in saws, axes, and other implements. Beyond the freezer was a door and there was a faint glow coming from underneath it. This had to be where they were.

‘Gareth? Steve?’

The groan in reply was louder, more frantic. Distressed even.

Casey eased the door open, blinked rapidly as she took in the sight in front of her.

The large wooden table and the naked woman strapped down on top of it.

For the longest moment Casey was rooted to the spot, trying to fathom what the hell was going on. Where the fuck were Gareth and Steve? Did they know this woman was down here?

Had they done this?

The woman couldn’t see Casey, a black scarf tied over her eyes, but she had heard her, and the rise and fall of her chest, her frantic struggles as she twisted against the ropes holding her down, the bruising around her neck and breasts, and the crusted blood on her thighs and belly, made Casey jolt too.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

She was all fingers and thumbs as she managed to push up the blindfold, the woman’s eyes bulging at Casey, as she tried to beg for help. Casey attempted to peel the tape back from her mouth, realised it was tightly wrapped around her head and she was going to need a knife. As she glanced frantically around, another anguished groan had her looking back into tear-stained blue eyes. The woman (was she even that? Her face was dark with bruises, dirt and mascara, but underneath all that she looked only about Casey’s age) strained against the ropes like an imprisoned animal, desperate for escape.

‘I’m going to help you. I’m going to get you out of here.’

Casey’s tongue stuck to the roof of her mouth, so dry.

The ropes were thick and tightly knotted. How the hell was she supposed to free the woman?

As she tried to figure out what the hell to do, whistling came from above,

and everything froze.

She recognised that whistle, knew it was Steve. And he was going to find her.

This wasn't a joke, this wasn't a situation Casey was going to be able to talk her way out of. He had a fucking woman tied to a fucking table in the basement of the outbuilding. When he realised what Casey had seen, he wasn't going to let her walk out of here.

The woman was already twisting her head, fresh tears filling her eyes.

'I'm so sorry. I have to go, but I'll come back.' She felt awful as she pulled the blindfold back into place, but Steve couldn't know she had been here. She tried to reassure the woman who was going frantic. 'I'm going to get help. I promise.'

Guilt, anger, terror; all the emotions quashed in Casey's gut as she backed out of the room, glancing around in panic. Steve was going to see her.

She looked at the freezer, could hear him still moving around above her.

There was no other choice. No other place to hide.

She was relieved to find it empty and quickly climbed inside, lowering the lid, her fingertips wedged in the gap, knowing she couldn't let it close completely.

She waited and she listened, to the jovial whistling and to the anguished sobbing coming from the woman she had left tied to the table, as she tried to ignore the biting temperature. It had all happened so fast and she was still struggling to process it all. By the time footsteps sounded on the stairs, she was shaking uncontrollably both with cold and with fear, and she was terrified Steve would hear, that he would see the freezer lid ajar.

What if he realised? What if he trapped her inside?

She saw him as he reached the bottom of the steps, watched him disappear inside the room, then heard a muffled scream of terror. Inside the freezer, Casey squeezed her eyes shut, choked down on her own scream, knew she had to make her escape.

Carefully, she eased the lid open, heart racing, expecting Steve to step back into the room and catch her.

She was wracked with guilt at the thought of leaving the woman, but knew that she had no choice. If she didn't escape and raise the alarm, the woman would die.

They both would die.

Out of the freezer, tiptoeing towards the stairs, one eye on the door,

terrified Steve would see her. He had his back to her and she caught the glint of a knife.

She wanted to be sick. Instead she ran.

Up the stairs, through to the front of the outbuilding, out of the door, round the side of the house. She fumbled with her keys, dropped them, snatching them back up, climbing in her Beetle and starting the car, certain that she heard Steve's voice as she gunned the engine, flying down the driveway at breakneck speed. Glancing in the rear-view mirror, she saw the reflection was empty. He wasn't behind her. It had been her imagination.

A bump brought her attention back to the road, but it was too late and the car was going too fast. She had already strayed off the driveway, had less than a second's warning before the Beetle smashed into a tree. Casey was flung hard against her seat belt, her head jolting forward.

Metal groaned and the engine fizzed. Angry tears fell as she drew a breath, released her seat belt with shaking hands.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

She should have been paying attention.

There was no time. She had to go, she had to get out of here before he caught her.

Grabbing her bag she left the car, bolting to the end of the driveway and stumbling into the road. She had to get help, had to call the police. The woman's life depended on it.

She crossed into the safety of the field, ducked down against the hedge and retrieved her phone from her bag, struggled to dial 999 as her hands were shaking so much.

'Emergency. Which service?'

'Police.'

Her voice sounded alien to her and she was still shaking all over.

Her call was connected and she heard the calm voice of the police handler, her own voice breaking as she answered.

'There's a girl. You have to help her before he kills her.'

The next half an hour passed in a blur. Casey had been in shock by the time the emergency vehicles arrived, and the paramedics had checked her over in the back of the ambulance, while the first police officers on the scene, a woman of around her mum's age and her male colleague, asked questions.

Casey tried to answer as best as she could, telling the woman, Thompson she thought she had said her name was, about the outbuilding and the girl in the basement. She saw her exchange a nod with her partner, before he headed over to the entrance of the driveway, scoping out the property as a second patrol car pulled up, this one with two younger officers spilling out.

The passenger joined the male officer, while the driver strode towards the ambulance. Thompson intercepted him and Casey tried to listen to what she was saying, though was prevented from doing so when the paramedic stepped into her line of vision.

'You've got whiplash and you're still in shock,' the woman told her. 'You're probably going to ache a bit later, have a stiff neck and shoulder from where you jerked against the seat belt. I strongly recommend you go see your doctor tomorrow, get checked over.'

'I'm fine, honestly. Shocked yes, but I didn't hurt myself.'

'That's the adrenaline. When it wears off, the pain will kick in.'

Thompson rejoined them, waiting patiently until the paramedic had finished talking.

'This is PC Murphy, he is going to take you back to the station,' she told Casey, as the younger officer returned from his car.

Casey's eyes flicked in his direction and he gave her a brief nod.

'What about the woman? You have to help her.'

‘What’s your name, love?’

‘Casey. Casey Fallon.’

‘Okay, Casey. We’re going to investigate, but we really need you to go back to the station with PC Murphy. The best thing you can do for us right now is to tell him everything that happened.’

‘He was hurting her. You need to go now.’

Thompson’s lips were in a tight line as she twisted them into something Casey thought was supposed to be a smile. Ignoring the comment, she gave Murphy a nod before heading over to join her colleagues.

‘Okay, Miss Fallon. I’m going to need to breathalyse you.’

Casey had been watching Thompson as the woman approached her colleagues, all sharp features and cropped blonde hair, one hand on her walkie-talkie, the other hovering over her baton. She now tore her eyes away and looked at Murphy, seeing him properly for the first time and surprised by how young he was. He probably wasn’t that much older than her, with dark hair, cropped short under his hat, and clean-shaven.

‘What?’

‘I said I need to breathalyse you.’

‘You called me Miss Fallon.’

‘I did.’

‘It’s Casey. You can call me Casey.’

His lips curved into the hint of a smile. ‘Okay, Casey. Have you ever been breathalysed before?’

‘No.’ And she wasn’t interested in taking the test. She was getting frustrated and simply wanted to know what the hell was going on.

He held up the device so she could see it. ‘It’s really simple. I just need you to blow into this tube here. Can you do that for me?’

‘Why do I need to be breathalysed? There’s a woman being held prisoner in that house and he is hurting her, yet all you’re worried about is whether I’ve had a drink? It’s the middle of the bloody day. Of course I haven’t been drinking.’

She was getting high-pitched, but couldn’t help herself. This was ridiculous. Why weren’t they storming the house and trying to stop Steve? The sound of the woman’s muffled, panicked screams were still echoing in Casey’s head, playing on a constant loop. She wanted, needed it to stop.

‘Look, it’s mandatory, okay. You’ve crashed your car, so I need to do the test, but no, I don’t think you’ve been drinking. So we will get it done

quickly, then I will take you back to the station and you can tell me exactly what happened.'

'But the woman—'

'My colleagues are now going to investigate. They will do everything possible to ensure she is safe, I promise you. There's nothing you can do to help them other than talk to me and tell me everything you know, so come on, what do you say? Let's get the test done quickly and get back to the station.'

Casey sniffed. Given how young he was, he was being incredibly patient with her. She guessed he had to be in his line of work. He was also right. Frustrating as it was, she had to let the police do their job. She couldn't interfere.

She took the test, knew, as she suspected he did too, that it was going to be negative, and once the result was confirmed, she let him lead her over to the patrol car, accompanied him back to the station.

'Do you want a drink?' he asked her, once they were in what she assumed was one of the interview rooms. 'The coffee isn't great, but the tea is okay.'

All Casey wanted was to get on answering his questions. She was desperate for news on the woman, needed to know she was safe and that Murphy's colleagues had found her in time. The guilt of leaving her in the basement weighed heavily. Even though there was no way Casey could have freed her in time, she had left her behind, and she hadn't missed the desperate, pleading look the woman had given her when she realised Casey was fleeing, just as she hadn't been able to drown out the awful sounds coming from the room before she had made her escape. If the woman died, she would never forgive herself.

She wanted, needed to help Murphy, but her mouth was so dry. 'Could I just have some water, please?'

'Sure thing.'

When he returned to the room, she gulped down the drink, put the empty paper cup down on the table, noted her hands were shaking, and buried them in her lap. She looked up and met his eyes. He had kind eyes, deep pools of blue that were calm, patient and sincere, and they steadied her.

'Okay, I'm ready. What else do you want to know?'



Casey lost track of how long she was in the interview room.

She went over everything with Murphy, answered all of his questions as

best she could, then there was a short wait before another more senior officer came to speak with her. He was a detective constable she recalled him saying when he introduced himself, though she couldn't remember his name. He was older than Murphy, more serious, and blunt with his questioning, and seemed impatient when she faltered.

All the time the clock was ticking and there was no update on what was happening at the house where she'd found the woman. Had Steve been arrested? Was the woman safe or had the police been too late to save her? And what about Gareth, Julie and Gareth's younger brother, Ethan? Did they know what had happened?

Was Gareth possibly involved in this?

She had asked the detective these questions when he had first come into the room and he had bluntly shut her down. She hadn't dared ask again. He went over the same questions Murphy had asked, repeated them again, but worded differently, as if he was trying to catch her out. Casey tried her best, wanting to help him, but she was tired and had a thumping headache.

Eventually he left and she was alone in the room, just waiting. Weary and frustrated, she scrubbed her hands over her face. Why wasn't anyone telling her anything?

'You okay in here?'

She parted her fingers, glanced through them at Murphy, who had poked his head in the door.

'They're going to let you go home in a bit. You'll just need to read through and sign the statement you've given.'

'Did they find her?'

'She's been taken to hospital.'

'And Steve?'

He nodded. 'Mr Noakes is in custody.'

A little of the tension eased out of Casey.

'My car.' With everything going on she had forgotten that she had crashed it, realised that the aches she had put down to sitting in the chair for so long could be the whiplash the paramedic had warned her about.

'It's with a recovery company. I'll get you their details so you can give them a call tomorrow. Do you need me to call your mum or dad to come pick you up?'

'They're away.'

'Is there anyone else I can call? Brother? Sister? A friend?'

Casey considered. She had two older brothers, but Liam worked weekends while Nick was away, and as for her friends, most of them hadn't yet passed their driving tests. 'It's okay. I can catch the bus.'

Murphy studied her for a moment, nodded. 'Wait here. I'll be back in a bit.'



Forty minutes later they were in his patrol car on their way out to Framingham Earl, Murphy having cleared it with his boss to give Casey a ride home.

She had been surprised to see it was almost dusk, realising that she had been at the police station all afternoon and into the evening. It was a warm night and the car windows were down, the gentle breeze a welcome relief after having been cooped up in the interview room for so long. Casey was exhausted and, despite lacking an appetite, her stomach growled with hunger pangs, reminding her she hadn't eaten since breakfast.

She still wasn't sure if she could stomach anything, and she planned on having a hot shower before crawling into bed. She wasn't foolish enough to think that sleep would come easily though. Knew that once she closed her eyes her mind would replay the awful scene she had witnessed in the basement of the outbuilding.

She had left the woman. Couldn't shake that look of betrayal. Even though there had been no way to free her, Casey had left. She imagined herself in the woman's position, trapped and terrified, the brief moment of relief knowing she had been found, only to have it cruelly snatched away. Despite the warmth of the evening, she shuddered.

Murphy must have noticed, because he briefly took his eyes off the road, glancing in her direction. 'You okay?'

Casey nodded, her thoughts turning to Gareth and Julie. It was late. They would know what had happened by now. Had Gareth been arrested too?

It occurred to her that her phone was in her bag, that she had been so caught up with everything that she had completely forgotten about it. She reached for it now, switching it on, shocked when it lit up in her hand, repeatedly beeping as numerous text messages came through.

Her heart sunk recognising Gareth's name, understanding that he had been trying to contact her all afternoon.

She read through the messages that ranged from worried to frantic to annoyed, telling her that his dad had been arrested, saying that he needed her

and asking where she was.

She winced at the last one.

Where the fuck are you? CALL ME NOW!

What was she supposed to say to him? She could hardly go to his side and play the sympathetic girlfriend.

Casey was aware of Murphy flicking another glance in her direction.

‘It’s Gareth. Steve’s son. My... boyfriend.’ Was he still that? Casey had never seen him to break things off with him, so yes, she guessed that technically he still was. Except she had just reported his dad for kidnapping and torturing a woman, so she guessed that kind of knocked the head on their relationship.

Did Gareth know what she had done? From the messages, she suspected not.

‘He’s sent me a dozen texts. What am I supposed to say?’

She was aware her tone was panicked, couldn’t help it. This wasn’t a situation she had ever expected to find herself dealing with.

Would anyone?

Murphy was thoughtful for a moment. ‘You said your parents are away.’

‘Horse-trekking in Peru.’ She chided herself at his slightly raised eyebrow. John and Cecelia Fallon weren’t package-holidays-to-Benidorm type of people, but it was a stupid detail he didn’t need to know. ‘They’re not back until Friday.’

‘So are you home alone?’

‘My brother, Liam, works nights. He’ll be home tomorrow.’

‘Do you have a friend or relative you can go stay with tonight?’

Most of her friends still lived at home. Casey could impose, but she didn’t like to. Her aunt, Natasha, lived alone though. Her mum’s younger sister was only eight years older than Casey and different to her mum in every possible way. While Cecelia was a free-spirited hippy at heart, Natasha was studious, elegant and grounded. Casey was close to her, but it still felt like an imposition.

‘I guess my aunt, maybe.’ She frowned.

‘Okay, why don’t you give her a call?’

‘What about Gareth though? What should I say to him?’

‘Honestly, I would advise you not to say anything. Call your aunt, then switch off your phone. Stay with her for a few days if you can and try to avoid any contact with Gareth. It will be...’ He paused. ‘Less complicated.’

Less complicated.

Casey considered his words, thought they held a certain irony, as nothing about this situation was uncomplicated. Still, she nodded in agreement, part of her feeling cowardly at the relief that came with avoiding Gareth.



If Murphy thought her family home was quirky, filled with numerous mementos from her parents' travels around the globe, he didn't say, waiting downstairs for her while she gathered a few things together, just enough for an overnight stay. She figured she could always return for more stuff when Liam was back home.

She had spoken to Natasha, but her aunt didn't yet know what had happened. Casey didn't want to explain it over the phone, wasn't looking forward to rehashing everything when she arrived at Natasha's, but understood there were going to be questions. Even though everything had happened several hours ago, she still hadn't really processed it, and all of the waiting around and the myriad questions that had been fired at her had zapped her energy. She was exhausted.

After calling her aunt she had switched off her phone, though a niggling dread nagged at the back of her mind, reminding her that she couldn't avoid Gareth forever.

How was he going to react when he learnt about his dad? And how would he feel, knowing that Casey had been the one who had caught him?



She was quiet on the ride over to Natasha's and Murphy didn't probe, seeming to understand that the day's events had taken their toll. He had been good to her and she knew it had been his idea to give her a lift home, just as he had been the one to offer a solution to her dilemma with Gareth. She appreciated everything he had done for her.

Her aunt lived in a terraced house in a popular area of Norwich known as the Golden Triangle. The lights were on in the front window, warm and inviting, as Murphy pulled up outside.

He turned to face her. 'I know you're beating yourself up about everything, but don't. You did a good thing today and because of you, that woman is alive. Remember that.'

'I know.' Casey found a smile for him, though it felt tight. 'Thank you for today. I mean that.'

'I was just doing my job.'

‘I know you were, but you made things easier. You...’ She searched for the right word, but her scrambled brain couldn’t think straight. ‘Thank you,’ she repeated.

Grabbing her bag from the footwell, she climbed out of the car, aware he waited until her aunt had opened the front door and ushered her inside.

She turned to raise a hand in goodbye. He smiled and nodded, and then he was gone.

Saturday 24 July 2004 was the day Gareth Noakes's world came crashing down around him.

It had started much like any other Saturday with a couple of cups of tea and a bacon butty, while he watched a bit of *Soccer AM* with his dad and brother, then his mum, Julie, had left for the hairdressers, dropping Gareth's younger brother, Ethan, off at a friend's, while Gareth had driven to Halfords for new wiper blades. His dad, who had been unwell recently, stayed home to get some more rest.

He was heading back to Strumpshaw, a bag of half-eaten McDonald's on the seat beside him, excited about Casey finally being home from university and looking forward to seeing her for the first time in weeks, Franz Ferdinand's 'Take Me Out' playing on the radio, when he turned the bend and saw all the flashing lights blocking off the road to his house. It was the last time he would ever be able to stomach McDonald's or listen to that song.

His first thought was that one of his parents had been involved in an accident, but the stern faces of the police officers blocking the road suggested otherwise. At first they hadn't told him what was going on. Much later, when his mother had returned, with her new hair and shocked face, and they had been put into the back of a patrol car and taken to a local police station, he learnt why the police were really there.

His first reaction had been shock, his second denial and his third, anger, while the whole time his mother sat and sobbed beside him, feebly repeating his father's name like it was going to magic him up or something.

At first the questioning had been aggressive. How could Gareth be working on doing up the house with his dad and not be aware of what was going on in the outbuilding? Was he a co-conspirator or had he simply turned

a blind eye to his dad's extracurricular activities?

Eventually the accusations had turned to pity, as the interrogating officers seemed to finally take on board Gareth's protestations of innocence, accepting that Steve Noakes had been acting alone, and that his wife and son had been woefully unaware.

They weren't allowed to go home. The family house, along with the place they were fixing up, was a crime scene and, although they weren't told so much, Gareth had overheard a conversation about digging up the grounds, the police expecting to find the remains of victims.

The thought of that roiled his stomach. This was his dad they had arrested. He still couldn't believe it had happened.

Steve's half-brother, Dennis, had taken them in, tight-lipped and furious at the accusations levelled against his sibling, immediately taking charge of the situation and barking orders at everyone. While Julie had sat on the sofa and sobbed as she proclaimed her husband's innocence, and Ethan cried too, Gareth had remained quiet as he tried to absorb everything, preoccupying himself with his phone. He had hoped to go stay with Casey instead of being stuck at his uncle's, especially as her parents were away. He had sent her several messages, so why wasn't she replying?

He barely slept that first night, worried about his dad and what might happen to him, and his anxiety levels going through the roof over Casey. He needed her right now. Why was she ignoring him? Had something happened to her?

When he still hadn't heard from her the following morning, he headed over to her house, frustration growing when he found the driveway empty and no one answering the door.

That was when the first sliver of doubt crept in. Did Casey already know what had happened?



He found out the answer to that question later that same day when he returned to her house and Casey's brother, Liam, answered the door, a scowl on his face.

Gareth and Liam had never got on particularly well. Liam was very protective of his sister and thought she could do better in the boyfriend department, but although he had always been cool with Gareth, dismissive even, he had never been outright hostile, as he was now.

'You have a nerve showing your face here.'

‘What?’ Gareth was taken aback. ‘I just want to see Casey. Is she home?’

‘No, she’s not. And she doesn’t want to see you or your pervert dad ever again.’

‘What do you mean?’

It was a stupid question. He knew exactly what Liam meant. He knew, which meant Casey knew too. But how? It wasn’t public knowledge. Yes, his dad had been arrested, but he hadn’t yet been charged with anything. The only way Casey and Liam could possibly know what had happened is if the police had spoken to them. Or if one of them had been at Gareth’s house.

Dread coiled in his belly, knotting tightly. Had Casey been the one who had called the police?

‘You know exactly what I mean. Don’t play the innocent with me. I always knew there was something bloody dodgy about you. They say the apple never falls far.’

‘It was Casey who called the police.’

It wasn’t a question. Gareth tested out the words, barely daring to believe them as Liam’s dark eyes narrowed, studying him as if he was stupid.

‘Damn right she did. And you need to leave her the fuck alone or you’ll have me to deal with. You understand?’

As though to make his point, Liam took a step forward, fully blocking the doorway.

‘He didn’t do it. There’s been a huge mistake.’

‘He was caught cutting up a woman. How the hell is that a mistake?’

‘It is. My dad wouldn’t do that!’ Gareth’s head was pounding, his forehead sweating. This wasn’t happening. He couldn’t lose both his dad and his girlfriend.

Yesterday morning he had woken up and everything had been normal. A regular Saturday. How could it suddenly go so wrong? How could Casey do this to him, to his dad? Why was she trying to hurt them like this? He needed to see her, to straighten things out.

‘I need to speak with Casey. Is she in there?’

‘She’s not home.’

Gareth didn’t believe him. Although her car wasn’t on the drive, it could be in the garage. He guessed she was hiding upstairs. ‘Casey? Come out here and talk to me, please.’

‘I said she’s not here!’

‘Casey, please. I just want to talk. You’ve made a mistake.’

Desperate, Gareth charged at Liam, trying to move him out of the way, but Casey's brother grabbed hold of him. When Gareth tried to lash out, Liam's fist connected with his jaw, Gareth's teeth snapping together and a blast of white-hot pain sending him staggering backwards. He put both hands to his face in shock.

'Get off our property and stay the fuck away from my sister.'

'Please.'

'Go!'

Gareth's head was pounding, the metallic taste of blood on his lips. His world was falling apart and there wasn't a damned thing he could do about it.

He needed to speak to Casey and fix this.



The next time he approached the house, he was calmer, smarter, had taken time to think things through, knowing he couldn't go knock on the door, as Liam would send him packing again. Instead, he parked a distance away, and discreetly watched and waited.

Casey couldn't stay holed up inside forever.

He soon realised that Liam had been telling the truth, she wasn't at home, and he wracked his brains, trying to figure out where she might be. He had been texting and calling her relentlessly, but his messages were being ignored and his calls going straight to voicemail.

Her parents were away, so was she perhaps staying with a friend or relative?

He texted her best friend, Zoe O'Farrell. Annoyed when she, too, ignored his message.

She did at least answer the door to him when he showed up at her house, and although she played dumb, claimed not to know what was going on, Gareth could tell she was lying. She might fancy herself as an actress, but it was written all over her face. And the way she half sneered at him, like she couldn't wait to slam the door on him, pissed him off. He knew she had never liked him. Bitch.

'I promise you I haven't seen Casey. She's not staying here.'

Zoe's parents were both home, her hulk of a dad loitering nearby, and so Gareth didn't call her out or try to push her. It was possible that Casey could be staying with her, but her car wasn't here and he couldn't waste more time waiting to see if she appeared.

He needed to keep on looking, find out where she was hiding and when

he did, he intended on finding out what the hell she was playing at.



‘Maybe I should call him.’

‘I’m not sure that’s a good idea, Case.’ Natasha was dubious, while Liam was practically flaring his nostrils.

‘That’s definitely not a good idea. I always told you there was something wrong with him.’

‘That’s unfair,’ Casey protested. ‘You can’t blame Gareth for what his dad has done.’

It was true. Casey had heard that the police had questioned him, but not pressed any charges. He had been an innocent in all of this and, if she was honest, it was the crux of why she felt guilty.

Gareth was still her boyfriend, had been for four years. She hadn’t ended things with him, she had just severed contact.

‘I’m telling you, Casey. There’s no way he could have been working on that house and not had a clue what his dad was up to.’

Yes, Liam had been telling her a lot of things since he had shown up at Natasha’s that evening. That was her brother. Loving, loyal and protective, but also hot-headed and opinionated. He wasn’t always right though.

‘Gareth had no reason to go in the outbuilding. He had no idea what his dad was doing in there.’

She shuddered, the image of what she had found still stuck in her head.

Who was the woman? Did Steve know her? Or was she a stranger he had abducted? How long had she been held prisoner in that basement?

It didn’t escape her attention that had she not managed to hide, Steve would have found her and the whole scenario would have played out very differently.

Liam’s retelling of his encounter with Gareth stuck with her long after he had left and she had settled down into the guest bedroom in her aunt’s house.

Natasha only bought quality, a luxury her accountancy job afforded, and the mattress Casey slept on was top of the range, while the bedding was soft and comfortable. Still she had tossed and turned, her sleep, when it eventually came, restless and troubled. Casey knew it was the nightmare of what she had found, fuelled by her guilt at how she had been ignoring Gareth, that woke her. No matter how her brother tried to lay down the law, no matter what the existing problems were with Gareth, she still owed him an explanation.

Reaching for the bedside light, she plumped up the pillows, tried to make

herself comfortable as she attempted to compose a text. It was already gone 1am, but sleep was far away. If she messaged Gareth, maybe she would finally settle.

She rewrote the message five times. Just how did you tell your boyfriend that you could no longer see him because you had discovered his dad torturing a woman?

She thought back to the man she had often sat around the dinner table with, how she had gone to football matches with Steve and Gareth. The times she had been alone with Steve. She had never felt unsafe, had trusted him implicitly because he was Gareth's dad. Good old jovial Steve. How could he have this side to him? How could she have never known?

Blinking, her eyes heavy, needing sleep that wouldn't come, she read over her words.

I'm sorry I haven't been in touch. You probably know by now that I was the one who found your dad with that girl, and honestly I don't quite know how to deal with that or with us. I know I am being a coward breaking up with you by text, but I can't see you anymore with everything that is going on. I really am sorry that things have to end this way. Casey. xxx

She debated over the kisses, deleted them, and pressed send. Her text was lame, but what the hell else could she say?

Before she could put the phone down, it started vibrating in her hand, Gareth's name flashing up on the screen. Casey dropped it on the bed, watched it ring, wide-eyed.

She couldn't speak to him. Composing the text had been difficult enough. What was she supposed to say? She knew he would be so angry with her.

This was stupid. He had been her boyfriend for four years. They had gone on holiday together, she had lost her virginity to him.

Still she couldn't bring herself to answer the ringing phone.

Eventually it cut into voicemail and she snatched it up, quickly turned it off before it started ringing again or a text message came through, annoyed that she was shaking. She shoved the phone in the bedside drawer, slipped back down under the duvet, told herself to get her shit together.

As her breathing steadied, she closed her eyes, though knew she was in for another long and sleepless night.

I *was the one who found your dad with that girl.
I can't see you anymore with everything that is going on.
I really am sorry that things have to end this way.*

These were the key points that stuck out as Gareth read and reread the message, trying to digest it.

It had crossed his mind that Casey could be the witness, the one who had called the police, but he hadn't really believed it, hadn't thought she was capable of betraying his family this way. And now, as well as getting his father arrested, she had dumped him. By text.

Emotions stirred, fighting for control. Anger, frustration and confusion.

How could she turn her back on him like this?

How could she do this to his family after they had welcomed her into it?

Anger took control and he wanted to hurt her, make her understand what she had done. He fired off a handful of furious texts in the heat of the moment, regretting them as the night wore on. By the time dawn was breaking, anger had worked itself into pity and regret.

He needed to see her. He needed to make her understand.

She couldn't just dump him like this. Regardless of how badly she had hurt him, it had been misguided. She hadn't meant it. She had no idea that this whole thing with his dad had come from a huge misunderstanding. She needed to realise that.

He was out and about early, trying his luck with a few more of her friends, hoping to find Casey staying with them, but she was nowhere to be found, and by lunchtime his mood had completely plummeted. He was about ready to give up when he remembered her Aunt Natasha had moved back to Norwich. Was it possible that Casey was staying with her? He knew they

were close, so it made sense. So much sense that he was now kicking himself for not thinking about Natasha sooner.

He recalled that she lived on Stafford Street, having dropped Casey off there a couple of times, but didn't have a clue which house Natasha lived in, still didn't have a plan for how to find that out when he turned into the street, pulling up on the side of the kerb.

For the first time in three days, luck was on his side, though, as he spotted Casey walking towards him, a French bulldog striding ahead of her. She hadn't seen him, seemed to be distracted by the dog and whatever she was listening to on her headphones.

Gareth drank in the sight of her, all long legs, her sleek dark hair worn in a blunt bob and falling like a curtain of raw silk as it grazed her jawline. As she neared the car, he opened the door and stepped out into her path, saw the look of panic on her face as she realised it was him. It made him angry and disappointed, hurt kicking him in the gut when she paled, taking a step back. The little dog yanked impatiently on the lead.

'Gareth.' She pulled the headphones from her ears.

He had caught her completely off guard, but that was good. This was better. Now at least she would have to listen to him.

'We need to talk.'

'That's not a good idea.' Casey glanced frantically around her, deciding the best escape route. Trapped between the car and the wall of the house, with Gareth blocking her path, she only had one option and that was back in the direction from which she had come.

'You can't just drop this on me, Casey. Now get in the car and we'll go for a drive. Sort this out.'

She looked shocked at that suggestion, staring at him as if he was a monster. 'I told you I can't see you. I'm sorry, Gareth, I have to go.'

She yanked on the dog's lead, looked frustrated when the stubborn little thing refused to move, instead planting its bum down on the pavement.

'Hector!'

When the dog ignored her, she bent down and scooped him up.

'You can't do this to me. Now I'm asking politely. Please get in the car.'

She shook her head, backing away as Hector whimpered. When she was half a dozen paces away from Gareth, she turned, started to hurry back up the street.

A switch flipped in Gareth and driven by panic, aware she was slipping

away from him, he charged after her, caught her hard by the arm, swinging her around.

Her eyes widened, both in shock and fear, warning him that he was scaring her and needed to let go. He didn't, though, instead tightening his grip. The little dog eyeballed him, dark eyes mirroring Casey's as he growled.

'Let me go.'

He heard the tremor in Casey's voice, ignored it. This was too important.

'I need you to get in the car.'

When he tried to forcefully pull her, her shock gave way to panic, and she fought against him, trying to free herself. He was bigger, stronger, but she lashed out like a wild animal and in that moment, he realised he no longer recognised his girlfriend. Still, he held on and as she screamed and kicked out at him, Hector leapt out of her arms, his lead free, charging back up the street and Gareth was dragging her towards the car, managing to wrestle the passenger door open.

He had just pushed her inside the car when a bellow came from behind.

'Get your bloody hands off her!'

Gareth glanced over his shoulder, saw the grey-haired man with the scowl on his face glaring at him from the open door of the house he was parked outside. The lazy bastard was still in his dressing gown.

'Go away. This has nothing to do with you.'

'It does when it's happening outside my house, now let her go.'

Exhaustion, frustration and anger had Gareth's temper close to snapping. He drew a breath, forced himself to calm. 'Look, she's my girlfriend, okay. We're just having a discussion, so why don't you mind your own business.'

His voice jerked on the last word as the heel of Casey's trainer caught his shin.

'Let me go!'

'Son, if you don't let that young lady out of your car, I'm going to call the police.'

The rage grew in Gareth's head.

Why was everyone making this so difficult? All he wanted to do was talk to his girlfriend. Was that such a big ask?

'Just fuck off, old man!'

He had only taken his eyes off Casey for a second and she took him by surprise when he turned back and her fist caught him in the mouth. It wasn't

a hard hit, but it was enough to make him loosen his grip, and he was unprepared when her foot kicked out again, this time catching him hard between the legs.

He yowled at the blistering pain, both hands covering his crotch as he staggered backwards and it was enough time for her to push past him, out of the car, hurtling back up the street towards, he assumed, her Aunt Natasha's house.

He had to stop her.

Pushing aside the pain, he hobbled after her.

'Casey, damn it. Stop!'

The old man had shuffled back inside his house, hopefully to mind his own business, nosey old twat. Up ahead, Casey had turned into a front garden, was scrambling to get her key in the lock of the door. Gareth sped up, managed to wedge his foot in the gap before she could slam it shut in his face.

'Go away!'

She sounded so frightened, but he had to talk with her, make her see sense and calm down.

'I just want to talk to you. I'm not going to hurt you.'

'Leave me alone!'

He put pressure on the door. She was throwing all her weight against it on the other side, but he was stronger. Suddenly that weight disappeared, the door pinging open and he fell through it, landing on the polished living-room floor.

'Casey?'

He caught a fleeting glance of her red top as she fled through the tiny galley kitchen and into the bathroom. The door slammed shut. Scrambling after her, he tried the knob, realised she had locked herself inside. In frustration he kicked at the door.

'Damn it. Casey!'

'Go away. Just leave me alone.'

Gareth placed both palms against the door, leant his head against it, willing himself to calm. This was not how he had envisioned this encounter would go.

'Look, I just want to talk to you. That is all.'

'There's nothing to say. Please just go.'

'I can't do that, Casey. Not until you hear me out.'

How was this happening? Until a couple of days ago, his life had been pretty much perfect. Now everything was unravelling. Why had she done this to him, to his family?

‘Leave me alone, Gareth. Please.’

Pulling at his hair in frustration, he sunk to the floor, back against the wall. She was so close. He couldn’t leave. He needed to find a way to get through to her. It was only lunchtime and Natasha would be at work for hours. Casey couldn’t stay locked in the bathroom all afternoon.

Eventually she would have to come out and when she did he would be waiting.



The other side of the bathroom door, Casey’s eyes remained on the door knob.

Although Gareth appeared to have given up trying to force his way into the bathroom, she could still hear him on the other side of the door, was wary of whether the lock would hold if he renewed his efforts.

She let out a shaky breath, cursed herself for not taking her phone with her when she went out. It was only supposed to be a quick ten minutes round the block, though, enough time to give Hector a chance to stretch his legs and have a pee.

Oh God, Hector!

Casey had forgotten about her aunt’s little dog. He had jumped out of her arms when Gareth had grabbed hold of her and he was still outside running around somewhere. What if he ran into the road? How would she explain that to Natasha?

She had to get him, but how?

To get to Hector she had to go through Gareth, and she couldn’t do that, feared he might try to push her into his car again, and the thought of that terrified her.

Get a grip. You were in a relationship with him for four years. You know him.

Except she didn’t know him. Not really. Four years with him and she had just found out that his dad liked to torture women.

And the texts Gareth had sent her over the course of the night, they hadn’t implied he wanted to talk. He had been angry with her, furious even, calling her a bitch, and worse, for ripping his family apart, and they had scared the shit out of her. He had always had a bit of a temper, could be unpredictable,

but he had never frightened her quite like this.

What if Gareth knew what his dad had done? They were both working on the house, so it was possible. What if he wanted to punish Casey for ratting on his dad?

He had never manhandled her before. Yes, he had a temper, but he had never tried to physically force her to do anything. Outside, though, she had been aware of how much bigger and stronger he was. She rubbed at the red marks on her arms where he had grabbed hold of her. Realised that his strength actually scared her.

Until he left or her aunt arrived home, she was trapped in this bathroom unless she could figure a way out.

She glanced at the window over the bath, knew it was too tiny for her to climb through, though could she perhaps open it and call for help?

The problem with that plan was most of the neighbours would be at work. Plus, she would only alert Gareth. Frustrated and frightened, she sunk to the floor beside the bathtub and dropped her head in her hands. There had to be another way.

It had gone quiet outside the bathroom, but Casey hadn't heard Gareth leave, so had to assume he was still there. She couldn't risk opening the door.

What the hell was he doing out there? Just standing guard?

As the minutes ticked by, her anxiety grew. He was up to something, she knew it.

When she saw the doorknob slowly turn, then heard the sound of something metal in the lock she realised he was trying to pick it.

God, no!

Casey got to her feet, glanced frantically around her, looking for some kind of weapon. She opened the cabinet, her shaking hands knocking half the contents into the sink as she tried to find something she could use.

Hearing the lock catch, she grabbed a can of deodorant, threw her weight against the door, knocking it shut as it started to open.

'Please, Gareth, just leave me alone.'

The door pushed against her and she choked down on a sob as terror clawed its way up her throat.

'Casey, I—'

Then the pressure was gone. She leant against the door, her heart thumping as it clicked shut again. Why had he stopped?

She heard voices, a new one, male and calm, then Gareth's raised. It

sounded like they were arguing, then the voices faded. Had he gone?

Too scared to find out what was going on, she remained where she was, jumping when the knob turned again and the door pushed against her.

‘Casey?’ It was a different voice to Gareth’s.

‘What do you want?’ She heard the edge of panic in her voice. Hated it.

‘Can you open the door for me?’

‘Who are you?’

‘It’s PC Murphy. We met the other day, remember?’

His tone was calm, patient. She did remember him. He was the officer who had been kind to her, he had given her a lift home. Still, though, she was scared.

‘Why are you here?’

‘We received a call.’

‘Where’s Gareth?’

‘He’s with my colleague. Can you open the door?’

‘I don’t want to see him.’

‘You don’t have to see him. Can you step away from the door? I’m going to come in.’

She nodded – which was stupid, because he couldn’t see her – doing as instructed, her legs shaking, watching as he eased it fully open and stepped into the bathroom.

‘Are you okay?’ He glanced over her and Casey guessed she probably looked rather comical, standing there clutching at a can of deodorant like it was a gun or a knife. He took the can from her, his expression darkening as his gaze was drawn to the visible marks on her arms. ‘Did he hurt you?’

‘No, he...’ She rubbed at them self-consciously, annoyed that she couldn’t stop shaking. ‘He tried to make me get in his car. I–’

‘Casey? CASEY!’

Her eyes widened as Gareth appeared in the hallway, moving towards her.

‘No!’ She caught hold of Murphy’s arm, tried to hide behind him when he stepped forward to block the doorway.

‘I just want to talk to her,’ Gareth pleaded.

Murphy’s colleague appeared, catching hold of him before he reached the bathroom.

‘Get him outside!’ Murphy snapped. He put his arm around Casey, shielding her as he turned her away, didn’t stop her when she wrapped her

arms around him, let her hold on to him.

‘It’s okay. He’s gone,’ he told her after a few moments, gently easing himself out of her grip.

‘He won’t leave me alone. He keeps texting me. Last night I told him... I said it was over, that I couldn’t see him again. His replies, they scared me. He blames me for his dad’s arrest.’

‘Have you got your phone? Can you show me the messages?’

‘It’s upstairs.’

Casey glanced towards the front of the house, fearing where Gareth was.

Murphy’s eyes narrowed in understanding. ‘Stay here a second, okay? I’m just going outside to speak with my colleague.’

She nodded, hugging her arms around herself as she watched him go. Despite the warmth of the day, she couldn’t shake the chill on her skin. She didn’t like being alone in the house with the bathroom door open.

A couple of minutes passed before she heard footsteps. Glancing up, she saw Murphy walking back through the house towards her. In his arms he carried Hector.

The dog. She had forgotten him again. Honestly, she was the worst dog-sitter ever. Natasha would kill her.

‘I take it he belongs to your aunt?’

Casey rushed forward, took Hector from him. ‘Yes, thank God. He got away when Gareth grabbed me.’ She glanced at Murphy as Hector licked her cheek. Having him in her arms, something to focus on, was already calming her. ‘How did you know?’

‘Picture on the wall in the living room. He was sniffing around just outside.’

Of course. Natasha adored Hector and had a print from his doggy-day photoshoot framed.

‘Do you want me to take him while you go get your phone?’

When Casey glanced nervously again towards the front door, Murphy shook his head. ‘He’s in the back of the car. He can’t get to you.’

‘Okay, thank you.’

She passed over the wriggling French bulldog, pleased when Murphy immediately started making a fuss of him. He obviously liked dogs. She decided she liked that about him.

From the bedroom window she glanced down to where the police car was parked. Murphy’s colleague was leaning against it, preventing her from

seeing Gareth in the back seat, but she could hear him swearing.

A ripple of fear snaked through her as she worried about what might happen when the police let him go. Telling herself not to think about that eventuality until it happened, she snatched up her phone, taking it back downstairs to where Murphy was making a fuss of Hector and, from what she could hear, having a full-blown conversation with him.

Yes, he definitely liked dogs.

She pulled up her text messages, found the ones Gareth had sent her overnight. The crude words and threats made her shudder.

Cold-hearted bitch.

Cruel, nasty, shit-stirrer.

You won't get away with this.

I will never forgive you.

She didn't want to remember what he had said, but the words were already etched in her memory.

Murphy put the dog down and she handed him the phone, saw his expression harden to a scowl as he read the messages. He nodded, passed her the phone back.

'We're going to have a chat with Gareth, take him back to where he's staying, and speak with Mrs Noakes too. Hopefully he won't bother you again, but if he does then call, okay?'

'He knows I am staying here.'

Murphy nodded at that. 'Do you have anywhere else you can go until your parents get home?'

There was her friend, Zoe, Casey guessed. As long as her parents didn't mind.

'Maybe. I will try and sort something out.' She bit into her bottom lip. 'You think he's going to come back here, don't you?'

His expression remained neutral, but the concern in his blue eyes gave him away. 'I just think it's best to be cautious, okay? Better safe than sorry.'

Casey smiled tightly and nodded. 'Better safe than sorry.'

The Steven Noakes case dominated the headlines for several weeks. Three bodies were found buried behind the property Steve Noakes had been fixing up and a further two in the woods on the family property. Noakes had pleaded ‘not guilty’, meaning Casey and his one surviving victim, Amanda Haines, were both forced to testify.

Casey had been dreading the trial, terrified of facing Steve and Gareth in court. She was an important part of the prosecution’s case though, and a lot was weighing on her evidence.

She hadn’t seen any of the Noakes family since the incident at Natasha’s. Gareth had tried to seek her out again, but with family constantly around her, he hadn’t dared approach her.

As the summer holidays came to an end she returned to university, though found it difficult to concentrate on her studies following everything that had happened. The period after Christmas was even worse, knowing that the trial was looming. Eventually she returned home on a cold March day, the time finally arriving when she had to sit down in the packed courtroom and tell everyone what she had seen.

Steve Noakes’s eyes never left her the entire time, his expression impassive. Casey tried not to look at him, but it wasn’t easy. And it was harder still to face Julie, Gareth and Ethan, who all sat in the row behind him. Julie cried the entire time while Ethan’s face was drained of colour. Meanwhile Gareth, like his father, watched her throughout and she was aware of the anger rolling off him.

She tried to focus on her parents and her brothers, all of whom were there for support. Her best friend, Zoe O’Farrell, was there too, and she recognised PC Murphy seated towards the back of the courtroom, along with some of his

colleagues, who she assumed had worked on the case. It seemed they all wanted to watch justice be served. She didn't want to let them down.

Although she had tried not to read too much press coverage, it had been difficult to avoid, and she knew the names of the victims, had shuddered when she had learnt about the torture that had been inflicted on them before Steve had killed them.

The questions weren't easy, and reliving the nightmare of that day was particularly tough. During the cross-examination it felt like she was personally under attack. She had been warned this would happen, had tried to prepare herself, but it still came as a shock. She stuck to the truth, did her best to stay calm and to the point as she answered.

Eventually the ordeal was over. Part of her was relieved, but still she was anxious as the case drew to an end and the jury retired to deliberate.



Casey wasn't there for the verdict, had no desire to ever step inside a courtroom ever again. She was at home with her family when the call came on Friday 1 April to say that Steven Henry Noakes had been found guilty on five counts of murder. Her mother hugged her, delighted at the news, announcing she would be cooking something special for dinner.

They were reacting to the news that a sadistic serial killer had been convicted of murder. While justice had been served and Steve Noakes wouldn't be able to hurt anyone else, Casey wasn't quite sure that it was something to celebrate.

She was numb throughout dinner, picking at her food, a little unsure how she was supposed to be feeling, relieved when Zoe showed up half an hour after they had finished eating to drag her to the pub. It was a Friday and, while she wasn't up for a big night out, friends and alcohol were definitely needed. With Easter fast approaching she wouldn't be returning to university for another couple of weeks.

They headed into the city, going to one of their favourite pubs, The Murderers, and while Casey found a table, tucked away in a quiet corner, her friend went to the bar for a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses.

The first glass went down quickly, but she really needed it, and while the pub began to fill, the chatter and the jukebox providing a welcome distraction, she updated Zoe on everything as they continued to top up their glasses.

They had only spoken by text since Casey's evidence and Zoe had a lot of

questions. While it helped to talk, she was relieved when they finally moved off the subject.

By the time the bottle was empty, Casey's head was buzzing comfortably and she was feeling more relaxed than she had done in weeks. Leaving Zoe at the table, she took the empty bottle to the bar to get another one. She had just paid and was turning to go back to the table, when a loud voice caught her attention.

'Well if it isn't Casey Fallon, our star witness. Hey, Finn. Look who's here.'

Her head jerked in the direction of the man who had spoken. She didn't recognise him, was momentarily panicked as she wondered how he knew who she was. Should she react or ignore him?

But then she saw he was one of a group at the bar, spotted PC Murphy at the same time he glanced up and made eye contact. Recognising her, his lips curved into a smile and he nodded, and tiny sparks of heat flittered in Casey's stomach, catching her by surprise.

She had never thought of him that way, but then she had never seen him in a non-stressful situation or out of uniform. Although he had been in court a couple of weeks ago, she hadn't had the opportunity to speak with him, and the last time they had been this close was when Gareth had her trapped in the bathroom at Natasha's house.

She remembered thinking of him as kind and caring, but, of course, he had just been doing his job. And he had nice eyes, blue eyes, and they were focused on her right now.

He looked good out of uniform. Tall and rangy, dark hair and pale skin, his T-shirt hanging off broad shoulders. In his casual clothing, she was reminded of his age, knew that he couldn't be more than two or three years older than her. If the circumstances in which they met had been different, if she had first seen him in a bar, she would have definitely sneaked a second look.

'Casey?' He stepped forward, the smile widening to reveal a crooked eye tooth. 'I didn't expect to bump into you.'

She hadn't expected to see him here either and was secretly pleased that he seemed happy to see her. 'It's been pretty intense waiting for the verdict. I needed to get out of the house, blow off some steam.'

'You were brilliant on the stand. Your evidence definitely helped convict him.'

She blushed a little at that. He genuinely seemed impressed. ‘I tried my best.’

‘Are you going to drink all of that wine yourself?’

That was from the bald guy who had first called out her name. He was older than Murphy, probably closer to her dad’s age.

‘No, I’m with my friend.’ She glanced over her shoulder in the direction of the table hidden behind the jukebox, where Zoe was waiting for her and probably wondering where she had got to. Casey needed to get back to her.

‘We should get her over. What’s her name?’

‘Zoe. But we can’t–’

‘Hey, Zoe? Casey’s friend?’ The guy had already disappeared, heading in the direction of the table.

Murphy wagged his eyebrows at her, smiling as he shook his head. ‘That’s Pete. He doesn’t know how to take no for an answer.’ He glanced at the other men in his group. ‘And this is Deano, Johnny and Chris.’

Casey studied them as hellos were exchanged. She recognised Johnny as the officer who had been with Murphy that day at Natasha’s house. The other two were older.

‘There you are. I thought you’d got lost.’

Zoe came sauntering over, empty wine glasses in her hands, with Pete behind her, her eyes flitting from Casey to Murphy, looking intrigued, then down to the bottle of wine in Casey’s hand, a crafty smile on her face. ‘I didn’t realise you were flirting.’

‘I’m not flirting!’ Casey spluttered, heat colouring her cheeks. ‘This is–’

‘Hush, I’m teasing.’ Zoe’s smile widened to a grin, as she set the glasses down on the bar so Casey could fill them. ‘I know who they are. Pete here told me. Hello, Casey’s police pals. I’m her best friend, Zoe.’

She did a little bow, her ridiculously short skirt rising, and Casey knew she would be loving this. Zoe revelled in attention. She had always been the louder of the two, the flirt, the outrageous one, the pretty girl who men gravitated towards with her skyscraper legs, perfect skin, and the throaty laugh that seemed to suck them in.

Casey didn’t mind, was happy to take a back seat as she sipped her wine and watched her friend do her thing, but still she was ridiculously pleased when Murphy sought her out, leaning back against the bar next to her, seeming to prefer her company, as he watched Zoe charm his colleagues.

‘She has a lot of confidence,’ he commented, watching her snatch

Johnny's beer bottle, stealing a swig.

Johnny didn't seem to mind, laughing out loud when Zoe then leaned forward, whispering something into his ear.

'She's a theatre student, loves being centre of attention. She wants to be an actress.' And she probably would achieve her dream. Zoe was nothing if not determined. It helped that she also had shedloads of talent and was as pretty as Beyoncé.

'And what about you? What do you want to do when you've finished uni?'

He turned slightly towards her, so he was giving her his full attention.

Was he flirting with her or just making polite conversation? She had been with Gareth since she was fifteen, had limited practice when it came to flirting with guys in pubs. Hell, Gareth hadn't even liked her going out without him, kicking off whenever she had a night out with Zoe.

Going to university had been a relief, a break from the pressure. There she had learnt to be Casey, not part of Gareth and Casey, and yes, she had flirted a little, but nothing too much because, stifled as she was, Gareth was still her boyfriend, and she wouldn't do that to him.

Now Gareth was out of the picture and she had a cute copper hitting on her. Okay, maybe not hitting on her, but he was definitely showing her some interest. She was certain it wasn't just the wine convincing her of that.

She turned so she was mirroring his pose, took another sip of her drink. 'I'm not sure yet. I'm studying media, so possibly television or radio production.' When he nodded at that, she quickly added, 'What about you? Did you always know you wanted to join the police?'

'Yeah, pretty much.'

Murphy looked like he was about to elaborate, when Deano interrupted, holding up his empty pint glass.

'I'm getting another round in. Casey, can I buy you a drink?'

'Thank you, but I still have my wine.'

'Finn? How about you? Another beer?'

'I'll take a Coke.' At Deano's screwed-up nose, Murphy elaborated. 'I'm driving.'

Finn. Casey had only known him as Murphy, hadn't even considered that he had a first name. It was a little different, but it suited him. She liked it.

'Is that Irish?'

'Sorry?'

‘Your name. Finn?’

‘Didn’t Murphy give it away?’ He was grinning again. ‘My dad is Irish. What about you? Casey and Fallon are both Gaelic names, right?’

‘I think I might be an eighth Irish, my great-granddad was from Belfast, but with a lot of other stuff thrown in too.’

‘Is that so?’

‘I know there’s some Spanish and some French on my mum’s side.’

‘That’ll count for the dark eyes.’ Which he was currently looking at intently.

It was a myth. Her mother actually had green eyes. But she didn’t tell him that.

‘There’s definitely some Norfolk in there somewhere too,’ she told him instead.

‘Yeah, I got that from the accent.’

Casey’s mouth dropped open. ‘I do not have a bloody Norfolk accent.’

His grin widened at that and she smiled back, realising he was teasing her.

Well, maybe she had a slight one, but nothing that noticeable. Not like Gareth, who was Norfolk through and through, as were Steve and Julie. Casey had always liked their accent. It seemed warm, inviting, familiar. But not anymore, not since...

Her expression must have changed because Murphy was still looking at her, but now with a slight frown on his face. ‘You okay?’

She nodded, wasn’t going to tell him what was on her mind, but he was a police officer and had been involved on the Noakes case. He would understand.

‘I can’t stop thinking about it. I know it happened last summer, but walking into that basement, seeing her... it’s as clear as if it happened five minutes ago. Does the bad stuff you see ever go away?’

He studied her, eyes narrowing slightly, and at first she wasn’t sure if he was even going to answer. He was off duty, wouldn’t want to talk about work stuff. She got that.

Eventually, though, he did speak.

‘I don’t know,’ he admitted. ‘I’ve only been on the force for a couple of years and this is the biggest case I have been involved in, so honestly, I really don’t know, Casey. I’m still trying to figure that out myself. I hope so.’

Casey nodded, neither of them saying anything for a moment as they

looked at each other and, it sounded stupid, but she felt a connection with him. Knew that he understood.

‘We did a good thing,’ he eventually continued. ‘We played a part in putting a bad person away. That will help me sleep at night.’

He was right, they had, and she was about to tell him that when Zoe interrupted, her tone excited.

‘We’re going to head down to Mercy. Johnny can get us in for free.’

Casey’s heart sunk. Getting out to the pub had been a good thing, but Zoe knew that nightclubs weren’t her thing, especially not tonight. She was happy in the pub and talking to Murphy.

‘I’m not really up for a big night out, Zoe.’

‘Oh, come on. You’ll love it once we’re in there.’

That was Zoe’s argument every time and Casey usually went along with her, each time regretting it.

‘Are you coming, Finn?’ That was from Johnny.

Murphy shook his head. ‘I’m heading home in a bit. I’m on earlies tomorrow.’

‘Lightweight.’

Zoe grabbed hold of Casey’s hand. ‘Come on, you have to come. It will be fun. Please!’

Casey really didn’t want to go, even less so now she knew Murphy wouldn’t be there.

‘I’m sorry, I’ve already had too much to drink and I’m knackered after today.’ She glanced at Johnny and his colleagues. They were coppers and friends of Murphy’s. Zoe would be safe with them. ‘You go. I’m gonna get a taxi home.’

While Zoe pouted, Murphy considered.

‘I can give you a lift.’

When both Casey and Zoe looked at him in surprise, he shrugged. ‘I have my car parked just round the corner and it makes sense if we’re both leaving.’

‘I don’t want to put you out of your way.’

‘You won’t be.’

Zoe’s expression turned sly as she watched the exchange and she shot Casey a not particularly discreet wink. ‘I guess if you really don’t fancy coming clubbing then you should take Finn here up on his offer of a lift.’

Casey blushed furiously, glad the lighting was dim in the pub. ‘Well... as long as you don’t mind.’

‘I don’t.’

‘Then thank you.’



They actually ended up staying for another hour after the others left, finishing up their drinks (well, mostly Casey finishing up the wine. Finn, had long drained his glass of Coke), and chatting, about the case, but also learning more about each other.

He was easy to talk to, asking her questions and seeming genuinely interested in what she had to say, and Casey was comfortable with him, was reminded of the kindness he had shown her when her world had unravelled.

When he eventually looked at his watch, told her they needed to go, he seemed reluctant.

As they walked towards where his car was parked, Casey stumbled on the cobbles (too much wine) and he caught her, his arm staying around her for the remainder of the way.

She liked how it felt, remembered briefly how he had held her in the bathroom on Stafford Street. He made her feel safe, and something else.

It was more than she had felt with Gareth. She had met him in a pub when she was too young to be in there, attracted by the fact he was older and seemed a little bit more dangerous than the boys her own age. That excitement had died quickly, though, and they had ended up staying together out of habit. This was different. This was something new.

And when Finn removed his arm as they reached his car, she missed it.

She wanted him to touch her again, was already hating that the night was almost over and he would soon be gone, but at the same time she was anticipating, knowing that the time had yet to come when they would say goodnight. Would he ask to see her again? Would he kiss her?

These were the questions scrambling her drink-addled brain as they neared her family home.

She had only ever kissed Gareth. What would it be like to kiss someone else?

The alcohol was hazing her brain, relaxing her, but also confusing her thought pattern. Part of her wondered if she was too drunk for this, the other part couldn’t wait to lock lips with him.

Finn had done most of the talking, Casey growing quieter as she realised she was slurring her words. She was drunk enough that she couldn’t help it, but still sober enough to be embarrassed.

As the car pulled to a halt outside her house, Finn killed the engine, turning to face her.

This was it, he was going to kiss her, and she really wanted him to.

‘Do you want me to help you to the front door? You’ve had quite a bit to drink.’

‘I can manage.’

Casey looked at him expectantly, waiting for him to lean in.

He hesitated. ‘Okay then. Well, it was nice to see you again. Goodnight.’

‘Yeah, goodnight.’

There was a pause as they both looked at each other. When he didn’t make a move, Casey thought *fuck it* and plunged forward, locking her lips against his.

For a moment he didn’t react, though when she didn’t back off, his mouth finally yielded and he started kissing her back, his fingers snaking through her hair as he cupped her face in his hands. He was so different to Gareth, gentle at first, but then she felt the heat behind the kiss as it became more intense, and she actually moaned against his mouth.

That was the moment when he broke away, almost jumping back in his seat, eyes wide, appearing horrified at what had just happened.

‘We can’t do this.’

‘What?’ Casey didn’t understand, was still reeling from the kiss, could feel where his lips had bruised against hers. ‘Why not?’

‘I’m a police officer. I worked on your case.’

‘But it’s over.’

‘I’m not sure my bosses would buy that excuse.’ He looked at the dashboard, seeming uncomfortable, and she sensed there was more.

‘Is it just the case?’

Despite her mentally willing him to, he refused to look up.

‘I have a girlfriend.’

Fuck. She hadn’t seen that coming and for a moment she wasn’t sure how to react. Why hadn’t he told her this earlier? He had led her on.

‘You were flirting with me.’

‘I was being friendly. I’m sorry if I gave you the wrong impression.’

‘You kissed me back.’

Now he did look up at her, his blue eyes apologetic. ‘And I shouldn’t have done. I’m sorry.’

He was sorry? Casey was mortified. She saw pity in his eyes, and regret,

and wished to hell she had never bumped into him tonight.

‘I have to go.’

She pushed open the door, stumbled out onto the pavement.

Finn opened the door, started to move around the car.

‘Don’t. Stay away from me.’ When he didn’t move, she hissed at him.
‘Just go!’

She drunkenly staggered up the driveway, trying to keep her head held high, tears of embarrassment pricking at her eyes and heat burning her cheeks, aware that he was watching her. Fishing in her bag for her key, she jammed it in the lock, sticking her finger up behind her as she pushed open the door.

Fuck PC Finn Murphy. She never wanted to see him again.



In his car parked across the street, Gareth Noakes slunk down in the driver’s seat, watched the exchange, anger and bitterness making him blind with rage.

She had kissed him.

Earlier today, his father had been found guilty on five counts of murder thanks to Casey and her reaction to that was to go out drinking, no doubt celebrating, and then make out with one of the police officers who had dealt with the case.

Gareth knew who he was, had seen him in the courtroom, but he also remembered him from that day at Casey’s aunt’s house. Just what the hell was he playing at, laying down the law, then pawing at his girlfriend, sticking his tongue down her throat? They were taking the piss out of him and he wouldn’t tolerate it.

Gareth had been parked outside Casey’s house for the last couple of hours, hoping he might see her so he could find out why she had hurt him, find out why she had turned against his family. He had expected her to be inside, not out partying with the copper who had helped to put his father away.

Watching Casey disappear up the driveway, the cop getting back into his car, Gareth tightened his grip on the steering wheel, the anger building, clouding any rational thoughts.

He would deal with Casey later. Right now the cop was leaving and he wanted to know where he lived.

Gareth waited until he had started the engine and had pulled away from

the kerb before swinging his own car around, following at a safe distance. There weren't many other cars on the road, so it was easy not to lose sight of him as he tracked him across the city and out towards the suburb of Hellesdon, turning into a quiet road that led to a small block of flats.

He switched off the headlights, stayed in his car, until the cop disappeared inside, saw lights turn on a couple of minutes later in a second-floor window, then he got out, went to the small parking area and found the black Golf the cop had been driving.

Gareth retrieved his pocket knife, used it to slash all four tyres, then carved the bodywork along the driver side door.

That would do, for tonight.

Holding on to his anger he returned to his car, but instead of driving home, he headed back across the city, heading out to Stoke Holy Cross again and Casey's house.

He had taught the cop a lesson, now it was time to start his revenge campaign against his bitch of a girlfriend.

Gareth Noakes sat on the beach and stared out at the sea. It was a calm evening and unseasonably warm for the start of April; the sky clear and the moon almost full, casting a silvery sparkle over the gently rolling waves.

It hadn't been his choice to move here and he had protested bitterly when his mother and his uncle had decided to up sticks and move Gareth, Ethan and their cousins, who were now their stepbrothers, Kelvin and Rod, down to the tiny fishing hamlet of Sizewell.

They needed a fresh start Julie Noakes had said, away from the gossip and the accusations.

Gareth knew it had been tough for his mother. It had been for all of them. A lot of people found it difficult to believe that she hadn't known what her husband was up to. Had she just been stupid, they questioned, or had she known, but chosen to turn a blind eye?

After Steve was jailed, she had made the decision to divorce him, then just eighteen months later she had betrayed him further, by marrying Dennis. Steve and Dennis had always been close, but even more so since Gareth's Aunt Wendy had died. Now, with his half-brother out of the way, Dennis had twisted it to his advantage, getting his feet firmly under the table.

Of course, his mother had dressed the move up differently, saying she was concerned about Gareth, too, and it would be good for him to have a fresh start. She had told him she was worried about his obsession with Casey and felt it was getting out of hand.

He hadn't liked that. Casey was his girlfriend and she had betrayed him. It was only natural that he was upset.

No one could prove his little hate vendetta against her. He had been

careful not to let anything link back to him. The brick through her window, the scratches on her car, the graffiti calling her a slut and then when she returned to university, the hang-up calls.

Of course, the police knew he was behind it, as did his mother, but no, they couldn't prove it, any more than they could prove he was the one who had tipped them off about PC Finn Murphy's steamy kiss with her, the one that Gareth had witnessed. He didn't ever find out if there were repercussions from that, but judging from Murphy's scowl when he had left work that day and the fact he didn't have any further contact with Casey, it suggested he'd had his knuckles rapped.

It had been Dennis who had initially put the idea into Julie's head that they move down to Sizewell, telling her it would be good for them all to start over.

Dennis had stood by Steve initially, but disowned him the moment the jury returned their guilty verdict and it hadn't taken him long to convince Julie to do the same. He had effectively brainwashed her and Gareth was disgusted with how they both turned their backs on his dad.

Dennis was nothing like Steve. He was stricter, less fun (actually, scrub that, he had no sense of humour whatsoever) and played the martyr, like he was doing them a huge favour, acting like it was his responsibility, his burden to take care of them.

He had pretty much taken charge the moment Gareth's dad was arrested, when Julie had gone to pieces. Gareth didn't blame her so much. He understood that Dennis had taken advantage of her at a time when she was vulnerable, upset and not of sound mind.

Gareth had lived in the house his entire life, had been devastated at the thought of leaving.

Dennis had told them to pack what they needed, made it clear that they didn't have room to accommodate any clutter.

It had been weird being back in the house without his dad, albeit they were only there for a couple of nights, and watching Kelvin poring over everything with a morbid fascination had turned his stomach. Kelvin was a year older than Gareth and although the two of them had got on okay growing up, he was slowly turning into Dennis, liking to throw his weight around and lay down the law. He hadn't been around the house quite so much since leaving school, preferring to hang out with his friends. Now, though, he was firmly back in Gareth's life and making it clear that he wanted to be the

alpha male. Gareth much preferred his younger cousin, Rod. Although he was a few years younger, he was quieter and more respectful. With bullying Kelvin and snivelling Ethan, Rod provided the only sanity in Gareth's life.

The neighbouring property where three of the bodies had been found was off limits, as was the woods behind the house. Although the police had finished their investigations long ago, Dennis had warned all four boys that he didn't want them going near it.

While Gareth didn't appreciate being told what he could and couldn't do, he hadn't complained too much. The place now held so many bad memories.

Instead, he had sullenly watched as his life was packed up in boxes and eventually shifted to Sizewell, which he soon learnt was the most boring place on earth. Dominated by its power station, it was a dreary place with a tiny aging population and nothing to do, and Gareth's only solace was the beach, a place he often escaped to when living with his uncle became too much to bear.

He had wanted to stay in Norwich, but couldn't afford anywhere on his own. While his mother took a job with the post office, he had sought work with a local construction company. The looks and the gossiping never went away though. The case had occupied the papers for months and his father had become a household name for all the wrong reasons.

The lads he worked with never spoke about it, but equally they didn't include him. It was the same with local people. It was a small community so everyone knew who he was.

No one would stop to make conversation and it was impossible to make friends or score a date.

It was what had ultimately led him on this path, the decision had been made for him and he understood that while he was leading this life, things would never go back to normal for him.

As he watched the rise and fall of the waves, he thought back to Casey. She would have graduated university over a year ago, had her whole life ahead of her.

Did she ever spare him a thought? Did she have any understanding of what she had put him through?

She had destroyed his life, hadn't even been remorseful that she had done it. How was it fair that she got to go on living hers without having to face any consequences?

It was her fault this was going to happen. She had left him with no other

choice. He would make her suffer for everything she had put him through.

As he slowly undressed, he thought of her reaction when she discovered what he had done. He would show her. He would show all of them.

Trainers unlaced, jeans kicked off, jumper pulled over his head. He left the clothes in a pile on the beach, checked to make sure the note he had carefully worded was still tucked safely in his jeans pocket, before stepping down to the water's edge. He had thought about this carefully for weeks, plotted out every last detail. It was the anniversary of his father's conviction.

How fitting. There would be no doubt in anyone's mind as to why he had decided to follow this course of action.

The cold waves lapped over his bare feet as he stared straight ahead into the darkness.

Sucking in a deep breath, he took the first step forward.

NOW

I *t's not you, it's me.*
I just need some space.
We're on different paths right now.
We can still be friends.
Urgh!

Casey replayed her lunch date with Marcus in her head, cringing at the clichéd words that had come out of her mouth.

This wasn't the first time she had dumped someone, and truthfully, it probably wouldn't be the last, so why did she keep on repeating the same old tired excuses?

The relationship had followed her usual pattern. They had started seeing each other on a casual basis, plenty of sex, commitment-free, but then somehow they had slipped into dating and the next thing she knew, Marcus was wanting to take her on a family holiday and she could tell he was thinking about their future together.

That was the bit that always scared her silly. The meeting with the potential in-laws. It had been that way since Gareth, and now she instinctively backed away from any kind of commitment.

Marcus had been shell-shocked, so much so he had barely protested as Casey had babbled her way through her break-up speech, not giving him room to interrupt. History told her, of course, that he would make contact again when he had thought things through, try to talk her round.

She would be ready for him though, wouldn't let herself be persuaded to give things another go. Already she felt lighter, freer. What was it with the clingy blokes she seemed to attract? Surely the idea of no-strings-attached fun would appeal to most men?

Trying to push the uncomfortable encounter to the back of her mind, she finished taping up the box containing carefully bubble-wrapped plates and mugs, labelled the contents with a bold black marker pen, then got up, stretching her aching muscles. Another two boxes and the kitchen should be packed, ready for her move tomorrow.

A fresh start in a new home, a fresh start without Marcus.

Her first niggles that he was taking things more seriously than she was had come just after she first viewed the apartment. Casey had mentioned it in passing when they were out for dinner the following evening and Marcus had seemed surprised, a little put out even, that she was looking to buy somewhere without factoring him into the decision.

They had been seeing each other casually for less than six months and it freaked her out that he was actually thinking about them living together.

It wasn't going to happen. Casey liked her space. Just her and Phoebe. No arguing over what to watch on TV, no having to take someone else into account when deciding what to eat, no one else's mess cluttering up her home.

Her best friends, Zoe and Ricky, called her a commitment-phobe. Casey didn't care what it made her. She was happy with her own company, didn't relish sharing her private space with anyone else.

Up until now she had always rented, unable to afford to get on the property ladder, but a financial gift from her parents when they had a crazy idea to sell their house, buy a boat and travel the world, plus years of hard saving had finally given her the deposit needed for her own place. She was moving out of the city, but only a few miles, having bought an apartment in the Broads village of Coltishall, much to Zoe's annoyance, her friend complaining it was too far away.

It would be fine. Okay, so she would be a fifteen-minute drive away, instead of one street, but Zoe was busy with her own family anyway; a loving husband and adorable twin girls, while Coltishall was closer to the radio station where Casey had recently taken over the late show. The drive to Mundesley would now take half the time, something that was important to her when she had to travel back four nights a week, in the early hours of the morning on deserted roads.

As she worked on filling the next box, she heard the patter of feet on the wooden hall floor, knew that Phoebe was on her way through to remind her it was almost time for her evening walk. The beagle entered the kitchen with a

whine, dropping down beside where Casey was sat cross-legged on the floor, and pushing her nose into her hand when she wasn't given immediate attention.

'Okay, we'll go in a minute. Just let me finish doing this.'

Phoebe cocked her head, brown eyes doleful. As though understanding, she got up and slunk off to her bed in the corner of the kitchen, eyes never leaving Casey as she watched her finish packing the box.

Casey glanced at her watch, saw it was gone seven thirty. She hadn't realised quite how late it was and she needed to take Phoebe out before her brother arrived. Despite now living in Cornwall, Liam had insisted on driving up to Norfolk and helping her move.

Phoebe's head shot up expectantly as she got to her feet and Casey winced at the stab of guilt.

They normally went out much earlier than this and tonight's walk was going to be shorter than normal as it was.

'Go get your lead, Pheeb.'


As they walked down the old railway track footpath that ran along behind Casey's block of flats, she consoled herself that come tomorrow, Phoebe would have a whole new adventure ahead of her, with far more interesting walks to go on, plus a bigger apartment, because that's what it was called, it was too grand to be a flat, with a generous balcony to enjoy.

Her phone vibrated in her pocket and she reached for it, saw Liam's name flashing up on the screen.

'Hey you.'

'You all packed yet?'

'Almost. What time do you think you'll get here?'

There was a brief pause. 'Not for at least another hour.'

Casey's belly rumbled, reminding her she had barely eaten. Despite having lunch with Marcus, she had only picked at her food, too anxious about getting the break-up out of the way. With most of her belongings packed, she would get takeout, but should wait for her brother to arrive. 'I'm just out with Phoebe, but I'll order some food when I get back. What do you fancy?'

'Pizza's probably easiest.' There was another pause. 'Where are you walking? You're not out on the railway footpath, are you?'

'No,' Casey lied, knowing he would have a shit fit if he found out she was. 'Of course not.'

Although central to the city, the footpath was overgrown and secluded, giving the illusion of being out in the countryside. Casey walked the route often, but Liam was convinced it wasn't safe, and he had tried to lay down the law, forbidding her from walking it alone, which was ridiculous, because she was a thirty-four-year-old woman who didn't answer to her overprotective brother. So she did what anyone would do in her position and told him to butt out.

Well, actually, she had agreed, but purely to keep the peace, then continued to walk the path most days anyway. What Liam didn't know wouldn't hurt him and it wasn't worth the argument. Besides, it was the last time. Tomorrow she would be finding new routes to walk, as she explored the village she had chosen to be her new home.

Changing the subject, she checked what Liam wanted on his pizza, then, through gritted teeth, asked after Anoushka, her brother's current, much younger, girlfriend.

Casey had met her just the once, hadn't warmed to her at all. She had been invited up with Liam on several occasions, but always declined the invitation, preferring to hang out with her surfing pals.

As she listened to him apologise again that Anoushka hadn't been free to come help with the move, but that she was really looking forward to catching up soon, Casey rolled her eyes, her attention moving to Phoebe when the dog started barking and straining on her lead.

'Is that Phoebe barking? Is everything okay?'

'Yeah, fine. It's probably just a squirrel or something.'

Or not. Phoebe was pulling towards a cluster of bushes and her barking had turned to a growl.

'Look, Liam, I need to go figure out what's rattling her. I'll see you when you get here, okay?'

Ending the call, she slipped her phone back in her pocket and tried to retract Phoebe's lead. She had it fully extended while they walked along the footpath and hurried to catch the little dog up when she refused to budge.

What the hell had got her attention? Surely a squirrel or rabbit would have scarpered by now?

'Phoebe!'

As Casey approached the thicket, the growling intensified and Phoebe let out a series of warning barks. For the first time, Casey was aware she was all alone on the path, and, despite the warmth of the July evening, she could feel

the hairs on the back of her neck standing on end. She had never been nervous on the footpath before, chided herself for being stupid, but part of her wished a cyclist or another dog walker would appear.

When she spotted the jean-clad leg poking out from behind the bush, she understood what Phoebe was barking at, and she froze.

Her first thought was that it was someone hiding, waiting to attack her as she walked past, but then she realised that whoever it was wasn't moving.

Shit! Was he dead? She was fairly certain it was a he judging by the size of the filthy trainer.

Part of her wanted to grab Phoebe and head back the way they had just come, get the hell out of there, but that was irresponsible. She couldn't just leave.

What if he really was dead or badly hurt? She had to check.

Gingerly, she stepped closer, willing Phoebe to quit with the barking, her eyes not straying from the unmoving leg. As she edged round the bush she saw and smelt the rest of him. Unkempt beard, scruffy T-shirt, the discarded litre bottle of cider on the ground beside him. He appeared to be alive. Casey was sure she could detect the rise and fall of his chest, even if he was managing to sleep through Phoebe's barking fit.

Still, she took another step closer to be sure, nose wrinkling at the stench of stale cider.

When he let out a sound that was somewhere between a snore and a snort, spluttering as his head jerked forward and his eyes shot open, she took a jerky step back, almost tripping over Phoebe's lead.

'What the fuck d'you want?'

Although the words were slurred, Casey could just about make out the question.

'I was just checking you are okay.'

His eyes were a pale blue and heated with anger at having his sleep disturbed, as he sat himself up. When Phoebe let out a fresh growl, he stabbed a dirty finger in her direction, his face screwed up in a scowl.

'Nosey bitch. Leave me the hell alone an' take that fuckin' mutt with you.'

His ungrateful reaction had her hackles rising, but Casey wasn't stupid enough to antagonise him. She backed up a couple of steps, keeping an eye on him as she tightened Phoebe's lead, in case he made any sudden moves (though he was so disgustingly drunk, she doubted he could if he tried),

before turning and walking quickly away in the direction from which she had come.

They had only been out for about fifteen minutes and Phoebe's walk would be cut short, but Casey would make it up to her tomorrow.

Typical that her one ugly encounter on the railway footpath had happened on her last night. Liam would go nuts if he ever found out.

Her heartbeat didn't slow until they passed under the bridge, were back in view of the neighbouring houses and supermarket. As they made their way along the road that led to the turn-off to Casey's block of flats, a woman appeared on the path ahead of them.

For a moment Casey took no notice, still a little shaken from her encounter with the drunk, but as the woman neared, she glanced up, did a double take, the automatic smile as they went to pass not quite making it to her lips.

For the second time in five minutes, she froze to the spot.

'Julie.'

She hadn't meant to say the name aloud, had been so shocked, it had just slipped out.

Gareth's mother stared back at her.

Although it had been fifteen years since they had seen each other, it seemed more recent, yet also a lifetime ago. Julie's once dark hair was now lighter, greyer, and harsh lines cut into her mouth and eyes. Even after all this time she looked like she carried the weight of the world on her shoulders and guilt stabbed through Casey, knowing she had caused that.

Julie's husband was in jail because of her. Gareth was dead because of her.

She had never expected to run into the woman, knew she had moved away. What the hell was she doing back here? And what the fuck was she supposed to say to her?

Yes, what exactly was the etiquette when encountering the wife of the serial killer, who you had helped to put away?

When Julie simply stared at her, an impassive expression on her face, Casey's brain went into meltdown.

'How are you?' she blurted, mentally kicking herself as soon as the words left her mouth.

Why the hell had she asked such a stupid, loaded question?

'How am I?' Julie repeated, seeming equally as unsure how to react as

she mulled over the words. For a moment her face started to crumple and Casey's eyes widened, fearful she was going to have to console the woman, then her expression hardened, the lines on her face deepening.

Casey readied herself, certain she was about to get a dose of Julie's pent-up anger, but instead, the woman scowled at her, raised her chin a notch and pushed past her. Casey watched her go, rooted to the spot, but Julie never looked back.

'Holy hell.'

She sucked in a breath, annoyed that she was shaking.

On the floor beside her, Phoebe glanced up and whined her discontentment at her thoroughly shit walk.

'Okay, Pheebs, let's go home.'

Casey willed her leaden legs to walk, let the dog pull her along.

What a hell of a moment to pick to go out. As far as chance encounters went, this one had blindsided her.

Tomorrow was a fresh start, she reminded herself.

And as she returned to her flat, she really believed that.

Saturday brought with it grey skies and July showers and Casey woke up in a mood that matched the weather, brought on by a hangover and too little sleep.

Liam had arrived later than intended, held up by an accident during the last stretch of his journey, and after eating and catching up, she had stayed up until gone midnight as she finished packing and emptying the second bottle of wine they had opened while Liam had crashed and burned, snoring loudly on the sofa. When she finally climbed into bed, sleep had evaded her, her mind returning to the uncomfortable encounter with Julie Noakes. It had been gone two when she finally drifted off into a restless dream-fuelled slumber.

She woke to the sound of Liam singing loudly and badly in the shower, then heard a lot of bashing and banging coming from the living room. God help her brother, he had never been quiet. He had obviously set Phoebe off too, as she was barking excitedly.

Casey groaned, pulled the pillow over her head, wanting just another five minutes of sleep. She didn't get it though, as her mobile vibrated and a WhatsApp message pinged through.

She ignored it for a minute, before giving in to see who it was.

Zoe.

Be there in half an hour. I'm picking Ricky up then we'll do a Maccy D's breakfast run on the way as I'm guessing you've packed everything away. xxx

Almost everything. Casey had left out a box of cereal and there was some long-life milk, but the idea of McDonald's was far more appealing to her rumbling belly. She sent a message back.

This is exactly why you are my best friend. I would kill for a bacon

and egg McMuffin. Better get Liam one too. See you in a bit. xxx

She was about to put down the phone when she spotted she had a notification on Messenger. It must have come through while she was still asleep. Opening it, she saw it was from her eldest brother, Nick.

Hey, trouble. Is today move day?

Casey fired a message back.

It is. Liam's here. At least one of my brothers came back to help me. 😊

She waited a beat, grinning at the screen. Saw his next message flash through.

Ha ha. I'm sure super bro has got it covered. Are they letting you practise your jokes on your radio show?

Always the tease. She played along.

Why do you think they gave me the graveyard shift?

Watched the dots bouncing as he typed his reply.

Fair point. Seriously, though, you're doing great. I've listened to a couple of your shows online. When I come back later this year we'll celebrate.

That would be nice. Casey missed him. Nick had moved to Australia six years ago and she had only seen him a handful of times since he had gone. She told him that she missed him then set down the phone, went to get in the shower.

Liam was leant against the counter, munching his way through a bowl of the Shreddies she had left out when she entered the kitchen fifteen minutes later.

'Nice of you to put in an appearance,' he greeted her through his mouthful.

'Nice of you to fall asleep on me last night and leave me to finish packing,' Casey retorted.

'Hey, who was the loving brother who drove seven hours to help you move?'

True. Casey didn't comment on that, though, knew he would be lording it over her for the next year anyway. Instead, she eyed the bowl he was eating from, knowing Liam wasn't a huge cereal fan. 'Enjoying your breakfast?'

'It tastes like cardboard. Want a bowl?'

'No thanks. Zoe and Ricky are stopping at McDonald's.'

Liam pouted. 'Now you tell me.'

‘I’d better message them and tell her to bring one less McMuffin.’

‘Don’t. I have a big appetite.’

Casey knew he did. Watched as he stopped eating and put the bowl down in front of Phoebe.

‘Hey, I’m about to feed her.’

‘She’s worked up an appetite too. I took her out for you, by the way. Another favour to add to the list.’

‘Thank you,’ Casey told him, and meant it. She really didn’t have the time or energy to walk Phoebe this morning and it was one less thing on her to-do list. Plus she was worried about running into Julie Noakes again.

She hadn’t told Liam that she had bumped into Julie, knew he would go into overprotective big brother mode.

Nothing had happened. Julie had seemed as shocked as Casey and, while the meeting had been uncomfortable as hell, it hadn’t been confrontational.

Casey was moving. If Julie had returned to Norwich, chances were they wouldn’t run into one another again, and that was for the best. Julie Noakes had been innocent in everything that had happened, as had Casey. Neither of them had asked for this divide.

Phoebe’s barking and the intercom buzzer sounding, signalled Zoe and Ricky’s arrival, pulling Casey from her thoughts. Seconds later her two best friends were walking through the front door, Zoe with far too much energy for a Saturday morning, waving paper bags in the air, while Ricky followed, leaning on his walking stick and grumbling about the early start.

Zoe had brought her husband, Joe’s, work van and once the McMuffins were demolished, she helped Casey and Liam to load the two vehicles, while Ricky supervised.

Casey knew it frustrated him that he couldn’t help with the physical work and in truth, there wasn’t much he could do, but he had insisted on being here, wanting to be a part of her big moving day, and she would try to include him as much as possible.

By the time the estate agent called to tell Casey the keys were ready for collection, they had just about finished.



Liam, Zoe and Ricky drove ahead to Coltishall and were parked outside Kimberley House when Casey pulled up a short while later.

She studied the old Georgian building, bathed in light from the sun that had finally decided to make an appearance, still unable to believe this was her

new home. It was certainly a step up from where she had been living, and the large house sat in a couple of acres of lush parkland, not far from the river. While the city centre would no longer be on her doorstep, the quietness would be a novel experience. Fewer emergency sirens and no more drunken revellers passing beneath her window when she was trying to sleep.

She had thought carefully about her decision before leaving the city, was certain she had made the right call. Phoebe had been a big factor and it helped that the building was pet friendly. There were so few flats and apartments that were willing to accept animals these days.

The building was divided into ten units and Casey was on the top level, in part of the converted attic. It was slightly smaller than the other apartments, though still bigger than what she was used to, and didn't have a private garden like those on the ground floor, but the slightly more affordable price tag had meant it had just been, with a little bit of stretching, within her budget.

She wondered what her neighbours were like, hadn't bumped into any of them on the two occasions she had been to view the property. Over the five years she had lived in her old flat, she had got to know most of the other tenants and, while a few of them had their quirks and some of them could be grumpy, most were friendly enough, and she had appreciated the sense of community spirit. Would the people she was sharing this building with be welcoming or did they all keep to themselves?

Glancing up at the top floor and the window she knew was her bedroom, she froze, spotting a face just behind the glass staring back at her.

Someone was in her apartment.

Her mouth was dry as she blinked, took a step forward trying to get a clearer view. But whoever it was moved back into the shadows. Her eyes caught a flicker of movement, then there was nothing.

'Casey?'

She jerked her head, aware Zoe was yelling at her. Her friend stood by the van, arms hugging a large box and a frown on her pretty face.

'What?'

'I was talking to you and you were ignoring me!'

'I never heard you.'

'That's because you were in a daydream staring at your lovely new home. Now come on, keys. I want to get the kettle unpacked so we can have a coffee.'

‘I thought I saw someone.’

‘Who?’

‘In my apartment, there was a face at the window.’

Zoe’s eyes narrowed as she marched over, the box making her movements clumsy. She paused beside Casey, dumped the box down and glanced up, one hand shielding her eyes.

‘I don’t see anyone.’

‘That’s because whoever it was has gone.’

‘Or maybe you imagined it. You have the keys, right?’

‘Yes.’

‘So we’ll see if the door is unlocked when we go upstairs.’

‘And if it’s not?’

‘It’s an old building.’ Zoe wrinkled up her nose. ‘Maybe you have a resident ghost.’

She nudged Casey with her elbow before picking up her box. ‘Come on, let’s get upstairs. Coffee. I’m gasping here.’

Casey nodded, stared up at the window again. Had she imagined it?

She glanced at the two vans, where Ricky was busy telling Liam how best to unload everything, noting the scowl on her brother’s face, and worried that the pair of them would come to blows soon.

Best to get Ricky in the lift and up to her apartment, out of Liam’s way. Ignoring the tiny chill that ran down her spine, she shouted to him that they were going upstairs, then followed after Zoe.



It was late when Zoe and Ricky left, the sky a pretty canvas of mauves and oranges as the sun disappeared. While Ricky was put on coffee duty, Casey, Liam and Zoe had worked hard, unpacking boxes and finding a home for everything, erecting shelves, hanging curtains and putting her big wrought-iron bed together. Casey had treated them all to a takeaway curry when they were finished and began clearing away the dirty plates and empty containers after waving her friends off. Liam, who was staying for one more night before his drive back, had volunteered to walk Phoebe again and she was glad to have twenty minutes to herself to take in her new home.

The open-plan style of the apartment suited her and she liked having one spacious room which served as a kitchen, diner and living area. Aside from the bedroom and bathroom, which led off down a hallway, the only other closed-off space was a cupboard.

Open spaces made Casey feel safer as there were less places to hide. She knew only too well that monsters existed.

Which led her mind back to the face she had seen at her bedroom window.

The apartment had been locked and as far as she was aware, she had the only sets of keys, other than the building's owner, who didn't live on-site. It made no sense, yet she was certain she had seen someone. A quick sweep of the apartment had revealed it to be empty, but still it niggled, to the point where she had eventually admitted to Liam what she thought she had seen.

He had taken her more seriously than Zoe, but after a quick search round, she could see the doubt on his face too.

There was no way someone could have been inside. It had to have been a trick of the light or something. Either that or she was losing her mind.

Gathering up the takeaway bags, she let herself out of her apartment, careful to lock the door behind her. There was just one other resident on this floor and as she stared down the hallway past the lift at the closed front door, she wondered who occupied it.

The thought remained with her as she went downstairs to get rid of the rubbish. Although they had used the lift to bring her boxes up, Casey planned to mostly rely on the stairs, figuring it would all be good exercise. As she headed down to the ground floor, she told herself she was being stupid even considering that it could have been her new neighbour at the window. Whoever lived there wouldn't have keys to her apartment and why would they want to be in there anyway? The place had been empty.

Perhaps she should knock on the door, introduce herself to whoever lived there. Once she had a name and a face, the whole thing would seem less sinister. Plus, it would be nice to know who she was living next door to.

She glanced at her watch, saw it was gone nine o' clock. Too late really to knock and if she wanted to make a good first impression she would be better to wait until the morning.



As she was making her way back up to her apartment, was about to head up the final flight that led to the attic, a creak of the floorboards had her head jerking around.

A sandy-haired man appeared behind her, making her jump.

Initially, he looked a little startled himself, but then he smiled at her wide-eyed expression. 'Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you.'

‘You didn’t. Well, okay, maybe a little bit,’ she elaborated when his smile widened further. ‘I didn’t see you there.’

‘I know.’

He continued to stare at her, the smile not slipping and the moment passed from a pause in conversation to an uncomfortable silence, which Casey attempted to fill.

‘I guess you live here. I’m your new neighbour. I just moved in upstairs.’

He nodded at that, still didn’t speak, still kept smiling. His sandy hair was thinning on top she noticed, his light-brown eyes were too close together, and there was a dubious stain on his pale-coloured jumper.

‘I’m Casey.’

She automatically held out her hand, regretted it almost immediately.

Although she couldn’t quite place what exactly, there was something creepy about this man, and she didn’t really want to make physical contact with him. It would be rude to withdraw her hand, though, and she tried not to grimace when his soft, cool fingers wrapped around hers.

When he didn’t let go, didn’t offer his name, she prompted, ‘And you are?’

‘Rupert. Number seven.’

Casey faked a smile, yanked her hand free. ‘Well, it’s lovely to meet you, Rupert. I’m sure I’ll see you around.’

‘You will.’

She backed away a little too sharply, almost losing her footing when her heel caught the bottom step. Keeping the smile plastered on her face, she turned and hurried up the stairs, not looking back, but certain he was still watching her. As she reached the top hallway, she glanced back down, saw she was right. And when he realised she had seen him watching, he raised his hand, gave a creepy little wave.

‘Bloody weirdo,’ she muttered to herself under her breath, as she unlocked the door, bolting it again once she was inside her apartment.

She made a mental note to herself. Avoid the neighbour in number seven.

If there was ever a woman who knew how to cry wolf, it was Saffron Pollard, and she was becoming the bane of Detective Constable Finn Murphy's life.

Over the last three years, Saffron had made two allegations of sexual assault against separate boyfriends (both withdrawn after they had kissed and made up) and had the police involved when she had 'lost' her five-year-old son (having conveniently forgotten he had gone away for the weekend with her ex-husband). She had also been arrested for shoplifting, possession of drugs, had a running spat with her elderly neighbours, calling uniforms out on a frequent basis because of disputes over blocked driveways and overgrown trees, actually getting involved in a fist fight with the wife on one occasion after accusing her husband of exposing himself to her, then, just weeks later, alleging that another neighbour had broken into her house and stolen food from her fridge.

Now her latest claim was that she was being stalked by an unknown assailant, who had broken into her house and stolen her underwear, and she was fearful for her life.

Finn very much doubted it was true, given her history, but he was duty-bound to jump through the hoops, which is how he found himself in Saffron's living room on Tuesday night, along with DC Vicky Cameron, half an hour after their shift should have finished.

It was the last job of a crappy day and he wasn't in the mood for Saffron's bullshit.

'You said he was wearing a mask.' Cameron went through the show of making notes as they spoke. Her and Finn both knew the more seriously they appeared to take the woman, the quicker they would be out of there. 'Can you

describe it to us?’

‘Have you seen that film, *It*? The one with the clown?’

‘He was wearing a clown’s mask?’ Finn questioned, trying his best to keep his tone even. Sarcasm wasn’t going to help him here.

Saffron’s eyes were bug wide as she nodded. ‘It was just like that. All this red hair and he looked evil.’

‘And you’ve seen him three times?’ Cameron asked.

‘That’s right. The first time he was standing by Alfie’s playhouse in the garden, just staring at me. Then a couple of days later I saw him looking through the window. Then today he was in the house. I caught him coming out of my bedroom and he had my knickers in his hand. That’s when I ran out of the house screaming. He looked just like him in *It*.’

Did he have a red balloon? Finn wanted to ask, but refrained. Instead, he discreetly scanned the shelf of movies behind Saffron, eyes landing on the *It* DVD.

She was messing them around again, of that he was certain.

Saffron sipped at the mug of tea she had made herself. Finn and Cameron knew better than to accept a drink from her, having learnt a long while ago that hygiene wasn’t high on her list of priorities. As she placed the mug down on the coffee table, her hand shook. ‘He really scared me, Detective Murphy. What if he comes back?’

It was another forty minutes before they managed to get out of there, Finn loosening his tie as they headed down the driveway. He clicked his keys at the car, muttering to himself about how they should charge Saffron Pollard with wasting police time.

‘Windows are open,’ Cameron warned, glancing warily back at the house.

She climbed in the passenger seat of the Ford, waited until both doors were closed, then looked at Finn, and they both burst out laughing.

‘She’s getting worse, I swear she is. A clown is stalking her?’ Cameron wiped tears from her eyes. ‘I don’t know how I kept a straight face.’

‘She’s a pain in the arse. What is that, three times this month?’

‘I think she has a crush on you.’ Cameron batted her eyelashes at Finn. ‘Maybe you should have stayed the night to protect her, Detective Murphy.’

Her impression, in a simpering broad Norwich accent, was accurate enough to make him shudder. ‘Thanks for that, I won’t sleep tonight now.’

‘My money’s on alien abduction next.’

‘Or Freddy Krueger’s in her bed.’

Finn's comment brought a fresh bout of laughter. As he turned the key in the ignition, Cameron raised her eyebrows at him. 'Talking of beds. Want some company in yours tonight?'

'What's happened to Tarquin?'

'Tristan,' Cameron corrected. 'It didn't work out. So, what do you say?'

Although she shrugged as if it was no big deal, Finn knew she was peed off. She had convinced herself that this guy was the one. He didn't push to find out why things hadn't worked out. That was for Cameron to discuss with her mates and, honestly, he didn't really care. It seemed they were back to the arrangement that had suited them both for the past few years, being each other's fuck buddy between relationships.

Neither of them wanted more from each other, so it was an arrangement that had suited both of them well.

He considered the offer, figured after the day they had both had, he could blow off some steam. His eyes lingered over the tight blouse Cameron was wearing, her breasts straining against the material and he nodded.

'Okay then.'

It took just a few days for Casey to settle into a new routine. Morning walks with Phoebe along by the river, chatting with Mrs Fletcher, the occupant at number four, when she fetched the post (it hadn't escaped her attention that the woman appeared without fail regardless of the time, which suggested she kept a lookout for neighbours to talk to), then setting up her MacBook on her balcony, enjoying the warm summer weather and the peaceful surroundings of her new home, as she designed websites for her clients.

Her radio show took up four nights of her week and on Mondays and Tuesdays, she had to make dual trips to Mundesley, where she also had a part-time sales job at East Coast Radio. It wasn't her first choice of work, but she had needed an in to get a shot at the deejaying, which had for a while been her dream career, gradually earning the friendship and respect of her colleagues, and eventually being rewarded with her own late-night show.

It was hard settling into a routine when the show didn't finish until the early hours and she then had the drive home, meaning she wasn't often in bed until 2.30am, but she didn't complain. An in was an in and hopefully, given time, she could manoeuvre to an earlier slot. It was playing havoc with her sleeping pattern, though, which is why she found herself running late on Wednesday morning, much to Phoebe's annoyance.

As they returned from their walk, a car pulled ahead of them into the driveway and, recognising it, Casey sped up, a smile on her face as Ricky climbed out, balancing heavily on his walking stick. 'Surprise.'

'What are you doing here? I wasn't expecting a visit.'

'Which is why it's called a surprise.' He kissed her cheek before stepping back and giving her the once-over, nodding in approval, before reaching back

into the car and pulling out a box. 'I think this country life is suiting you. Oh, and I thought we could toast your fresh start. Just not with toast. I brought a different kind of breakfast.'

Casey glanced at the Krispy Kreme logo, salivating. All thoughts of her breakfast smoothie going out of the window. Her grin widened. 'Come on up.'



They ate on the balcony. Strong coffee and a selection of doughnuts on the table as Phoebe lay patiently on the floor, solemn brown eyes glancing up at every movement in the hope they would share. Ricky hadn't forgotten her and he had brought her a chewy bone, but she had long lost interest in that, convinced there were better treats up for grabs.

Casey knew she had him to thank for the move. Ricky had been the one who had spotted the apartment, had nagged her to go see it when she had initially been looking at houses closer to the city. She wasn't losing anything by viewing he had told her, and he had been right. She had fallen in love with the place on sight and he had been quick to allay any fears she had about moving further out, pointing out the convenience of Coltishall in proximity to the radio station, as well as how good it would be for Phoebe.

It turned out it had been a good move for both of them. She owed Ricky big time.

Her coffee mug empty, she got up to refill the kettle, loving that the accommodation layout meant that she could chat to him while he was still out on the balcony.

'How are things with Jared?' she called through, aware his attention was distracted as he peered over the wall, and guessing he was admiring the view. It was pretty spectacular and had been one of the things that had sold her on the place. From her top-floor position she could see not only the grounds of the house, but the river that ran through the village, plus the far-reaching fields.

'He's good. He says hi.'

'Things are getting serious between you two.'

'We're having fun.' Ricky was being coy, but then he always was when he was in the early stages of a new relationship. 'Looks like you have some eye candy going on downstairs,' he commented, conveniently switching the subject. 'You kept your new neighbour quiet.'

'What? Who are you talking about?'

Casey rejoined him on the balcony, realised Ricky was actually looking down at the gardens of the ground-floor apartments. She peered over the wall.

In the garden directly below, a man stood drinking coffee while watching a large shaggy dog sniffing around in some bushes. He had his back to them, so Casey couldn't make out his face, just a headful of dark, bed-ruffled hair, but she could see that, apart from a pair of jeans, that were worn low on his hips, he appeared to be naked, and that what was on show of his body was lean and toned.

'Look at that bum.'

Casey was, though she ignored the little lick of lust that skittered through her belly. She was newly single and the last thing she wanted was to form any kind of attachment to a neighbour. That was far too close to home. Instead she downplayed it. 'The bum's nice, but for all you know, he might need a paper bag for his face.'

'He doesn't. I've seen it. And it's just as fine as the rest of him.'

'You are such a man-whore.'

'Just window shopping. I want him to turn round again so you can see his pretty face.'

Ricky leaned further over the balcony and Casey grabbed at his arm. 'Stop it, he's going to see you.'

Ignoring her, he put his fingers in his mouth and wolf-whistled loudly.

Before Casey could react, the man started to turn and, mortified, she quickly stepped back before he spotted her.

'Ricky!' she hissed. 'Stop it.'

Her request fell on deaf ears. Ricky, who had no shame whatsoever, was still peering over the wall then bursting into laughter as he lifted his hand in a wave.

He glanced back at Casey, a wide grin on his face. 'He just smiled and raised his coffee cup at me. I think I've pulled for you.'

'You are so embarrassing.'

'Well actually, he didn't see you, so maybe I pulled for myself.'

Casey shook her head, went back inside to pour the drinks. 'He's all yours. I am giving men a break for a while.'

'Marcus has really put you off, huh?' Ricky asked, this time grabbing his walking stick and following.

'He was just so clingy, wanting me to go on holiday with him, meet his

family.'

'You had been seeing each other for nearly six months. That's usually how things progress.'

'It was too much, too soon.' Casey reached into the fridge for the milk. 'He was suffocating me.'

She could feel the weight of Ricky's stare and it cranked her irritation levels up a notch. They both knew the real reason why she would never commit, why the second any relationship started to get serious, she ran for the hills.

'Not every family has a psycho, Casey.'

She was well aware of that, but still.

Besides, what did Ricky really know? He had never known Gareth, hadn't been there in the courtroom when she had been forced to recount what had happened. It was easy for him to sit there and judge.

She put the milk away, stirred the coffee, handing him a cup.

'This has nothing to do with my past,' she lied. 'Marcus was a fling. It was never supposed to become serious.'

Ricky nodded, but she knew he knew better. Just as she knew it was shitty to lie to him.

He may not have known Gareth or Steve Noakes, but he had his own demons and knew all about hers.

They had met seven years ago in one of the counselling groups that Casey's mother had bullied her into attending. It was run by one of Cecelia's friends and was for victims of trauma and PTSD.

Casey hadn't wanted to go, had only attended to shut her mother up, quite certain she could work through things herself. She had met Ricky there on her third session, immediately warming to him after he shared the story of his dad's violent reaction when he found out his only son was gay. Ricky had long left home and although some of his physical scars had healed, he couldn't walk far without the use of his walking stick. His mental scars also ran deep and it was through helping each other face the demons of their past that a firm friendship had been built. He had been a permanent fixture in her life ever since.

'Maybe the quickest way to get over that fling then is with another fling,' Ricky commented, following her back out onto the balcony and helping himself to another doughnut.

The man had the appetite of a horse, yet never seemed to put on any

weight, despite his disabilities. Ricky always laughed and called it his nervous energy. Casey was jealous. She knew it would take a week of exercise to burn off the two doughnuts she had eaten.

‘I am not going to hook up with my neighbour. That would just be awkward. Anyway, he’s probably married or living with someone. He is all yours to perv over.’

Ricky waggled his eyebrows and grinned at her, before biting into his doughnut.



As it turned out, Ricky wasn’t the only one doing the perving. And over the next week, Casey found herself enjoying the view from her apartment most mornings, as her new downstairs neighbour – who seemed to have an aversion to shirts – was frequently outside.

She didn’t go out of her way to notice, but it was difficult to avoid him when he was down there with his dog, soaking up the early sun, while enjoying his coffee, and looking like he could give the Diet Coke man a run for his money. She had seen a front view now and, although she hadn’t yet caught a glimpse of his face, it was enough to pique her interest.

She wasn’t planning on approaching him, but what was the harm in having something pretty to look at to kickstart her day?



It was a Thursday morning when their paths finally crossed. Casey had overslept again, waking up to a restless Phoebe who was whining frantically like she was going to pee herself. With no time to shower or run a brush through her hair, she slipped on the rumpled T-shirt and jeans she had worn for her radio show, and went to grab her trainers, only to find one of them was missing from where she had kicked them off by the front door.

‘Damn it, Phoebe!’

There was no question that the dog had hidden it somewhere. Phoebe loved shoes, particularly Casey’s old trainers, and that should have been warning enough to put them away, but Casey had been tired and eager for her bed and she hadn’t been thinking clearly.

Phoebe sat obediently by the door, looking up with guilty eyes, her tail thumping.

She wasn’t going to lead Casey to where she had hidden the shoe and there wasn’t time to find it. Grumbling under her breath, Casey went through to her bedroom and threw open the wardrobe door, looking at her shoe rack.

She wasn't big on footwear, didn't have a shoe fetish like Zoe, and her collection consisted of one pair of heels, her knee-high winter boots, two pairs of strappy sandals and hidden at the back where they wouldn't offend her eyes, the bright-pink crocs her mother had given her a couple of years back. Casey refused to wear them, though had held on to them simply because Cecelia had bought them for her. Right now, though, they were her only option and she hurriedly slipped her bare feet into them, while cursing Phoebe under her breath, and hoping to hell that she didn't run into anyone while on the dog walk.

No such luck. Mrs Fletcher's door opened as Casey made her way along the hallway and although Casey tried to explain she was in a rush, the woman wasn't easy to shake, excited because she had listened to the radio show the previous night. Finally, Casey managed to get a word in edgeways, signalling that Phoebe needed to pee, rushing down the hallway towards the main entrance, but then the door to number one opened and the Diet Coke man she had been ogling stepped into her path.

She realised it was him immediately, despite the fact he had slipped on a T-shirt, dipping her head and hoping to slide past him undetected, not needing another hold-up.

'Casey?'

Something familiar in that surprised tone caught her off guard and she ground to a halt, much to Phoebe's annoyance, everything inside her heating up.

It wasn't him. She was imagining it. Her shoulders tensed and slowly she turned to face him, hoping to hell that she was wrong, but knowing that she wasn't.

Finn bloody Murphy.

Her first thought was, could she pretend she didn't recognise him? Though she knew her shocked expression gave her away. The second was, what the fuck do I look like?

As if reading her thoughts, Finn's gaze did a full sweep of her, from her burning cheeks down to the shocking crocs and back up again.

She had crushed on PC Finn Murphy so badly, had damned him to hell after that hot kiss they had shared was followed by his blistering rejection and he had broken her teenage heart. Of course she had moved on and it was all now in the past, but standing here in front of him, the years rolled back and she was nineteen again.

‘Casey Fallon. I can’t believe it’s you. I didn’t realise you lived here.’
No, I can’t believe it either, Finn. Seriously, I really can’t bloody believe it.

Phoebe whined and tugged on her lead. Casey held tight, her feet unwilling to move.

‘Finn, I... What are you doing here?’

Stupid. Stupid. He’s here because he lives here. He just stepped out of his door.

For a deejay who was supposed to have all the words, she was really struggling to find the right ones.

To make matters worse, he didn’t just live here, he was the guy she had been perving over for the last week. Her favourite morning fix. If only he had turned, if only he had looked up, things would have played out a hell of a lot differently to this.

Phoebe chose that moment to give a warning yelp, followed by another whine, jerking Casey to her senses. She was about to use the dog to make her getaway when Phoebe squatted and decided to relieve herself all over the hallway floor.

Ground, swallow me up now.

Casey cringed, while Finn grinned, seeming to find the whole situation highly amusing.

She was certain he was struggling not to laugh, those dimples of his that had been appealing fifteen years ago, now cutting into a face that had become harder and more rugged, his features more defined. He had definitely improved with age.

‘Wait here. I’ll go get something to clear this up with.’

Like I’m gonna go anywhere.

Mortified, Casey remained rooted to the spot where she was, quite certain things couldn’t possibly get any worse.

She was wrong.

Moments after Finn returned with a wad of paper towels, a bucket and some disinfectant, a perky-looking blonde sauntered into the hallway, wearing a shirt that barely covered her arse. Finn’s shirt, Casey presumed.

She was pretty, petite and sleep-tousled, and it was obvious where she had spent the night.

Wife? Girlfriend?

‘Oh, now I get what you meant when you said accident.’ The woman

laughed to Finn, as if it was some private little joke they had just shared.

Casey wished she was anywhere but here.

‘I can take care of this.’ She tried to take the paper towels from Finn.

‘It’s fine. I’ve got it.’

‘While you two bicker, I’m gonna go get dressed.’ The blonde gave Casey the once-over, a sly smile on her face, flicked a quick glance at Finn, then turning on her heel, she disappeared back inside the apartment.

‘Give me the towels.’

‘I said I’ve got it.’

‘No really, she’s my dog. My mess.’

They went to drop to the floor at the same time, bashing heads.

‘Ouch!’

‘Shit, sorry.’ Finn had his hand on her arm now, his warm touch sending little sparks through Casey’s already burning skin. ‘Are you okay?’ He was looking at her so intently, so seemingly worried he had hurt her that she had no choice but to meet his gaze, notice that his eyes were more vividly blue than she remembered; the lines around them adding character.

For a while after his rejection, she had fantasised about bumping into him again. Of course, it hadn’t been in this kind of scenario. Oh no, in her fantasy she was slim and glamorous, witty and successful, and he had realised what a huge mistake he had made.

Having her dog pee a river outside his apartment, while she was wearing last night’s knickers and her mother’s pink crocs was never on the agenda. And to make matters worse, he was her freaking neighbour. She couldn’t even walk away from this mortifying situation with her head held high, knowing that she would never see him again.

‘I’m fine.’ She forced the words out through gritted teeth, trying her best to make them sound pleasant. ‘And honestly, go back inside. I can knock when I’m done.’

‘It will be quicker with two of us.’

He was right, of course, but that didn’t make the situation any easier and Casey struggled through uncomfortable small talk while they scrubbed at the floor, shooting occasional daggers at Phoebe who had slumped down beside them and was looking far too put out for a dog that had just caused such chaos.

Okay, technically none of this was Phoebe’s fault. She had tried to alert Casey that her bladder was bursting and if Casey hadn’t overslept they

wouldn't be in this situation. That didn't make any of this any easier though.

'When did you move in?'

'A couple of weeks back.'

'Which apartment are you in?'

Jesus. Is this an interrogation? 'Number nine.'

'Up on the top floor.' Finn paused scrubbing, glanced at her again, grin back on his face, immediately getting Casey's back up.

'What? Why are you grinning at me like that?'

'No reason. I was just curious.'

And then it dawned on Casey. Ricky wolf-whistling, Finn glancing up. He wasn't stupid and would have put two and two together.

'How long have you lived here?' she countered, keen to move on to safer ground.

'A couple of years.'

'Are you still in the police?' This was better. She had found her tongue, was leading the questions now.

'I am.'

'Your wife is pretty.' *Dangerous ground, Casey.*

'I'm not married.'

'You're not?' Casey's gaze slid to the apartment door.

Finn stopped scrubbing again and she was aware of him looking at her. 'Oh, you mean Vicky? Yeah, she's my umm...' He trailed off.

'Well, she's pretty.'

It had been a stupid comment fuelled by nosiness, but now Casey knew and she didn't appreciate the little ball of jealousy that had knotted itself in her gut. Finn wasn't hers. He had never been hers. And they hadn't seen each other in years. Of course, a man who looked like him was going to have a girlfriend. And a pretty one at that.

And even if he didn't have a girlfriend, Casey wasn't interested. She had just broken things off with Marcus and the last thing she needed was to become involved with someone else.

She managed to keep the rest of their conversation to small talk and safer topics, thanking him for helping her clear up Phoebe's pee, and eager to get away.

'We should catch up sometime.' Finn lingered by his front door and his suggestion conjured up thoughts in Casey's mind of wine and nibbles with him and his pretty blonde girlfriend.

No thanks.

‘That would be great,’ she lied, keen to get away. ‘Well, best not keep this one waiting.’

With as much dignity as she could muster, Casey led Phoebe out of the main door and down the steps at the front of the house, fairly certain Finn was still watching her and quite sure she would never suffer a more embarrassing encounter in her life.

She took Phoebe for a longer walk than originally intended, reluctant to return home in case she bumped into him again. Of course, she couldn’t stay out forever though, and glanced warily around when eventually sneaking back inside.

To her relief Finn’s front door remained closed.

Back upstairs and she fished for her keys in the pocket of her jeans, keen to get showered and put the kettle on.

As soon as she opened the apartment door and stepped inside, she sensed something was wrong.

It wasn’t anything immediately obvious, just a feeling she had, one that had the hairs raising on the back of her neck, and over the years, Casey had learned to trust her gut instinct. The fact that Phoebe seemed on edge, too, only added to her fears.

She removed the dog’s lead, watched as she started sniffing around, following her through into the bedroom. Casey’s bed was still unmade, the strappy pyjama top and shorts she had worn bunched up in the middle of the duvet. Normally, she wouldn’t leave it in a mess, but getting Phoebe out had been urgent. Still, nothing seemed wrong, though there was a faint odour in the air that was off, and Phoebe was definitely unsettled.

Then she spotted the slightly ajar drawer in her dresser, her favourite perfume was twisted so the back of the bottle was facing her, and the two framed pictures that sat on the dresser, one of her family, the other taken on a day out with Zoe and Ricky, were tilted at a slightly different angle.

Had someone been in her apartment?

They were such tiny things, but she was sure she wasn’t imagining them, and they were enough to have her dropping to her knees to look under the bed, checking in the wardrobe and cupboard and any other conceivable place an intruder could be hiding.

The windows were closed, all of them locked, and there was no damage to the front door. She was up on the top floor, which would make it difficult

for a burglar to break in.

Besides. Nothing had been taken.

Throughout the day, she tried to reason with herself, tried to convince herself she was mistaken. Paranoia had played a big part in her life, which was part of the reason why her mother had made her go to therapy.

After everything that had happened with Steve Noakes, it was understandable that she was automatically distrustful of certain situations and people. Sometimes she had to talk herself down from overreacting.

This time she was certain she wasn't being paranoid and so when she left to go to work that night, she tied a piece of cotton around the inside of the doorknob. She held on to the loose end as she let herself out of the apartment, bending down and pulling it taut as she taped it to the wall. There was just enough slack that she would be able to open the door a fraction and see if it had been tampered with when she returned home.

It was a temporary fix until she could get a security camera and the lock changed, which perhaps really was an overreaction, but Casey knew better than most that when it came to self-protection, it was better to be safe than sorry.

I was thirteen when I first saw a dead body. It was during a family holiday to Wales. My brother and I were out walking down by the river and we heard a woman crying out for help further down the track.

When we got closer, we realised she was in the fast-moving water, clinging to a branch that was jutting out from the bank, while a large white poodle sat obediently waiting for her, curly fur damp and covered in mud, and pink tongue hanging out.

‘Please help me.’

Her tone was pleading, her expression desperate, as her head momentarily dipped under the water. She emerged coughing and spluttering, clinging on to the branch.

‘We have to do something.’ My brother was panicked, but rooted to the spot. He shoved me hard in the back, urging me to be the one to step forward and help.

The muddy bank was slippery and I dropped to my knees. From this closer position I could see that the woman’s teeth were chattering, either from the temperature of the water or in fear for her life, probably both, and that she was more a girl than a woman, maybe only a few years older than us.

‘Please. I can’t swim.’

For a moment I stared at her, saw both the hope and anguish in her wide grey-blue eyes, understood she was terrified for her life. I was her one chance.

‘Take her hand!’

That was from my brother, barking orders from the safety of the path.

I wiped the mud on my palm onto the leg of my jeans, held my hand out

for her to grab. She was clinging on to the branch with both hands, seeming reluctant to let go.

‘Take it!’ I urged.

She stared at me, stared past me at my brother. I guess it was a big ask for her to put her life in the hands of someone so young.

‘I’m gonna go get help,’ said my brother, his brain finally engaging. ‘Stay here. Don’t leave her.’

I glanced back, saw him hotfooting it down the track in the direction of our campsite. It would take about ten minutes for him to return with assistance. I looked at the girl again, then at the weakening branch, knew she didn’t have that long.

‘Take my hand,’ I repeated. ‘It’s not going to hold.’

I might have only been thirteen, but I was stronger than she realised.

She nodded, choked down on a sob as she looked at me, understood I was trying to help her, that I was her one chance of survival, and she released her right hand, made a grab for me. We almost missed the connection, but then my fingers were curling around her cold ones, tightening my grip. She still had hold of the branch with her left hand and her arms were spread wide as the water bashed her about.

I held on tight, knew I couldn’t afford to lose my footing.

‘Give me your other hand.’

She seemed reluctant to let go, knowing that once she did, her life was fully in my hands. While she was debating, trying to pluck up the courage, the decision was made for her, as the branch snapped. She screamed, her free arm flailing in the water, yanking me forward. I managed to steady myself, my tight grip around her wrist now the only thing keeping her safe.

If I were to let go.

I don’t even remember where that thought came from, but as I locked eyes with the girl, saw the terror in them, I wondered if she could sense what I had been thinking.

‘Please.’

That one word, that plea to help her. She was trapped and completely helpless, and although I didn’t understand why, I fed on knowing her fate was in my hands (literally).

A part of me craved that power, that level of control, liked seeing the terror in the girl’s eyes, knowing I could put it there or make it go away.

Seconds slipped by and I continued to hold on, but made no attempt to

pull her from the water. She dipped again, choked again, begged again, and then her eyes met mine again, and in that moment I think she knew. Perhaps even realised before I did.

‘I can’t swim.’

Those repeated words were the last ones she spoke and I remember her scream as I released her hand, watched her thrash in the water until it finally consumed her.

The large poodle sat on the bank and whined, and I turned to it and smiled.

‘You did that. It was all your fault.’



I have only ever told one person what really happened that day.

I had found him in the basement and I could see he was torn over what to do. I had caught him off guard showing up here and in doing so I had caused him a terrible dilemma. One he didn’t know how to deal with, which is why I told him.

‘Remember that camping trip last year, the one where the woman drowned?’

He nodded, the long silver blade with a crimson edge still tightly gripped in his hand.

‘It wasn’t an accident.’

While he took in that information, my eyes slid to the table and the woman on top of it, her body painted in the same shade of red as on the knife. She had plastic wrapped around her head covering her mouth, nose and eyes, and I had thought she was dead, but then I noticed the faint rise and fall of her chest and saw her right foot twitch, then suddenly she was jerking against her restraints, her screams smothered by the plastic.

I watched her, fascinated, could feel myself growing hard, and after a few seconds I was aware of him watching my reactions.

‘Can I touch her?’

He hesitated over that. I had caught him in a terrible situation and I had the power to destroy everything for him, but there was also an understanding. This is not how he had expected me to react.

I took a step towards the table and, aware that I had to earn his trust, I turned my back on him.

I was taking a chance, knew that he had the perfect opportunity to attack me, to slit my throat.

The woman was hysterical, had no idea I was there, and she flinched on the table when I touched her thigh, trying to squirm away. I nipped her flesh between my fingers, marvelling at her reactions.

When I turned, he was stood behind me watching, had made no attempt to raise the knife.

I glanced at it, my lips curving into a smile as I raised my eyes to meet his.

‘Can I cut her?’

Lining up three songs back-to-back, Casey removed her headphones and got up from the desk, walking over to the wide window that overlooked the beach. It was a calm night, warm and sticky, the almost full moon casting streaks of silver across the sea and frothy waves gently lapping against the shore. Right now the beach was empty and peaceful, but give it another ten hours and that would change. Friday's temperature was forecast to be well into the thirties and the holidaymakers would flock.

From the old sofa in the corner of the studio, Phoebe looked up hopefully. 'Not much longer,' Casey told her, stretching her arms above her head, then rolling the knots out of her shoulders.

She had forty minutes of her show left, then after locking up she would give Phoebe a quick walk before driving home.

Part of her felt bad, making the dog sit with her in the small studio for four nights a week, especially on nights like tonight when it was hot and airless, offering little respite, but Phoebe was happier with Casey than without her and would be miserable at home alone. Plus she was company.

Casey had twisted the desk fan so it was facing the sofa and had sat a full bowl of water on the floor, trying to make the beagle as comfortable as possible. The heatwave would hopefully pass soon and things would be more bearable.

When she had first been offered the late-night show, she had been torn, wanting to celebrate, but also nervous. It wasn't her first time on-air. She had read out the traffic bulletins and also had helped cover a couple of shows for one of the afternoon deejays after he had been taken sick, but having her own show was a big responsibility. Yes, it was the graveyard shift and listening

figures weren't great, but still it was up to her to get people to tune in, to try and grow the audience, and she knew the station bosses would be watching her performance closely.

She was also a little bit uncomfortable at being in the building alone and late at night. It was an old place with creaking floorboards and dark corners, and it was creepy enough during the day. The idea of being in the back-room studio while the rest of the old house was deserted spooked her more than she cared to admit.

The station bosses were never going to let her cut her teeth on one of the prime shows, though, and if she wanted to be a deejay, she would have to suck it up. Luckily, she was okay for the first couple of nights, as the station producer had sat with her through the show to make sure she didn't cock it up. After that, she was on her own.

A couple of weeks in, she was growing used to it, though she wasn't scared to admit that she always asked Kenny Lee, the deejay she took over from, to make sure he locked the door on the way out. What she wouldn't confess to is that as soon as her first songs were playing, she quickly ran through to the front of the building to check that Kenny hadn't forgotten.

It wasn't that she didn't trust him, but he was getting on in years and she knew he could be forgetful at the best of times.

Once she knew the door was definitely locked and no one could walk in off the street, she was always a lot more relaxed.

The third song on her list hit its guitar solo and leaving the window she returned to the desk and slipped her headphones back on. On the monitor screen to her left she spotted a new email, but there wasn't time to open it before the song finished. Instead, she turned her attention to her audience, commenting on the warmth of the night and telling them it was forecast to be even hotter tomorrow, before going on to talk about how difficult it was to sleep when the weather was as oppressive as this. It led her nicely into the Martha Reeves and The Vandellas song she had scheduled to play before the advert break.

Then there would be just under half an hour left before she closed the show.

East Coast Radio went to night service at 1am, meaning Casey was responsible for shutting everything down and locking up the studio, which would open again when the early morning breakfast deejay arrived.

As 'Heatwave' kicked in, she turned her attention to the waiting email,

smiling at the unoriginal address, Cityboy2005. She opened the message.

Hi, I know it's late, but could you give me a mention? I've had my eye on this special lady for a while and she is just perfect. Next week I will show her how much she means to me.

Casey groaned and rolled her eyes. Seriously, was this late-night love lines or something? It was the only email she had received in a while though.

Was Cityboy2005 her only listener? It was a sobering thought.

Aware she was getting short on time, she quickly typed back a reply.

I can give you a quick mention. Does your lady friend have a name? And I will need yours, too, please and a location.

The reply came as the adverts were playing.

Thank you so much. Her name is Saffron. Tell her she is my special lady. She will know who she is. My name is Steve and I'm in Norwich.

Casey read the name, the familiar shudder of unease rippling through her. It was stupid. Steve was such a common name, but every time she heard it or saw it written down, it took her right back to that day in the basement.

While she was figuring out a way to relay Steve's corny message without sounding like too much of a cheeseball, another email popped up from him.

I don't suppose I could push my luck and request a song too?

Yes, that is pushing your luck. Casey had a set list of songs that the station gave her, that she was supposed to stick to.

I'm sorry. I can't do requests at this time of night. If you call or email in on Monday evening, I can take requests between 10.30 and 11pm.

She turned away from the monitor as the song she was playing finished and introduced the Bryan Adams song she had lined up next. As the intro to 'Heaven' started playing, she glanced back at the screen.

Oh, please help me out. There's a certain song and if you play it she will know exactly who I am. This is so important. Please, please, PLEASE. You would make my night.

Casey debated. She wasn't supposed to deviate from the list, but equally she didn't want to piss off a listener. As long as the song was nothing too ridiculous she could bend the rules just this once, couldn't she?

What's the song?

She waited a beat, saw another email pop up.

Maroon 5. Harder to Breathe. Wow, thank you so much. You honestly have no idea how much this means to me.

Great. He had taken her last email as confirmation she was going to play the song. She hadn't yet decided, was just trying to find out what song it was. Now she was backed into a corner.

The song was okay, though, and she could easily slot it in, maybe replacing the Celine Dion one she was supposed to play. Casey hated Celine Dion's music with a passion, so in a way Steve would be doing her a favour.

She set the song up, then read over his first email again, deciding what she would say. As the Bryan Adams song drew to a close, she leaned into the microphone.

'It seems that the songs I've been playing tonight are bringing out the romantics in some of you. Steve in Norwich has just emailed in for a mention and to tell me he has his eye on a certain special lady called Saffron. I hope she is listening right now and knows who she is. He wants me to tell you, Saffron, that you're the perfect girl for him and that next week he will show you exactly how much you mean to him. So, to Steve and Saffron, this next song is for you.'

At least the guy has picked a decent song. Casey hadn't heard this one in ages.

As she leant back in her chair and yawned, another email popped up from Steve.

She read the opening line, *Thank you so much*, and grinned. At least someone was happy.

She rubbed at her tired eyes, soothed a whining Phoebe, who was getting restless, before she opened the full message.

Thank you so much. I can't wait to show Saffron how important she is to me. Next week, I am going to surprise the hell out of her and whisk her off to somewhere very special.

Casey smiled. Should she get a hat?

She considered making the joke, but didn't know Steve, didn't want him getting overfamiliar. Instead, she replied, keeping it simple.

I hope it all goes well for you.

Steve's reply was almost instant, sparking the faintest bristle of irritation.

It will. She is going to be so surprised she will find it hard to breathe.

'And the winner of worst joke of the night.' Casey rolled her eyes as she muttered the words.

That last comment didn't warrant a reply and in another ten minutes she could lock up for the night. Her bed was waiting and, after four late nights, she couldn't wait to climb into it.

As the Maroon 5 song finished, she said farewell to her listeners and set up the last two tracks of the night. As the first one began to play, she turned

back to the monitor that was logged into her email, annoyed when she saw there was another message from Steve.

Jesus, did he not get the hint? She hadn't replied to his last email. The conversation was over.

She was tempted to just shut down her computer and ignore it, but the professional in her couldn't leave it. She clicked open the message, figuring Steve was one of those people who didn't know how to end a conversation. Either that or he was just lonely and wanted someone to talk to.

I have been thinking about what you said earlier about it being too hot to sleep tonight, and now I am curious. Are you going to sleep naked or will you wear that strappy little black vest top?

Casey read and reread the message, at first shocked and angry, then she froze.

She glanced at the window and unease rippled through her. It was dark outside, but the light was on in the studio. Was he outside? Had he been watching her?

Her mouth was dry, her hands shaking, and her immediate thought was the front door.

She had locked it, she knew she had.

If he was outside, there was no way he could get in.

She crossed to the studio door, flicked off the light switch and cautiously approached the window.

There was no one outside, at least as far as she could see, but still she couldn't shake the unease, and she was reluctant to turn the light back on, not wanting to feel exposed.

She drew in a few deep breaths, knew she had to pull herself together. Switching over to the night service, she gathered her things, annoyed she was scared about leaving the studio.

What if he was waiting for her?

She had parked just outside. All she needed to do was lock up the main door and get to her car.

She felt bad for Phoebe, but the dog would have to hold on. Casey would give her five minutes outside when she returned home.

'Come on, Pheeb.''

The beagle didn't need asking twice, jumping off the sofa and running straight to the door. Casey slipped her lead on and followed her out of the studio and into the hallway.

Maybe it had been a lucky guess. It's not like Steve had said a yellow or a pink vest. Black was a common colour. Most girls probably owned a black vest top.

Either that or maybe he had seen her earlier, before she had arrived for her show.

She tried to reassure herself that it was nothing sinister. Just a creep hitting on her.

The fact he was called Steve had immediately put her on edge. She was overreacting.

Still, her heart beat a little faster as she switched off the hall light, opened the front door, and stepped outside into the warm night.

Luckily, there was an outdoor light that lit up the path to her car, which sat looking lonely in the otherwise empty car park.

Casey fumbled with the keys, quickly locking the door, then marched straight ahead, her focus on her car. She clicked the locks, clambering inside after Phoebe as soon as she reached the vehicle, and her heart didn't stop racing until she was locked inside, the engine running.

She berated herself for being so shaken on the drive back to Coltishall, angry that such a stupid thing had put her on edge, making her feel weak and pathetic.

After Steve Noakes had been sent to jail, she had taken self-defence classes, wanting to gain some control back. That had been a long time ago, though, and if someone attacked her now, she wasn't sure she could properly defend herself. Maybe it was time to find another course.

By the time she arrived back home, she had talked her way round, telling herself she had completely overreacted. Still, finding a new self-defence class wasn't a bad idea, if only to bolster her confidence.

Before going inside, she let Phoebe have five minutes on the grassed area to the front of the house, staying in view of the security lights. While she didn't think there were any dangers here, she didn't want to take any unnecessary risks.

Letting the dog have one last sniff, Casey tugged on her lead. 'Come on, let's go inside now. I need my bed.'

When Phoebe played for time, apparently finding the patch of grass she was sniffing fascinating, Casey tugged again. As she started to turn, she heard the crunch of a footstep behind her, and a firm hand caught hold of her shoulder.

Dropping Phoebe's lead, she let out a scream.

Apparently Casey did remember one of the self-defence moves she had learnt, her elbow driving back into her attacker's chest. She heard a grunt, turned to knee him in the balls, but she wasn't quick enough and he caught hold of her raised leg, tipping her off balance. She grabbed hold of him as she fell, knocking the wind out of herself as she landed on her back, the man sprawling on top of her.

Her immediate reaction was one of panic and she hit out, getting a jab in before he caught hold of her wrists, wrestling them to the ground above her head.

'For fuck's sake. Casey, it's me!'

The familiar voice, then the sound of a dog barking, no, two dogs barking, had her paying attention. She paused, actually looking up at the man on top of her for the first time, her eyes widening in horror.

'Finn?'

What the actual fuck? He had jumped her. Well... okay, maybe he hadn't exactly jumped her, but he had startled her, sneaking up behind her like that and grabbing her shoulder.

Her fright gave way to anger, then quickly to embarrassment as she realised he was still lying on top of her, pinning her to the ground, his belly, groin and legs mashed against hers.

'Get the hell off me,' she grumbled, far too aware of his masculinity and the heat of his body; the fresh citrus scent and dampness curling his hair suggesting that he had recently come out of the shower. In the shadowy glow of the outdoor light, his face looked harder and she was close enough to see the stubble on his jaw and the glint of mischief in his eyes, as he stared at her, making no attempt to move.

Phoebe chose that moment to join them, barking at Finn, which seemed to finally spur him into action. Easing his grip on Casey's wrists, he lifted his weight off her.

Casey glared for a moment at the hand he offered, before grudgingly taking it, and letting him pull her to her feet.

'So do you have a habit of attacking your neighbours?' he asked.

'I didn't attack you. You crept up behind me and scared the shit out of me.'

'I called your name.'

'Well I never heard you.'

'Clearly.' Finn studied her for a moment. 'How come you're out here so late anyway?'

'I'm just home from work.' When he lifted an eyebrow she elaborated. 'I do the late show on East Coast Radio.'

'You're a deejay?'

He grinned at that, which had Casey's hackles going up. 'Yes, why? Is that funny?'

'No, not at all. I will have to tune in.'

Casey wasn't sure how she felt about that, knowing Finn might be listening to her. Of course, she was being ridiculous. She had no idea who might be listening.

Steve. She pushed thoughts of her earlier encounter from her mind.

'So why are...?' She tailed off, spotting the large scruffy dog that had wandered up behind Phoebe and nuzzled its nose into her arse, making her give a surprised yelp. 'Hey! Leave her alone.'

'Bert! That's enough.'

The dog – he looked too big to be a retriever or a collie – ignored Finn, following after Phoebe, who tried to hide behind Casey's legs.

'Hey, it's okay, Phoebe. Can you please get him to back off? She gets nervous.'

She thought Finn was going to roll his eyes at her request, but with the faintest shake of his head, he whistled to the shaggy dog. 'Hey, Bert, come here now.' When Bert continued to take no notice, Finn had to step in to physically restrain him, holding him back by his collar.

'You called your dog Bert?' Casey barely managed to keep the incredulous tone out of her voice, the corner of her mouth twitching. The dog grinned up at her and she suspected he didn't get much discipline.

‘Really?’ Finn’s eyebrows shot up. ‘You’re gonna criticise my dog’s name when yours is called Phoebe? Glass houses, Casey.’

‘There’s nothing wrong with the name Phoebe.’

‘For a human.’

Casey shook her head, yawned. It was late and she wasn’t up to debating dog names. She studied Finn, annoyed she still found him attractive. She should really be over him by now.

‘Well, lovely as this is standing around while you insult my dog, my bed is calling.’

She reached down to clip on Phoebe’s lead, wincing at the sudden sharp pain in her lower back.

‘Are you hurt?’

Was that concern she could hear in Finn’s voice?

‘I’m fine.’ Actually she wasn’t, could feel where she had landed heavily on the ground. Come tomorrow she would probably have a fetching black-and-blue bruise. There was no need to tell Finn that though. She went to clip on the lead again, this time masking her expression of pain. ‘But it’s late and I need to go.’

‘Look, I’m sorry I scared you.’

‘You didn’t and it’s all good. No doubt I’ll see you around. Say hi to Nicky for me.’

‘Vicky,’ he called after her, sounding amused.



Finn watched her go, could see she was limping slightly despite her best efforts to hide it, and he swore under his breath. She had caught him off guard, taking the full brunt of his weight and he felt bad that he had hurt her.

When he had opened his front door on Thursday morning, the last person he had expected to find standing on the other side was Casey Fallon.

He had thought about her many times over the years and considered his dickhead move of flirting with her and kissing her, before revealing he had a girlfriend, as one of the shittiest things he had ever done.

There had been no point in contacting her, though, to try and put things right, because, quite simply, he couldn’t fix it. Casey had been part of a case he had actively been involved with, plus there was his girlfriend. One he had gone on to marry four years later.

It hadn’t lasted, of course. The warning should have come that he wasn’t truly happy after he had kissed Casey, but he had ignored his doubts, trying

to put that indiscretion behind him as a moment of madness and doing his best to be a dutiful boyfriend. He had dated Catherine for five years, but the marriage had survived less than two. It was as if the second they said, 'I do', they had both started trying to find fault with each other. Divorced before thirty, Finn had embraced his single lifestyle, and now tended to keep any relationships as casual as possible.

It was easier that way, especially with work. He had taken his detective's exam eight years ago, moving to CID, had never gone for sergeant, as he didn't want to spend his life managing people and doing admin. Doing the job, dealing with the public and investigating crimes was what he thrived on, and the women he had dated seemed to have little understanding of the unsociable hours he often had to keep.

He remembered Casey Fallon as a teenager. The first time he had met her she had been scared and agitated, her dark eyes wide and her olive skin pale, but still a quiet determination had shone through, her only focus on saving the life of Amanda Haines. Months later when the trial was finally over, he had seen a different side to her, understood that beneath that serious façade of wanting justice to be served, there was a nineteen-year-old girl ready to start living her life again. If he was honest, there had been something about her that first day they met and seeing her eyes light up when she bumped into him in the pub, had kicked his interest up a gear into full-blown attraction. It wasn't an excuse though. He should never have led her on. She had been so angry with him and Finn honestly couldn't blame her. He had lived with that guilt for a long time.

Now he was older, more jaded, and Casey, it seemed, was feistier and, God help him, even more attractive than he remembered. The blunt bob she had worn as a teenager had grown out and her hair was longer, made everything softer. What would she be now, thirty-three, thirty-four? Just a couple of years younger than him. When he had bumped into her outside his apartment, had realised who she was, he had actually caught his breath, was for a moment worried he was going to look like a complete dick, as he momentarily lost his words, looking her up and down, like some kind of lech.

It was the shock. He had thought he would never see her again.

Except here she was living in the same building. What were the chances of that? And he hadn't seen any sign that she was living with anyone, had already discreetly checked her naked ring finger, though, of course, that didn't mean there wasn't a boyfriend hovering somewhere on the scene.

They were neighbours and he had been telling himself that hitting on her would be a bad idea, a terrible idea in fact, particularly given their history, but still he couldn't stop thinking about it.

She had taken the full brunt of his weight and it bothered him that she had been limping. He felt bad about that, though was pretty certain any offer to help her up the stairs would have been swiftly rebuked.

Scratching at his jaw and pondering his new neighbour dilemma as Bert, who had wandered over to the flower beds on his now extended lead, cocked his leg, Finn glanced at the spot where the pair of them had landed, eyes immediately going to the phone lying on the grass.

Casey must have dropped it.

He snatched it up, yanking on Bert's lead and hurrying inside after her.

Her back must have been hurting her more than she had let on because she had taken the lift up, was exiting it with her hand on her hip and a pained expression on her face, as he neared the top of the stairs. Phoebe spotted him and Bert first, letting out a woof which had Casey glancing up. Seeing Finn approach she actually rolled her eyes.

He wasn't deterred.

'I did hurt you.'

'I said I'm fine.'

'You're limping like Jack Nicholson at the end of *The Shining*. That's hardly fine.'

'Thanks for that comparison.'

When she reached her door and he was still standing there, she turned to him, arched a haughty brow.

'Okay, if your plan was to see me to my door then we're here, so you can go now.'

Finn grinned, held up her phone. 'Actually, you dropped this outside. I thought I would be nice and return it.'

'Oh.' He had wrong-footed her and she had the good grace to look a little embarrassed. 'Thank you, I appreciate that.'

He handed her the phone and she unlocked the door, eased it open just a fraction. Aware he was still standing there watching, her cheeks coloured.

'Okay, goodnight.'

'Goodnight.'

He started to walk away and she turned back to her apartment, though didn't enter, keeping a firm grip on her dog's lead.

Why was she being so hesitant about opening the door?

Curiosity had him lingering as he watched her peer through the crack, glance down towards the floor. 'What are you doing?'

'What? Nothing.'

'Why don't you want to open the door?'

She laughed at that, but wouldn't meet his eyes. 'I am now opening my door. Go away.'

When he didn't move she gave an exaggerated sigh, pushed the door wide. 'Happy now?'

Finn wanted to go into the apartment, see the door from the inside. She had definitely been up to something. It was late, though, and he didn't have a decent excuse. Besides, Casey had already stepped inside, was starting to close the door.

'Want to grab some breakfast in the morning?' he asked instead.

'It's already the morning.'

'Okay, lunch. We could catch up. Old times' sake.'

'Goodnight, Finn.'

'Is that a yes?'

'Go back downstairs to your girlfriend. I need to sleep.'

The door fully closed so she never heard the response he gave to that.

'She's not my girlfriend.'

Public displays have never been my style. I much prefer to go about my business quietly and privately. It is how I have gone undetected for so long.

A secluded location and a random victim. The police always focus their investigations closer to home, scrutinising family and friends, work colleagues, maybe any handymen or delivery workers their missing person may have been in contact with. They will check internet usage and social media, looking for any clues.

But they won't find any trace of me there or in the victim's home. That is because there is no connection. Since I choose at random, they will struggle to uncover my identity, and as I never leave a body or a murder weapon, all they ever have is a missing person. While they are conducting their investigation sixty-odd miles away, I can have my fun.

Isolated, safe, secure, those were the three things I was looking for when I chose my den.

I researched carefully, knew I needed a place that would give me privacy, somewhere safe enough that I could leave my guests and not have to worry that they might escape or be found while I am gone. That was important, because I like to play and when I play, I like to take my time. It needed to be quiet too. You would be amazed how loudly a person can scream when they are pleading for their life.

You would also be surprised at some of the ways they try to bargain with me, telling me they have kids or sick relatives to take care of, offering me money or sex, which let's face it, the sex thing is a pretty stupid bargaining chip when they're tied down and mine to do with as I please. A couple of them have even offered to help me find other victims.

Can you believe that?

Sometimes I play along, listening earnestly to their tearful pleas, appearing genuinely sorry for what I have done. I even cried with one of the bitches once, had her trying to comfort me and telling me everything was going to be okay. I went as far as untying her and letting her think I was about to let her go free, opening the door for her. Then, as she took her first breath of freedom, I knocked her unconscious. When she awoke she found herself hanging by her wrists from a hook I had bolted into the ceiling and her utter desperation, knowing that her freedom had been snatched away, and things were about to get a whole lot worse for her, is still on my list as one of my top three most memorable moments.

Yes, I keep a list. It's in my diary, where I like to record everything about them, from the way they smell and how they react to the various things I do to them, to the different ways they try to barter for their lives and the length of time it takes them to die, exactly how they look at the moment I take their last breath from them. I keep the diary with the videos I make and the souvenirs I take. And when I am finished I make sure my victims will never be found.

Quiet, private and under the radar, that is how I operate.

Just sometimes, though, public displays are necessary. And I am about to put on the performance of my life, one I have been preparing for and practising to perfection for years.

In order to pull this off, I have had to change the way I operate. This time, my victims have been pre-planned, there has been some breaking and entering, and I have engaged in some stalking. A delicious kick I have never experienced before.

Right now I am hiding under the bed of my latest target. We have engaged in a little bit of flirtatious banter in recent days. Well, I call it banter, but I don't think she has appreciated my clown mask and finding it pressed up against her kitchen window late at night, just as she didn't appreciate finding me in her house.

She has told the police about me, but they haven't taken her too seriously. It seems she has a reputation as a troublemaker and for crying wolf, which is bad for her, but good for me, as I have been able to push things a little further knowing there will be no repercussions. I guess in a way I will be doing them a favour by taking her off their hands.

Saffron Pollard has a young son, Alfie, and she shares custody of him

with her ex-husband, Tony. This evening she has dropped the kid off at Tony's house and will be home alone. This is the perfect opportunity for us to finally become properly acquainted.

It has been a long wait for me, but one I know will be worth it, and as I listen to her pottering around downstairs, muttering away to herself as she prepares dinner, smokes countless fags and chats on the phone with a friend, I am reminded of a quote I once saw, that *fishing is patience and faith awaiting a nibble*, and I can't help smiling to myself, thinking how true it is.

Saffron is complaining to her friend about the man she has been seeing. She has found out he is cheating on her and the conversation is littered with swear words. I am no prude, but even I am tiring of the constant stream of expletives. I am thinking I might wash her mouth out with soap later.

She is not my usual type. Not at all. I know I can't always afford to be picky, especially when I usually select victims at random, but if I was out hunting, I wouldn't stop for her. For starters she is too skinny. I prefer my women to have a little flesh and I imagine there will be no pleasure in grappling with the bony frame of Saffron Pollard.

There is nothing attractive about her either; her hard face and lanky, overly-dyed hair, enough to repel most men, I imagine.

She calls her cheating boyfriend an 'oxygen thief' and I smile again, thinking how ironic her turn of phrase is. Saffron Pollard will learn very soon what an oxygen thief really is.

It is close to midnight when she finally comes to bed. I have been waiting for so long I am worried my muscles might start to cramp and I have been trying to do a few stretching exercises in the limited space I have.

The plus side of the hour is that most people will now be asleep, meaning it should be easier to get Saffron out of her house undetected.

I wait until she is in bed and the light has been turned off for a good twenty minutes. Eventually, I hear the sound of snoring and know it is safe to come out.

I have my bag of tricks with me and I slide it carefully over the carpet, moving slowly, as I don't want to wake her.

Slipping on the clown mask, I sit on the bed beside her. The mattress dips, but the snoring continues as I peel tape from the roll. I lean over her, wanting to be the first thing she sees when she wakes.

For a moment I watch her through the eye slits of the mask, her mouth ajar, sounding like a vile pig. Even in this light, with the glow of the street

lamp shining through a crack in the curtains, she repulses me.

In one fluid movement I seal the tape across her mouth.

Limbs flail, her eyes open in shock, blinking furiously, taking a moment to adjust, then spotting me, seeing the mask, she thrashes wildly. I already have hold of her wrists in one gloved hand, am pinning them down as I climb on top of her and she starts snorting in panic, unable to catch her breath.

I taunt her for a moment, let her see my knife, running it across her cheek and down over her neck towards her breasts. I am tempted to play with her for a little while before we leave, but I mustn't stray from the plan. If I cut her with the knife, it will cause a blood spatter. I don't want this to be a crime scene. The knife is just for show, to help me instil fear. I need to control myself. We have the whole weekend together and there will be plenty of time to play later.

Twisting the knife, I let the smooth side skim over her nipple, and she trembles in fear beneath me. Fat tears are spilling from her eyes now and snot is dribbling from her nose.

She knows how much trouble she is in.

Dropping the knife, I hit her hard with the side of my hand and she stills, eyes dropping shut.

I move quickly, retrieving rope from my bag and securely binding her wrists and ankles.

I put more tape over her mouth, this time wrapping it around her head so she can't work it free. I check my knots, satisfied they will hold.

She will wake before I return with my van, but it doesn't matter. There is no way she can break free, and it will give her a little time to wonder exactly what I have planned for her.

I think you should tell your station bosses,' Zoe suggested.

It was Sunday afternoon and Casey was sat down by the river with Zoe and Ricky, enjoying the warm July sun. With her first radio show of the week approaching, the encounter with Steve was playing on her mind. She had so far kept what happened to herself, but the thought of returning to the studio and spending four late nights alone there was starting to bother her.

Zoe had picked up that something was wrong straightaway and wasn't going to let the matter drop, which is how Casey had ended up telling them both about what had happened. Unfortunately, her friend was reacting exactly as anticipated, part of the reason why Casey hadn't planned to tell her in the first place.

'There's no point speaking with them. Honestly, there is nothing they can do.'

'But you can't be alone in the studio at night if it's not safe,' Zoe argued. 'It's ridiculous. They have a duty of care, you know.'

'I have Phoebe with me.'

Ricky snorted at that, earning himself a glare from Casey.

'Sorry.' He glanced at the beagle who was playing on her extended lead. 'But she's hardly a guard dog.'

'Maybe they can have someone stay with you,' Zoe suggested. 'There must be another employee who can work a little later.'

Now it was Casey's turn to snort. 'We're not that kind of set-up. The station is small and there just aren't the staff to spare. No one is going to want to volunteer to sit with me for three hours every night.'

'Well, they have to do something.'

'Trust me, Zoe. If I go to them about this then the only thing that will

happen is I will get booted off the show. Paul Powers has already kicked off because I was given the show ahead of Jade.'

Paul Powers had been the breakfast show deejay since the station had launched and he and Casey didn't see eye to eye. She couldn't stand his monster ego and how he acted like he was in charge of the station, while Paul didn't like the fact that she didn't kiss his arse. Jade Armitage had worked with him on the show for the past nine months and Casey was pretty certain that the pair of them were sleeping together. When the late-night show slot had come up for grabs, Paul had pushed hard for it to be given to Jade and was furious when his request was ignored. Luckily, Casey only had to see him two days a week now when she went in to help with the marketing, but she knew he was waiting for her to screw up so he could go running to the bosses and gloat that they had made the wrong decision.

It was nice that Zoe was concerned about her, but Casey would figure something out. 'The building is locked and no one can get inside. It was probably just a lucky guess that he knew I was wearing a black vest top. Either that or he has seen me out and about wearing it. I am probably overreacting. No one attacked me, no one hurt me.'

Even as she said the words, Casey's mind drifted back to Thursday night and her up close and personal encounter with Finn, which had led to her hurting her back.

Despite his suggestion of breakfast then lunch, she hadn't heard from him and, while that had disappointed her a little, she knew it was for the best. For starters he had a girlfriend and, even if he didn't have a girlfriend, it wasn't a smart move. She still had too many feelings for him and didn't want to go through the humiliation of another whole unrequited love thing again.

Being mates would just be plain awkward and, even if Nicky or Vicky, or whatever the heck her name was, wasn't on the scene and if Finn did hit on Casey, sleeping with a neighbour, someone she still ran the risk of running into regularly once things had ended, would be a bad idea. A really bad idea.

Her back still hurt a little from where she had landed on it and she had a nice black-and-blue bruise as a reminder. She had iced it and tried to rest on the Friday, and it was now getting to the point where she didn't limp. That was good because if Zoe or Ricky spotted she had hurt herself, there would be questions, and Casey was not ready to admit that Finn Murphy was her new neighbour.

'A black vest top is still pretty specific, Case.'

‘I’ll be fine,’ Casey reassured Zoe. ‘It was one show, just a handful of harmless emails. I overreacted.’ And talking about it out loud on a warm, sunny afternoon, Casey was beginning to wonder if she had. ‘I could always order some self-defence spray or maybe a rape alarm.’

‘Isn’t pepper spray illegal?’ That was from Ricky, who was looking at her curiously. ‘I’m sure I read it was.’

‘It isn’t actually pepper spray. It’s not as powerful, but it does help repel and apparently it can stay on clothes for up to three days.’

‘Maybe I should get some of that.’ Ricky grinned. ‘I could use it on the idiots who approach me. They all want to get their hands on my body.’

They all laughed at that. Ricky was obsessed with the way he looked and as well as fussing over his hair and being a complete label snob, spent plenty of hours sunning himself in the tanning booths. Zoe called him vain, Ricky told her she was just jealous that he looked better than she did.

‘I can come and sit with you in the studio one night if you want,’ he volunteered, his tone sobering. ‘If you are worried.’

‘And if this creep shows up, are you going to beat him up with your cane?’ Zoe smirked, trying to duck when he raised the walking stick to smack her gently on the head with it.

‘I meant I would sit with her for company.’ He pouted. ‘Though you never know, the stick could come in handy.’

Casey couldn’t help smiling. This was why she loved Ricky. Even though he couldn’t physically defend her, she knew he would still try. Just as he would give up his evening to go to the station with her. Of course, she wouldn’t let him. She would be fine.

‘Thank you, I appreciate that. I’m going to be okay though.’

‘Maybe you should get to know that hot piece of arse living downstairs. If you get up close and personal with him, I’m sure he will be happy to protect you.’

Shut up, Ricky.

‘What hot piece of arse?’ Zoe demanded, her eyes darting between them both.

Shit. ‘No one. Just a guy who lives downstairs who Ricky was perving over the other day.’

‘Have you seen him since?’ Ricky wanted to know.

‘Umm... no,’ Casey lied.

‘Shame. You live in the same building, though, so you’re bound to run

into him at some point.

‘Hmm, maybe.’

Casey quickly changed topic. ‘Talking of hot men, are things still going well with Jared?’

It was a tried-and-tested formula. If she ever wanted to avoid talking about something, all she had to do was ask Ricky about his love life.

It was his favourite subject and distracted him every time, which is why he was still waffling on twenty minutes later when they arrived back at Kimberley House.

Her shoulders tensed as they passed Finn’s front door and went to the lift. As they waited for the door to open, she prayed he wouldn’t step out of his apartment. To her relief, his door remained closed. The last thing she wanted was for Zoe to find out he lived here. Her friend knew about Casey’s teenage crush and how Finn had rejected her, and it would be just her style to go and confront him.

Upstairs, she unlocked her front door, her eyes doing a quick sweep of the living room and kitchen as she stepped inside. This was the first occasion since Thursday night that she hadn’t tied cotton to the door handle before going out, knowing her friends would realise what she was doing and not wanting to feel foolish. It had been embarrassing enough trying to go into her apartment in front of Finn, after he insisted on lingering and scrutinising her every move.

She didn’t want anyone to know what she was doing, certain they would tell her she was being an idiot. As it was, she was beginning to wonder if she was being paranoid, as the cotton hadn’t been tampered with at all.

Maybe she had imagined that someone had broken in to her apartment. It wouldn’t be the first time she had overreacted to a perfectly innocent situation.

Discovering what Steve Noakes was up to had affected her more deeply than she had first realised, leading to months of nightmares as she tried to come to terms with what had happened and what she had witnessed.

That last time she had been at the Noakes’s house was the day she had learnt that monsters were real and understood just how good they were at disguising themselves to appear normal so they blended in with society.

That was what really messed with Casey’s head. The trauma of seeing that basement room, of finding Amanda Haines tied to his torture table, could have easily been enough to tip her over the edge, but knowing that the father

of her boyfriend, a man she would have trusted with her life, was a sadistic serial killer, was the real headfuck. And as a result she found it difficult to trust new people.

Meeting with Amanda had helped. Their paths had only crossed briefly, but the thank you Amanda had murmured helped Casey deal with the guilt she carried.

She thought back to that day in court when she had to testify, while under the scrutiny of Steve, Gareth and the rest of the Noakes family. It was one of the most terrifying ordeals of her life and it still shocked her that she had managed to hold it together.

That was why she had gone out with Zoe that night, needing to feel normal again, and if she was honest, it was probably why she had attached herself to Finn Murphy. He had been there since that first day when she phoned the police and he was one of the few people she knew she could trust.

She finished making tea and took the cups outside. Although it wasn't a garden, the balcony was spacious and she loved being out here, especially in the warm weather.

Now she was settled in the apartment and everything was unpacked, she planned to visit a few of the local garden centres and get some tubs and plants to dress the space.

'I think you're going to be happy here,' Zoe commented, looking out over the open fields.

'Really? The other day you were grumbling about me moving out of the city,' Casey reminded her, a teasing smile on her face.

'That was before I saw this apartment. It's very peaceful. The country life will be good for you.'

Ricky glanced between the two of them, looking smug. 'See, I knew it. I was the one who knew best.'

Zoe arched a brow. 'Do you want a gold star? Stop crowing, Ricky. It's very unattractive.'

The apartment had been a bone of contention between them and Zoe hadn't been at all happy when Ricky had first suggested it to Casey, and she had sulked for a week after Casey had viewed it and decided to make an offer. At least Zoe was finally coming around.

Casey glanced at the view. Despite Finn Murphy and despite her reservations that someone had been inside her apartment, she hoped that Zoe was right.



It was late afternoon before her friends finally left, Ricky reiterating his offer for Casey to call him if she wanted his company one night.

She thanked him for that, saying she would let him know, but truth was, she had no intention of taking him up on the offer.

This was her radio show, her job. She did it four nights a week and she couldn't start relying on having a babysitter. She was thirty-four and tried her best to be independent. She could cope with being in the studio by herself.

She waved them off, glancing at Finn's front door as she headed back to the stairs. She hadn't seen anything of him for the last few days and wondered if perhaps he had been at work.

Not that it mattered. Where he was, what he was doing and who he was doing things with was none of her business.

'Miss Casey Fallon.'

Hearing her name, Casey glanced up at the top floor, her heart sinking as she spotted Rupert from number seven heading towards her. What was he doing up on her landing and how did he know her full name? She was pretty sure she had only introduced herself as Casey.

'Can I help you?' she asked, pausing on the stairs.

'Just visiting your neighbour.'

Casey glanced past him at the closed door of number ten. Since she had moved in, she hadn't seen any sign of anyone living there, her knock to introduce herself going unanswered, and she had assumed either the apartment was empty or the occupants were away on holiday.

She narrowed her eyes. 'I didn't think anyone was there.'

Her tone must have sounded suspicious because Rupert paled. 'I have a key... for the plants. They're away.'

'Oh, okay.' It was a normal enough thing to do for a neighbour, but there was something shifty in the way he was acting. 'Who actually lives there?'

He gave her a strange smile. 'They're nice people. I'm sure you'll meet them when they get back.'

'Are they on holiday?'

'I listened to your show.'

'I'm sorry?'

'Your radio show. I listened to it on Thursday night.' He seemed rather pleased with himself. 'You have a very nice voice.'

'Thank you... how...'

‘Mrs Fletcher told me. I shall be tuning in again tomorrow night. I like to listen to you when I get into bed. Makes a change from reading my books.’

Okay, Rupert was socially awkward and his comment could have been perfectly innocent, but still, it was open to interpretation. Time to knock this conversation on the head.

‘I should go.’ Casey gestured to her apartment. ‘I’ve left something in the oven.’

He looked at her strangely and she suspected he didn’t believe her lie, but still he moved slightly to one side of the step and gestured for her to pass.

Casey glanced at the space. He hadn’t allowed her much room and she wondered if he had done that on purpose. She quickly brushed past him, not liking the moment where her arm brushed against him. When she reached her apartment door, she glanced back, saw he was still standing on the stairs watching her.

She forced a smile. ‘Okay, see you later.’

He simply nodded in response.

As she unlocked the door, stepped inside, she couldn’t help wonder if Rupert had been telling the truth about looking after the neighbour’s plants. He seemed an odd choice to trust with your keys, but then she guessed she didn’t really know anything about him or her new neighbour. Was it really that impossible to believe they were friends?

Still, her mind wandered back to Thursday morning when she thought someone had been inside her apartment. Rupert knew she had gone out with the dog. She had passed him on the stairs. Had he broken in while she had been out? The lock wasn’t damaged and nothing was missing, but still, she was sure she hadn’t imagined it.

And then there were the emails to the station. What if Rupert had been responsible for those?

No, that was a stretch and Casey was being ridiculous now. She couldn’t accuse him of sending her harassing emails just because he said he had listened to her show.

The two incidents weren’t connected, she was sure they weren’t, and accusing him of breaking into her apartment was a stretch. She had nothing to prove he had done it. He was definitely odd, but he was probably harmless.

Still, she would go back to tying the cotton across her door, just to be safe, and perhaps she would mention him to her immediate neighbours when they returned, see what she could find out. They were on holiday, hadn’t he

said that?

Casey thought back over her brief conversation with Rupert, realised he had never actually answered her question. Instead, he had changed the subject.

Just what exactly was he hiding?

The call from Saffron Pollard's ex-husband, Tony, came in on Sunday morning.

He had gone to drop their son, Alfie, off, and was concerned when he found that Saffron wasn't home. Although this wasn't the first time this had happened, given her recent 'clown stalking' claim, a patrol officer was sent to the house to do a missing person's report. Tony had a set of keys for the house and the PC did a quick check, confirming nothing appeared out of place. With Saffron's history, it was highly likely she had hooked up with someone and forgotten that her son was being dropped home. It was certainly the most plausible scenario.

Tony had grumbled a bit, but taken Alfie back home with him, repeatedly calling Saffron and leaving messages on her phone. When she still hadn't showed up by Monday afternoon, he had called the police again, and the report became high risk, ending up with Finn and Vicky.

Finn was already tired and snappy, not in the mood for another Saffron runaround. The last few days hadn't gone as intended, after receiving a call from his mother on Friday morning to say that his father had fallen off a ladder while trying to fix a broken tile on the roof of their bungalow.

That had scuppered his plans to ambush Casey and try and charm her into the lunch date he had proposed, as instead he had spent much of his day in A&E, then the weekend talking to doctors and running around after his parents, trying to make sure they were okay and had everything they needed.

His dad was bruised and had badly twisted his ankle, was lucky that he hadn't done any further damage, and the doctors had ordered bed rest, which had led to a lot of grumbling. Given that Brenda Murphy didn't drive and relied on her husband to get her about, that left both of them housebound, and

Finn's sole responsibility until his sister could get up to Norwich on Tuesday.

He had hoped to finish his shift on time today so he could call in to check up on them on his way home, but it looked like Saffron Pollard and her latest stunt might have put paid to that plan.

'If she is having drunken sex somewhere and wasting our time, she won't need to worry about a bloody clown attacking her,' Vicky grumbled as they pulled up outside her house.

Tony Pollard was waiting for them by the front door, an anxious expression on his face.

Finn had met him a few times, knew he still thought a lot of Saffron, despite everything his ex-wife had put him through.

'Let's just get this over with,' he muttered, getting out of the car.



They had read over the initial report before leaving the station, but Finn still had more questions for Tony, firing them at him as he and Vicky did a walk-through of the house, trying to find any clue of where Saffron could have taken off to. Her car was still in the driveway, but if she had gone out drinking, she would have probably caught a taxi. Her keys were missing and presumably on her.

Finn didn't think Tony Pollard was involved with his wife's disappearance, but he had to ask the questions, check that he did have alibis, find out how his relationship had been with Saffron recently. Whether they had fought over anything or if she had acted oddly the last time he had seen her.

It was the bedroom that gave them their first clue that things weren't right.

Vicky was over by the unmade bed and screwed her nose up in disgust. 'Yuck!'

'What?' Finn questioned from across the room, where he had just opened the wardrobe door.

'These sheets stink of wee.'

She peeled back the duvet and Finn looked at the dried yellowing patch in the centre of the white sheet. It definitely looked like urine. Had Saffron been drinking and peed the bed? He glanced at Tony, who was hovering in the doorway. 'Has she ever done anything like this before?'

Tony shook his head, took a step closer. 'Never while I was with her.'

Vicky had bent down for a closer inspection and was looking like she was

going to puke. 'Yeah, it's definitely wee. So we know she wet the bed, but what I don't understand is why she didn't clean it up.'

Finn agreed, it didn't make sense. Why would she pee herself then just leave the house? He glanced back at the open wardrobe door. The top shelf was filled with handbags.

They hadn't found a bag downstairs, assumed as her keys were missing Saffron would have her bag with her too. He gestured for Tony to step over to the wardrobe. 'Do you know which handbag she regularly uses?'

'She doesn't have a regular one. She likes to co-ordinate her bag to whatever outfit she wears.' Tony pointed to a bag on the end of the row. 'I think she had that pink one with her when she dropped Alfie off.'

Nodding, Finn pulled the bag down from the shelf, unzipping it and emptying the contents onto the top of the dresser. A purse, hairbrush, lipstick, cigarettes and two lighters. He opened the purse, saw it held her driving licence and credit cards. In one of the plastic pockets was a picture of Alfie.

'That's her purse,' Tony told them, stating the obvious. 'Why would she go out without her purse?'

She wouldn't, Finn agreed, and for the first time felt a flicker of unease. Maybe Saffron Pollard wasn't okay. 'We need to try and find out if her phone is in the house,' he told Vicky.

'I've been calling her all day,' Tony was quick to point out. 'She hasn't answered.'

'Can you call her again, please?'

Tony nodded, pulled out his own phone and punched in his ex-wife's name. As it rang, a vibration sounded. Finn exchanged a glance with Vicky. The noise was coming from the floor.

Vicky dropped to her knees, peering under the bed. 'It's her phone,' she confirmed.

She sat up briefly to pull on plastic gloves, before crawling back under.

When she emerged, she held the mobile phone in one hand, it was still attached to the charger. In the other something was pinched between her thumb and forefinger.

Finn stepped closer, eyes narrowing. 'What is that, red hair?'

Vicky glanced down at her hand and nodded. 'I don't think it's real though.'

'So it's from a wig?'

'Maybe. It feels cheap. Could be fancy dress.' Vicky rolled the hair

between her fingers, her expression thoughtful. She looked at Finn and raised a questioning eyebrow. 'Remember the last time she called us out? What if it's from a clown's costume?'



It was late when the pair of them were finally away from Saffron Pollard's house, having called CSI and secured the scene, and they were now taking it seriously that Saffron could very well be in danger, especially after an outdoor sweep of the perimeter of the house had revealed the keyring that held her house and car keys, thrown into some bushes close to the front door. Saffron wouldn't pee the bed then lock herself out of the house, minus phone and purse, and throw away her keys. Something had happened to her.

As they headed back to the station, Vicky glanced in Finn's direction.

'I could be up for a nightcap, if you are.'

He knew exactly what her idea of a nightcap was, would normally say yes, but truth was he was knackered and just wanted to go to bed, alone. 'I'll pass tonight. It's been a busy few days. I need to catch up on my beauty sleep.' He grinned at her.

She shrugged, seeming unbothered, though the rejection obviously played on her mind, because a couple of minutes later she asked, 'Who was that woman? The one whose dog peed outside your apartment last week.'

Her question took Finn by surprise. 'Casey? She's my new neighbour.'

'But you knew her, right, from before?'

'Yeah, we go back several years.' He was about to tell Vicky about Casey's connection to Steve Noakes, then changed his mind. It was in the past.

There was another longer pause.

'Do you fancy her?'

This time Finn actually took his eyes off the road to look at Vicky, brows raised. 'Would it bother you if I did?'

'No, of course not. I'm just being nosey.' Another pause. 'So, do you?'

He considered the question, considered Casey – dark wide eyes and soft features, curves in all the right places – and felt a kick in the groin.

'Yeah, I do,' he admitted, hoping Vicky would be cool with that. The two of them had always been upfront about the fuck buddy thing. There was no reason to lie to her. 'Not that it means anything is going to happen. I don't even know if she has a boyfriend. And she as good as shut the door in my face last time we spoke.'

‘That’s never stopped you.’

‘No,’ Finn agreed, grinning. ‘It hasn’t.’

He was pretty good at figuring out a way to get what he wanted, even if sometimes it took a little bit of effort. He had a feeling Casey would be worth the effort.



When he eventually finished work, he drove straight home.

He had spoken with his mum on the phone, promised to try and find time to call in on them in the morning. Brenda Murphy understood the demands of her son’s job, knew he would do his best.

Bert was waiting for him, tail wagging, and as he had been alone for several hours, Finn decided to take him out before grabbing a shower. As he walked the dog down by the river, his mind wandered back to Saffron Pollard, and he mused over the mystery of her disappearance. The woman was a pain in the arse, but even so, Finn didn’t want to see anything bad happen to her. The clues they had found in her house, though, suggested she could be in some kind of trouble.

Tony’s alibis had already cleared him and tomorrow Finn and Vicky would start contacting Saffron’s friends. Despite the fact that she had left without her phone and keys, there was no sign of a fight or that she had been forced out of the house and no evidence of a break-in. Her whole disappearance was looking extremely odd.

Back in his apartment he threw a frozen pizza in the oven and opened a beer, before tuning into East Coast Radio. It was time to check out Casey’s show.



For such a small and skinny woman, Saffron Pollard is physically very strong. Even after everything she has endured over the past couple of days, she continues to fight me, and there have been a couple of times that I have been concerned she might actually break free of her restraints.

Fear can provoke many different reactions, from the more common uncontrollable shaking and hysteria to shutting down completely. One girl I took was so frightened, she became unresponsive. It was almost as if she had disappeared into her shell. She suffered for longer than most as I became desperate for a reaction. I never got one, though, and it stands out as the least satisfying experience I have had.

Saffron is not the first to display superhuman strength, though she is the

smallest, and I have a new begrudging admiration for her. She has proven to be a worthy adversary and I am almost sorry that our time together is about to come to an end. I do like a fighter.

I look at her now. We have changed location and I have dressed her for the occasion. Her pretty yellow summer dress is a bright contrast to the dark and dingy walls of the abandoned cattle shed we are in, and in the light from the lanterns, her cuts and bruises are less apparent. She struggles violently against the chair to which she is tied, and I am grateful that I anticipated she would, which is why I made a trip out here yesterday to concrete the metal legs to the floor. I don't want her to tip over and get dirt on her nice clean dress.

She watches me warily as I set down a cheap portable radio next to her, tuning it in to a local station, East Coast Radio. During our time together I haven't removed the mask and I haven't spoken a word to her. She still has no idea what I look like or why I have done these terrible things to her. I prefer the silence, know it invokes more fear. Not knowing what I am going to do next is far more frightening than being given a running commentary.

But she is about to see me and to hear me speak for the first time.

Here, in the abandoned cattle shed, two lanterns lighting up my lady in yellow, the only noise cutting through the still warm night, the tinny sound of Coldplay singing, rather ironically, about paradise, I remove the mask and reach for my phone.

As the Coldplay song began, Casey pulled off her headphones and closed her eyes, massaging her temples; the prickling of a headache coming on.

It was tension-caused, she knew that. Last night she had struggled to fall asleep, the encounter with Rupert playing on her mind, plus she was still worried about being in the studio alone again. She had eventually drifted off, but her sleep had been restless and dream-fuelled. In her dream she was in an old house, full of rooms and corridors and she was aware of someone moving things around whenever she tried to sleep. She then discovered the front door was open and try as she might, she couldn't lock it, couldn't keep out whatever bad thing was trying to get inside.

When she awoke for real, her eyes were sore, her brain foggy, and she found it a struggle taking Phoebe for a brief walk. And, of course, it was one of her double-trip days. After gulping down two cups of coffee, Casey had headed to Mundesley, hoping to lock herself away in the marketing office and keep her head down for the morning, but there was no chance of that.

She had logged into her email, part of her dreading further contact from Steve, but the only new message was from the station manager, Justin, telling her off for deviating from the playlist schedule on Thursday night.

Casey couldn't believe he had listened to the late show, immediately suspecting Paul Powers or Jade Armitage of shit-stirring.

She had deleted Justin's email, then the ones from Steve, trying to focus on her work, but then she had fallen foul of Paul, who accused her of breaking his favourite mug. Apparently, it had been clean and sat on the desk ready for him to use on Friday morning, so Casey, being the last one in the studio had to have dropped it.

Casey knew the mug he was talking about, with ‘No.1 DJ’ in a red love heart. She had glared at it many times. There was no way she had broken it, though, in fact, she was fairly certain she had seen it on the desk on Thursday night.

Of course, Paul wasn’t having any of it and after arguing with him for a few minutes and getting nowhere, she slammed the office door, wondering how the hell someone could get so het up over a stupid mug.

Her morning in the studio had put her in a bad mood and when she returned there later for her show, she was dreading setting foot in the place. She didn’t get paid for the deejay gig, doing it voluntarily for the experience. If it became too much of a chore, she promised herself she would knock it on the head.

Problem was, Casey wasn’t a quitter.

The evening atmosphere was more relaxed than the one she had left earlier. Kenny Lee was the only person in the building and he was so laid-back, Casey was convinced he must smoke a lot of weed.

She busied herself sorting Phoebe while she waited for Kenny to finish, then reminded him to lock the door on his way out. As always, she had gone to check it as soon as she was able.

As the song neared the end, she slipped her headphones back on, told her listeners that after the ad break they would be heading into the request half hour, giving out her email address and the station telephone number for texts or phone calls.

No one ever called and she didn’t know why she bothered. If she was lucky she might get two or three texts and maybe the odd email. Most nights she made up requests to read out, just so she didn’t sound like the idiot deejay who didn’t have any listeners.

She had one of her fictitious texters lined up for after the break, the song good to go, when the station telephone started to ring, startling the life out of her.

Was someone actually calling in to speak on-air? This would be a first for her.

She went to snatch up the receiver, then waited a beat before answering, not wanting to appear overeager.

‘East Coast Radio. How may I help you?’

‘Can I speak to Casey?’ A deep male voice.

‘This is Casey speaking.’

‘Casey Fallon?’

‘The one and only.’ Casey gave a nervous laugh, cursing herself. She sounded like a dork. It was the excitement of having her first caller. ‘Are you calling to make a request?’

‘I am.’

‘Are you happy to go on-air?’

‘Yes. Okay.’

‘Can you give me your name and tell me where you are, and what song you would like me to play? I will get it lined up then I will introduce you and ask you for your song and any dedication on-air. Is that okay?’

‘Uh... yeah, sure. Um, it’s Steven.’

Casey froze. Steve from the other night? The Steve who knew she was wearing a black vest top and asked her if she liked to sleep naked?

She instructed herself to pull her shit together. Steve was such a common name and he had actually called himself Steven, not shortened it to Steve. It had to be a different guy. Plus the man on the end of the phone seemed normal enough, and he had actually called in, not sent an email. It was a different person.

‘Where are you calling from, Steven?’

‘Right now? I’m in Suffolk, working. I come from Norwich though.’

‘Another night owl.’

‘Oh yes, most definitely. I seem to do all my best work at night.’ He laughed at his joke and Casey thought he relaxed a little. That was good.

‘What song would you like me to play, Steven from Norwich?’

‘It’s an old one, but one of my favourites. “Mellow Yellow” by Donovan. Can you play that for me, Casey?’

It was old, and an odd choice, but Casey was just excited about having a listener on-air. She would play him ‘Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious’ if he asked for it.

‘Yes, of course. I can play it. Right, I’m just going to pop you on hold. Don’t go anywhere, okay?’

‘I won’t.’

She quickly found the song, reminded everyone it was the request half hour, then introduced Steven.

‘Now I’m not going to lie, Steven. Most of my requests come in by text or email, so when the phone rang, it made me jump. It’s nice to have someone actually come on-air to talk to me.’

‘Well... I guess I’m old-fashioned like that.’ Steven laughed nervously. ‘I get butterfingers trying to send texts.’

‘It makes a pleasant change to hear a human voice, so if any other listeners out there are thinking about making a request, don’t be shy. Go ahead and pick up the phone. I don’t bite.’

‘So you’re all alone in the studio, then?’ Steven asked. ‘That doesn’t seem right, a pretty lady all by herself this late at night.’

A ripple of unease fluttered through Casey’s stomach. It wasn’t just Steven’s tone, which sounded a little lewd, he had just told every listener that she was by herself. She attempted to get the conversation back on track.

‘We were just talking off-air and you said you’re a night owl yourself.’

‘I did.’

‘And you’re working down in Suffolk at the moment, I believe.’

‘I am. I’m pulling a late-night shift, but it will be worth it.’

‘Oh really? What line of work you are in, Steven?’

‘Extermination.’

The line had crackled and Casey wasn’t quite sure if she heard him correctly. ‘Sorry, did you say extermination?’

‘I did. I kill vermin. I like to trap them and make them squeal.’

He means rats, right? Casey didn’t like the way this conversation was going and she was beginning to wish she hadn’t put him on the air. She needed to bring this to a close, right now. ‘You had a song request for us,’ she told him, ignoring his last comment. ‘“Mellow Yellow”, by Donovan.’ She wasn’t going to leave it for him to say, worried that he might change the song on her.

‘That’s the one.’

‘And is there anyone special you would like to dedicate this song to?’ She regretted asking the question as soon as she had said it, hoping he was going to dedicate it to the rats.

For a moment he didn’t answer and she was about to fill the dead air, thank him for his request and start the song, but then he spoke.

‘Yes, there is actually.’

‘Okay, and who is that?’

‘I would like to dedicate it to you, Casey Fallon.’

‘Me?’ She laughed nervously. ‘Okay, umm, thank you.’ *Get him off-air, get him off-air.*

‘Unlike you, Casey, I do bite, and I bite hard. I want you to listen to the

song, listen to the lyrics very carefully. Do you understand? I want you to—'

Steven didn't get to finish what he was saying as Casey cut him off, went straight into the song.

Fucking weirdo.

She let out a shaky breath, annoyed that her hands were trembling, and told herself she had just been unlucky. Steven was obviously just a little odd.

The phone started ringing again and this time she didn't jump, she almost fell off her chair.

Her heart was racing, her mouth dry as she stared at it. *What if it's him?*

She didn't want to speak to him again, but she was at work and couldn't ignore the call. It could be another listener or the station manager wondering what the fuck had just happened.

She wiped her damp palms on her jeans before she lifted the receiver, hating the quiver in her voice when she spoke. 'East Coast Radio. How may I help you?'

'Casey, it's Finn.'

Relief skittered through her and she was so grateful it wasn't Steven that for a second she never even questioned why he was calling.

'I've been listening to your show and I heard the guy who just called in. Are you okay?'

Finn is listening to my show? God, if he had heard the call and picked up that she was freaked out, who the hell else was listening? She was going to get a reputation as the deejay who panicked when dealing with a difficult caller.

'I'm fine,' she told him matter-of-factly.

'Are you sure about that? You sounded pretty shaken.'

'Honestly, I'm fine. He was just a weirdo.' She gave a humourless laugh. 'Unfortunately, you get them in this business.'

'You're there at the station alone?'

'The main door's locked, I checked it myself. No one can get in. And I'm not alone, Phoebe's with me.' Casey glanced at the dog, snoozing on the sofa. There was no getting away from it. If anyone managed to break in to the studio and attack her, Phoebe would be no use whatsoever.

Finn grumbled a bit at that. Casey wasn't really listening to what he was saying, as she was aware of the song coming to an end, knew she had to go back on-air, but still she bristled a little with irritation.

He wasn't her boyfriend. He wasn't even really her friend. He was just

someone she had known briefly a long while ago and who now happened to be a neighbour in the apartment block where she was living. (She ignored the huge crush she had on him. Correction. Had once had on him.) It wasn't his place to check up on her, just as it wasn't his place to argue with her about the safety of the studio.

'Hold on a second. I have to go back on-air.'

She pressed the hold button before he could object, was tempted to leave him there as she replaced her headphones and introduced her bogus request, the one she was going to start with originally, before Steven had called. As the Oasis song started playing she checked for texts and emails, saw she had a couple of genuine requests, and spent a couple of moments getting them ready. When she returned to the call Finn didn't sound happy.

'I really think you should take this a bit more seriously. You're in an empty studio and you've just had a creep on the line who knows you're alone.'

Casey's irritation rumbled into annoyance. Not taking it seriously? He had no bloody idea just how seriously she had taken every perceived danger since discovering what her ex-boyfriend's father did for a hobby.

Her own father had called her paranoid, her mother had sent her to therapy. Casey had known her need to triple-check locks and to sleep with a knife close by wasn't normal, that her inability to form long-term relationships and the urge to look under the bed before getting in it was a knock-on effect to what she had witnessed. She had worked so damned hard to conquer those fears and mostly had – well, except for the relationship thing, and she wasn't sure she would ever be able to get past that.

'What exactly would you like me to do, Finn? Do you want me to walk out of the studio right now and go home? I'm live on-air. I'm sure my boss would just love it if I upped and left. I would never get another job in radio again.'

She could tell by his silence that he didn't have an answer for that.

'Do you want me to drive over there?' he asked eventually. He couldn't have sounded more reluctant if he had tried.

And even though his offer had come from a good place, even though it was quite possible he had been at work all day, and even though Casey was more worried about the caller than she was letting on, she channelled it into anger and threw it straight back in his face.

'You're not my boyfriend, you're not my brother, and you're not my dad.'

I don't need you to protect me. I don't need you checking up on me. It's not your job. Creeps contact the radio station all the time. You're overreacting. Now I have a show to get back to and I'm sure you have better things to do than talk to me. Thank you for your concern, but it's unnecessary.'

She didn't bother saying goodnight, hanging up before he could protest.

Taking her frustration out on Finn was wrong, she knew that, but it had given her anger, which was now usurping her fear. That was good. Anger was stronger. She wouldn't let some asshole caller get the better of her. This was her show and she called the shots.

She read out a couple of requests, lined the songs up back-to-back to give her a chance to stretch her legs. As the first tune kicked in, she pulled off the headphones, started to get up.

The phone started ringing again and she glared at it. Finn probably didn't like the fact she had hung up on him.

She snatched up the receiver, ready for a fight. 'East Coast Radio. How may I help you?'

'You cut me off!'

The voice was angry, it wasn't Finn, and Casey froze.

'Steven?'

Why the fuck was he calling back? What the hell did he want?

'You cut me off, Casey, when I was talking on-air. Why did you do that?'

'I'm sorry, I only have an allotted time for each request and I needed to play your song.'

She thought she sounded apologetic enough, and technically it was kind of the truth.

'LIAR!'

She jumped at the vehemence in the man's voice.

'I'm not lying, now if you'll excuse me, I played your request and—'

'You've disappointed me, Casey, and I'm afraid there will be consequences for that. Now I want you to listen to me carefully.'

'No, I want you to stop harassing me.' She tried to keep her voice assertive, her tone firm, but inside she was shaking. 'I'm hanging up now. If you call back I'm going to ring the police.'

'If you hang up, she dies. If you call the police, she dies.'

What? Who was going to die? What the hell was he talking about?

He had her attention now and he knew it.

'We're going to play a game. Are you good at riddles, Casey?' When she

didn't answer, he snapped at her. 'I asked you a question. Are you good at riddles?'

'What do you want from me?'

'I want you to save her.'

'Save who?'

'Think about my song. Think about the lyrics. You'll find her where the cattle are no longer lowing, east of the bridge.'

'What?'

'I was going to give you until 3am, but you disrespected me and I have to punish you for that, so I'm docking half an hour. You have until 2.30am, so when your show finishes, you'll need to move quickly.'

He was clearly crazy and Casey was about to disrespect him again by cutting the call, but then he asked her a question that made her blood run cold.

'You saved one life, but can you save them all?'

Was he referring to Amanda Haines?

'What have you done?' she asked quietly, aware the second song had just started and she only had another couple of minutes before she was back on-air.

'At the moment, nothing, and I'm giving you a chance to stop this. Your show finishes at 1am. You have one-and-a-half hours to find her. At 2.30am I will be taping a plastic bag over her head. She won't have long then. If she dies before you get to her, it will be your fault. Do you understand?'

Casey squeezed her eyes shut. This wasn't real. He was messing with her.

'I asked you a question. Do you understand?'

'Why are you doing this?'

'Because I can. Now let me go over the clues again. My song, the lyrics. You'll find her where the cattle are no longer lowing, east of the bridge. Are you paying attention, Casey?'

Her mouth was so dry, she found it hard to speak.

'Casey, I need you to answer me. You really don't want me to dock more time.'

'Yes.'

'Good girl. Now listen to me carefully. You are to call no one. No police, no friends, no family. Only you can save her and you come alone. If you call anyone, if you try to trick me, I will know. If you do any of those things, the plastic bag goes on sooner. I am trusting you to do the right thing. You want

to save her. You don't want her to die. She is counting on you. Save her, Casey. Before she takes her last breath.'

The line went dead and for a moment Casey couldn't move. She was aware of the Elbow song that was playing in the background, knew as she stared at the receiver that she had to get her shit together. What the hell had just happened? There was no way the caller – Steven – had been serious. It was a prank. A tasteless prank.

Maybe he had figured out who she was, knew about her connection to Steven Noakes, and decided to have a little fun at her expense. See if he could fool her into driving out into the countryside in the middle of the night, probably wanting to try and scare her.

Well he had certainly done that. Her focus was shot and she couldn't stop shaking.

She reached for her water bottle, took a couple of swigs, then tried to concentrate on her breathing. How the hell was she supposed to do the rest of her show after that call?

Breathe, Casey. She put the earphones back on and tried to focus on her final request as the Elbow song finished. When she spoke her voice sounded distant and disjointed, like it wasn't hers. She tripped over her words badly as she read out the next message and introduced the song, putting her head in her hands as soon as it started playing.

Jesus, Casey, pull it together.

What kind of sicko joked about suffocating someone with a plastic bag?

For a moment she was tempted to call Finn back and tell him what had happened. His number would be programmed into the station phone. She had behaved badly and been rude to him, though, and what she really needed to do was apologise for being a bitch. She decided she would do that, but separate from this.

What if this man... Steven, was telling the truth? What if he really was planning to try and kill someone? While it was more likely to be a prank, Casey guessed she couldn't dismiss it being real. But what was she to do? Try and solve his riddle, then drive out alone to wherever to try and find whoever he was threatening to kill? That would be both stupid and dangerous.

He had said not to call the police, but how would he really know if she did?

Though if she did call them, what the hell was she supposed to tell them?

They would just think she was hysterical and overreacting. Would they really take her seriously?

But if I don't call them and a woman dies...

If that happened and Casey hadn't tried to stop him, she wasn't sure she could forgive herself.

Her mind made up, she went to an ad break and lined a couple of songs up, then picked up the phone and dialled 999.

Casey has ignored my instructions. This is really very disappointing as I had made myself perfectly clear. Unfortunately, she is going to have to learn the hard way. Games have rules and if the players break the rules, there are consequences.

I know this. Saffron knows this too. She heard the conversation, understands what is going to happen to her. The game is tough and I am not sure Casey would have figured it out in time anyway, but until now, at least poor Saffron had a fighting chance. But no, Casey has been selfish and she has let down her teammate.

I hold the phone up for Saffron to see the camera footage of the police car parked outside the radio station.

‘She broke the rules, Saffron. She let you down. I’m sorry.’

This is the first time I have addressed Saffron directly. The only other time she has heard me speak was when I called the radio station. I used a voice-changer app for that, so only Saffron heard the real me. It’s amazing the things you can purchase these days. Technology is definitely my friend.

Saffron shakes her head frantically, fights against the chair, her face a puffy mess of tears and snot, of cuts and bruises. It’s not an attractive look. Saffron understands the rules. She knows what is going to happen as a consequence of Casey breaking them.

I go to my car, retrieve what I need and as she sees me walking back towards her, a clear plastic bag in one hand, duct tape in the other, her struggles become more violent.

‘She didn’t care about you, Saffron. She never even gave you a chance.’

Saffron pleads with her eyes and I shake my head. ‘I’m afraid there can be no exceptions. I warned her what would happen if she called the police

and I have to show her now that I was being serious. I'm sorry, Saffron. You are a fighter and I have enjoyed our time together. I am sad it has to come to an end.'

I work quickly, securing the bag, then I switch my camera to video mode and record her struggles. It is not an easy death and I admire how she fights to the very last breath. After everything I have done to her over the past couple of days, she still wanted to live so badly. It amazes me how some give up almost straightaway, while others cling to every last hope that they will be saved.

Unfortunately for Saffron, she never had the chance. Casey stole that from her and I have to teach Casey a lesson, show her that she must follow the rules.

It's a sharp learning curve, but next time she will know better.

‘Good night’s sleep?’ Vicky commented drily as Finn stifled another yawn. He had only started his shift half an hour ago and was already on his third cup of coffee.

Last night he had been dog-tired and had turned down her offer of a nightcap, but after the conversation that had followed about Casey, he suspected Vicky was fishing to find out if he had really been in bed alone.

‘Not overly.’

‘Your new neighbour keeping you up?’

Subtlety had never been Vicky’s strongest quality. She kept pushing about Casey and it was starting to irritate Finn. They had been clear on the whole fuck buddy rule thing from the start and, until now, it had always been him stepping to one side whenever she had a new bloke on the scene. Now he had shown an interest in Casey, she was being sarcastic and was, he suspected, jealous. Not that he was flattering himself. He worked fine with Vicky as a colleague, but a relationship was never on the cards for either of them. He didn’t want that and knew she didn’t either. No, he suspected she didn’t like being the one stepping to the side.

‘In a way, yes,’ he answered to her question. It was none of her business and he was tempted to leave it at that, but the whole thing with Casey had irritated him last night. It wasn’t that she had told him in no uncertain terms to piss off. He had a hard enough exterior to deal with a knock-back. What had annoyed him, in fact, had played on his mind for much of the night, was the caller she had dealt with, who made it clear he knew she was working alone, and the fact that Casey didn’t seem to take the threat seriously.

She told Finn the man hadn’t bothered her, but he had picked up on the tone of her voice as her show continued, listened to her tripping over her

words, sounding downright uncomfortable and distracted at times, and he knew she was lying. In the end he had turned off the radio and put on the TV for a bit, but she played on his mind, and he hated knowing that she was in the building all alone, would have to lock up and return to her car in the middle of the night, when no one else was about.

It wasn't his problem she had told him and she was right. What happened in Casey's life was none of his business. He didn't like that either. Fifteen years ago she had been sweet and vulnerable and he had taken advantage of her. Now she was older, guarded and certainly more jaded, and the idea that he might have contributed a small part to her being that way, pissed him off. He had lain awake for what seemed like hours, fighting every protective instinct to get in his car and drive out to Mundesley, knowing that Casey didn't want him there and that he needed to respect her decision, and when sleep had finally come, she had plagued his dreams, leading to a restless night.

Of course, he didn't tell Vicky any of this, instead, he focused on the creep who had called into Casey's show.

'She was pretty shaken up,' DC Shane McGuigan commented from across the office as Finn finished recounting what had happened.

His head shot up. 'You heard it?'

'No, I wasn't on duty. Harry took the job. He thinks the guy was just fucking with her, but he went to check it out anyway. He spoke to the deejay lady, even followed up the threat, but he didn't find anything.'

Finn narrowed his eyes. What was he missing here? 'What threat? Casey made a 999 call?'

Shane looked at him in surprise, obviously assuming he already knew all this. 'The creep who called her. The guy you were just talking about. He said that he wanted to play a game with her and that he was going to kill some woman if she didn't do as he told her.'

'What?' Finn shot up out of his chair, suddenly a whole lot more awake. Why the hell hadn't Casey called him back and told him what had happened?

'I take it you know her well, then?'

'They're just neighbours... at the moment.'

Finn's gaze cut from Vicky and her snide comment to Shane, whose eyebrows had lifted, the start of a smirk on his face.

This wasn't good. He needed to speak to his boss.



An hour later he pulled up outside the building of East Coast Radio, having learnt that Casey worked there on a Tuesday morning in a sales and marketing role.

He had spoken with her station manager and guessed she wouldn't be happy to see him, but that wasn't his problem. This was work. Finn was lead on the Saffron Pollard case and right now he needed to know if Casey's creepy caller had any connection to the missing woman.

Saffron was mentioned in the lyrics of the song he had requested, making it a little too coincidental for Finn's liking.

The station manager, a guy called Justin Walters, greeted him. He was younger than Finn, probably only mid-twenties, with slicked-back hair, dark-framed glasses that looked more like a fashion statement than a necessity, and a faint sneer. After shaking hands, he led Finn past the studio and upstairs, heading down a narrow landing and into an office that had a 'marketing' sign on the door and where wide windows overlooked the beach. Casey sat with her back to the door, earphones in and focused on a computer screen.

'Casey!' Justin barked, and her head shot round, one earphone slipping out. 'Police to see you.'

Her eyes widened as she looked at Finn and she pulled the other earphone out.

'She'll get you a drink if you want one.'

Finn decided he didn't particularly like Justin, and wondered how Casey felt about working for someone about ten years younger who appeared to look down his nose at her and talk to her like she was some kind of lackey.

'What are you doing here?' she asked, getting up from the chair as Justin left the room.

Finn pushed the door shut after him, turned back to face her, noticing the dark circles under her eyes. She would have been up late and he doubted she'd had much sleep.

Still, her anger had gone. She sounded more surprised than annoyed to see him.

'Your caller friend last night, I understand he got in touch with you again after we spoke?' Finn struggled to keep his own annoyance out of his voice.

'I... he... yes. I already went through everything last night.'

He could tell he had her flustered, confused even. Well that was tough. 'I need you to go through it again.'

'But... why?'

‘Because I have a missing woman, Casey, and her name is Saffron.’

Her face drained of colour and she sat down again. He knew she had listened to the lyrics, understood the relevance of the song to the name.

‘Do you really think...’ She trailed off, scrubbing her hand over her face and back through her hair. ‘You’d better sit down. Do you want a drink?’

‘I’m good.’ Finn gave her a hard stare, ignoring the seat she was gesturing to.

She seemed a little taken aback by that. ‘You’re mad at me, because of what I said to you last night.’

‘I’m not mad at you,’ he lied.

‘I shouldn’t have spoken to you the way I did. I know you were only trying to help.’

Irritation bristled. ‘This isn’t about you and me. This is about a woman who has been missing for two days, possibly longer. She has a five-year-old son who is wondering where she is and with each hour that passes, the chances of us finding her alive lessens, so can we focus on trying to help her?’

‘Of course.’ Her face paled further and she gripped her hands together. Finn could tell it was to stop them from shaking, and he inwardly cursed himself for being so harsh with her. She drew in a deep breath, exhaled slowly, gathering herself and regrouping, slipping on the mask before fixing him with a steely gaze. ‘What is it you want to know?’



Finn spent half an hour firing questions at her, getting her to go into detail about certain points, his frustration growing. Not only was he becoming increasingly concerned for Saffron’s safety, he didn’t like the idea that the individual who might be responsible for her disappearance seemed to have fixated on Casey.

‘I think he knows about what happened.’ She seemed almost afraid to say the words out loud.

‘Knows what?’ He suspected what she was talking about, but wanted her to say it.

‘He knew what I saw, about Amanda Haines.’ She had glanced up at him then. ‘He asked me, “you saved one life, but can you save them all?”’

A crank, possibly. At least that was what Finn hoped. Casey’s name had been in the papers. It wouldn’t have taken too much digging to find out who she was. Finding out she was a deejay, and a pretty one at that, would make

her perfect fodder.

The Saffron connection bothered him, though, and he hoped it was just a coincidence.

Before he left the radio station he strongly advised her to not do her show alone for the next few nights. She must have been shaken because she didn't argue with him, telling him that her friend, Ricky, was going to stay with her for the duration of tonight's show and she would sort someone for Wednesday and Thursday.

That was good. Finn didn't want her being alone. He pushed aside the nagging question of exactly what kind of friend Ricky was, reminding himself that it was none of his business and the most important thing was that she was safe.

He met up with Vicky back at the station in the afternoon, knew she had been to speak with Saffron's parents.

'They were a delightful pair,' she informed Finn as he fired up his computer, wanting to listen to the live call again. 'I can understand now where Saffron gets her charming personality from.'

'Unfazed that she is missing?'

'Just a bit. Her dad didn't even take his eyes off the TV. Apparently she will be on a bender. The mother took it a little more seriously, though she is secretly hoping she might get to appear on the news. She was even fretting about which top she should wear if she does, because apparently black drains her, but her nice orange one might make her look fat. Those TV cameras add six pounds, you know.'

'Nice.'

'It's sad really, because the person who cares the most about whether Saffron's okay is her ex-husband, and she treats him like shit.'

It was true. Over the years, Tony Pollard had been the target of many of his ex-wife's attacks. Finn couldn't understand how the man could still have any feelings for her.

While he waited for the computer to load, he checked in with Suffolk Constabulary. Saffron's picture had been distributed to their team, in case 'Steven' was telling the truth about being over the county line and officers had been told to keep a lookout.

'How is your deejay friend?' Vicky asked as he ended the call.

He studied her for a moment, unsure if she genuinely wanted to know if he had any new information or if this was another fishing expedition. She had

offered to go speak to Casey, but Finn had insisted on being the one to do it, and he hadn't missed the look she had given him before he left. There seemed no motive behind the question other than to ascertain if talking to her had helped their case, so he took her comment at face value.

'Pretty shaken. She's convinced whoever called her knows about her connection to Steven Noakes.'

It was the first time he had spoken with Vicky about Casey being the witness who helped put the serial killer away and he didn't know how much she already knew or if she had even made the connection. It wasn't something he had ever planned on discussing with her, but if there was a possibility that the radio caller was referencing Casey's involvement, then Vicky needed to know.

She didn't look at all shocked by his comment, which suggested she had already been doing her own research on Casey. 'And is that what you think too?'

'I think the information is there and easily accessible, but that makes it more likely to be a sick prank.'

'Or someone connected to the Noakes family, maybe looking to get revenge. Obviously that's the worst-case scenario. Saffron is missing, but we don't know for sure anything has happened to her and the call made to the radio station could have been someone messing around. But we have to look at every angle, so we can't completely rule it out.'

No, they couldn't. Finn had already chewed over the possibility it could be someone connected to Noakes. He hadn't said anything to Casey, as he didn't want to scare her, but the truth was, he didn't like that idea one bit.

For the first time since she had been given her own show, Casey was dreading going on-air.

She wouldn't be alone. Ricky was picking her up and intended to stay with her for the duration of the show, but even so, what if Steven (if that was really his name) called in again?

She honestly had no idea how she would react to that, was terrified of it happening, partly because he had scared the shit out of her, and also because his call last night had completely thrown her. She had been distracted for the rest of the show, tripping over her words and messing everything up. Justin hadn't been particularly forgiving, reminding her that a professional would manage to keep it together. He had also been unhappy that she had called the police.

Casey hadn't really had a choice though. She had no idea if Steven was playing a sick joke or if his threats were real. If she hadn't called the police and something did happen, she would be wracked with guilt.

No one had been found murdered, which suggested it was a joke, but then Finn had told her about the missing woman he was investigating and, try as she might, Casey now couldn't shake the feeling that something really bad had happened.

It didn't help that Finn had been so cold towards her today. She understood that he was just doing his job, but he had been blunt with his questions and acted almost as if he didn't know her.

She knew she deserved that after the way she had spoken to him. She hadn't just been rude, she had behaved like a complete bitch. What had happened had been a long time ago and holding a pathetic teenage-crush grudge against him was ridiculous.

He had been so good to her before the whole pub incident, dealing with Gareth, looking after her and making sure she arrived safely home. And she had lost sight of that.

Tonight, before she left for work, she intended to try and put things right by going downstairs and telling him she was sorry. She would swallow her pride, knock on his door, praying to hell his girlfriend didn't answer, then she hoped he might listen to her, realise that she had made a mistake, and accept her apology.

She took a bottle of wine with her, one she had been given as a housewarming gift, feeling that she shouldn't show up empty-handed. She didn't even know if he drank wine, but it was a token gesture and she wasn't sure what else to take.

As she knocked on the door, waited for it to open, butterflies churned in her belly and part of her hoped he wasn't home. It wasn't that she was worried about apologising. Casey had never been one to shy away from saying sorry if she knew she was in the wrong. Finn had been so annoyed with her, though, and she wasn't sure if her apology would be thrown back in her face.

She stood her ground, waited patiently, was debating whether to knock again or try later when noise came from inside the apartment and the door opened.

When he saw her standing on his doorstep, he frowned, but didn't say anything, just arched a questioning eyebrow.

'I wanted to stop by and properly apologise for what I said last night.'

When he didn't react to that, his cool blue gaze sweeping over her, she squirmed and pushed on. 'I was rude and I shouldn't have said what I did. I know that you were only trying to help.' She thrust the bottle towards him. 'I brought a peace offering.'

For a moment she didn't think he was going to accept the wine and she was aware of her cheeks heating under the scrutiny of his stare, but then he stepped back and pulled the door wide. 'You'd better come in.'

Casey hesitated, couldn't help feeling like she was being invited into the lion's den. As she stepped past him, still clutching the bottle, her arm brushed against his chest and she was acutely aware of the heat of his body, could smell the soft subtle scent of aftershave. Something kicked in her gut and the butterflies churned faster.

Finn's apartment was a similar layout to her own, but bigger and with

higher ceilings, and she glanced around the light, welcoming space, a little more at ease. French doors were opened wide and she could see the garden beyond, a blush creeping into her cheeks as she thought about the occasions she had watched him outside, enjoying the shirtless view.

Right now he was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt that hung on broad shoulders, his feet bare and his hair a tousled mess, as he studied her intently.

Aware she still had hold of the wine, Casey moved to the central kitchen island and set it down. She remained behind the safety of the counter, liking the barrier it put between them. There was no getting away from it, Finn Murphy had become even more ridiculously attractive over the last fifteen years. Back when Casey had first met him, he was only in his early twenties, still very much a boy. There was nothing boyish about him now, though, and he was pressing every one of her yum buttons. That was not good. They were neighbours, could – if she was able to get past this ridiculous crush – perhaps become friends, plus, of course, there was the whole girlfriend thing.

Casey didn't know how serious it was with Nicky/Vicky, could see no trace of a woman around the apartment – not that she was looking, of course. It was a homely, but masculine space, with no sign of feminine knick-knacks.

'I brought red. I didn't know what you drank.'

Finn nodded. 'Thanks.'

Other than telling her to come inside, it was the first word he had spoken to her. Was he still really that mad?

'You have a nice apartment. Your ceilings are really high.' *Jesus, that was goofy, Casey.*

It was, but he had her flustered and she wasn't sure what else to say. She had apologised and he hadn't really accepted or declined it, and she wasn't going to stoop to mention the weather. That left talking about the caller and the case he was working on or asking after his girlfriend. Casey had no plan to do either.

She should have just handed him the wine and gone back upstairs. Here in his apartment, trapped with all his brooding sexiness, she was painfully aware that she was acting like a gibbering fool, and her inability to behave like a normal human being around him was annoying her. She wasn't an unconfident woman. There had been plenty of boyfriends and she wasn't shy in the bedroom, so why did Finn Murphy always make her nervous?

Finn's giant of a dog picked that moment to bound in from outside, his pale face covered in dirt, from where he had clearly been digging.

‘Damn it, Bert! We talked about the flower beds.’

Bert wasn’t listening, his focus on the new person in the room and a wide grin on his doggy face as he headed for Casey, all gangly limbs and wagging tail. She glanced down at her yellow dress, which was clean on, and took a step back. *Uh oh.*

‘For fuck’s sake, Bert. No!’ Finn’s instruction fell on deaf ears as Bert leapt up, launching giant filthy paws at Casey.

She took another step back, lost her footing, and went sprawling down on her arse, wincing as she landed on the same spot she had hurt previously. Before she could move, Bert clambered on top of her, liking the game, as he slobbered wet kisses over her face.

‘Finn!’

Casey was mortified, but to be fair Finn was wide-eyed in horror as he removed his dog, especially when Casey realised her dress had ridden up and her knickers were on show. She quickly pushed the material down, but not before making eye contact with him and realising he had seen. He averted his eyes, busied himself pushing Bert back outside and closing the French doors. By the time he turned back to face her, Casey was on her feet, trying to straighten her clothing and wiping at the smears of dirt on her dress.

‘This is becoming a habit, you and your animals knocking me on my arse,’ she grumbled, her cheeks still burning.

‘I’m sorry.’

She chanced a look at him, saw he was somewhere between embarrassed and amused, the corner of his mouth twitching as laughter threatened, and her annoyance melted as she struggled to stifle her own smirk.

You really couldn’t make it up. And to be fair to Bert, not that she was ready to admit this to Finn, the dog had been the perfect icebreaker. Gone was the brooding, hard-faced man who had opened the door to her. This was the Finn she knew and, thank God, he no longer seemed angry with her.

‘Let me get something to clean your dress.’

‘It’s okay, I’ll go back upstairs and change. I have time.’

He wasn’t listening to her, was already rinsing a dishcloth under the hot tap.

Casey backed up against the worktop when he stepped into her personal space, a little taken aback when, instead of handing her the cloth, he began dabbing at the stain on her neckline himself. She didn’t attempt to stop him, though, her body very aware of his closeness and the warmth of his knuckle

against her collarbone, as he pulled the material taut.

‘I don’t think it’s going to come out without washing,’ she gently told him.

She dared to study his expression as he concentrated on the stain. The furrow between his tightly-knit brows, the long sweep of lashes, startled when he glanced up at her, the deep-blue pool of his eyes stirring up the butterflies again as he held her gaze.

‘You have a bit of dirt on your cheek.’

‘Do I?’ She was still looking at him, aware of the heat radiating from him, and her body was aching to close the gap, even though she knew it was wrong. And then his thumb was grazing down her cheekbone, his knee nudging between her legs, and she had to steady herself by holding on to the counter. His mouth was so close to hers, his breath warm on her face, lips almost touching, as he traced a path over her jawline.

Casey wanted to kiss him. She wanted his body pressed against hers. But it was wrong.

‘We can’t do this.’ She pushed him back, took a couple of big steps away from the counter, needing to put distance between them. Jesus Christ, she was going to need a cold shower before work. ‘You have a girlfriend. It’s wrong.’

She had morals. She wasn’t that girl and she wouldn’t be that girl.

‘What?’ He simply stared at her, shook his head. ‘No, I don’t.’

‘Nicky... Vicky... I met her, remember?’

‘She’s not my girlfriend.’

‘Yes, she is. You said she was. This... this is wrong.’

‘No, I didn’t.’ Finn looked both exasperated and amused. ‘She’s a police colleague. We work together.’

‘What?’ That threw Casey. Work together? But he had said...

Okay, actually, he hadn’t said. She had assumed. Though the woman had been here wearing one of Finn’s shirts the first time she had run into him, so she couldn’t be that wide of the mark. ‘But she was half-naked in your apartment.’

‘Yeah, that.’ Finn scrubbed his hands over his face, seemed to consider his words. ‘We... we kind of hook up occasionally between relationships.’

Casey’s eyes must have widened, because he quickly added, ‘But there’s nothing between us. We’re not seeing each other and neither of us want anything serious... with each other.’ His eyes twinkled and one corner of his mouth lifted. ‘She knows I like you.’

‘She does?’ Her brain processed that, her bottom lip dropping as she took in exactly what he had just said. ‘You do?’

‘Yeah, Casey, I do. I didn’t think I had been that subtle.’

And then he was closing the gap between them again and she was taking another step back, this time towards the safety of the door. His revelation had come out of the blue and she needed a little time to let it sink in.

‘I... um, I need to go and get ready for work.’

When he grinned broadly at that, looking amused that he had her flustered, her temper spiked. ‘You can’t just throw this at me, Finn. Five minutes ago you were in a foul mood and barely speaking to me. Now you’ve decided to tell me you don’t actually have a girlfriend and that you have... feelings for me, and apparently I am supposed to roll with it.’

‘I never told you I had a girlfriend. You assumed that.’

Her back was against the door now and he was still moving towards her, slower, but even so, closing in on her like some predatory animal.

‘Whatever, and stop right there, okay. Just stay where you are. Stay.’ She held up her hand to halt him from stepping into her space again, her palm hitting the wall of his chest, and she was aware of the heat from his skin, radiating through her fingers. ‘I need time to process all of this. It’s too fast.’

‘You want time?’

‘Yes! Now back off. You’re worse than your bloody dog.’

That made him chuckle, appealing dimples cutting into his cheeks as the sound rumbled low in his chest against her splayed hand. All these years later after his humiliating rejection and he had waltzed back into her life, was now telling her the words she had always wanted to hear him say, yet instead of completing her, it was scaring her half to death.

He was so different to Gareth, to Marcus, and to the other men she had been with and she remembered her one kiss with Finn so clearly, could recall exactly how it had made her feel. Gareth had never kissed her that way and she hadn’t been kissed like it since. Casey was used to being in charge of her life. She compartmentalised everything into its own place, and that included the men in her life, and she knew if she stepped off that ledge with Finn, she would lose control of that. She needed time to think through what had just happened, to consider his admission in a calm and rational way before she decided what to do about it, and she really, really needed that cold shower.

‘Okay, I can give you time.’

‘And space.’

‘Yeah, that too,’ he agreed, telling her what she wanted to hear while his hand did the exact opposite, closing over hers and removing it from his chest, taking that last dangerous step towards her.

‘Finn!’ Her voice came out as a squeak, as her heart pounded faster.

‘Hmm?’ He was a hair breadth from her, almost touching, but not quite, well, except for her hand. He still had hold of that, while the fingers of his free hand brushed her hair back from her face.

He was short-circuiting all of her senses, everything going haywire in her brain, and she couldn’t think straight. Giving in, she closed her eyes, her lips parting in anticipation, caught off guard when the stubble of his jaw grazed against her cheek, his head dipping lower until his mouth settled against her ear.

‘When you’re ready, I’ll be here waiting.’ His whisper caressed her skin, breath hot against her ear, then he stepped back, breaking the moment and Casey was glad the door was holding her up, was almost afraid to move in case she melted into a puddle on the floor.

How the fuck was she supposed to go and be a deejay now and talk to people like everything was normal? He knew what he had done, that he had just twisted her insides into knots. Oh yes, he knew. She could tell from that sly, lazy grin that was plastered on his smug face.

‘I need to go. I’ll be late for my show.’

She turned, fumbled with the door handle, all fingers and thumbs, annoyed when he reached over her and opened the door for her.

Christ, get a grip, Casey.

‘Well, enjoy the wine.’ She was stepping back out of his doorway as she spoke the words. Putting some distance between them was good.

‘I want you to call me tonight if you have any trouble.’

‘I’m sure everything will be fine.’

‘Promise me, Casey.’

‘Okay. If he calls I will let you know.’ When Finn’s eyes narrowed as if he didn’t believe her, she added, ‘I promise.’

‘And this friend of yours, tell him not to leave you alone in the studio.’

‘Stop being bossy.’

‘I’m not being bossy, I’m being concerned.’

‘He won’t leave. He’s driving me there and back.’

‘Good.’ Although he seemed satisfied with her answer, a muscle in his jaw twitched and Casey wondered if he was questioning who the friend was

and what exact kind of friendship they had. He didn't say any more, though, and she turned to go.

'Casey.'

'What?' She was getting impatient now and she needed to get upstairs and sort herself out before Ricky arrived.

'Stay safe.'

Her lips curved at that and she turned back, raising her hand to salute him. 'Yes, Dad.'

She was aware of him watching her as she walked down the hallway and she hurried up the stairs, not pausing until she reached the top floor. As she reached into her dress pocket for her door key, she let out a deep breath, tried to get her head around what had just happened.

Finn Murphy had just hit on her. It was the last possible scenario she had been expecting and she honestly wasn't quite sure how to react. Yes, she fancied the pants off him, but they were neighbours and that complicated things. For starters, she had no idea what he wanted from her, if it was just a fuck buddy thing like what he'd had with his police pal or something more serious.

She didn't do serious, panicked whenever relationships started to become so, but likewise, was just a taste of Finn Murphy enough?

This was too complicated and she grumbled under her breath about the dilemma he had presented her with as she let herself into her apartment.



At the other end of the landing, a face pressed up against the door of number ten, eye lined up with the peephole, and watched as Casey Fallon, the late-night radio deejay with the husky voice and the pretty smile, disappeared inside her apartment.

In his hand he held her underwear, a pair of simple white knickers, and he buried his nose in the soft cotton material, inhaled the sweet scent of fabric conditioner, liked knowing that she had worn these, that they had been against her most intimate of places.

It would soon be time for her show and he was looking forward to tuning in.

To Casey's relief, Psycho Steven, as Ricky had decided to nickname him, didn't make contact on the Tuesday night show. She was already distracted enough after the almost kiss with Finn, and the last thing she needed was to be dealing with a creep as well. Given how much she had been dreading her show, it actually passed quickly, and while the music and adverts were playing, she updated Ricky on what had happened in Finn's apartment.

She hadn't planned on telling him, but he had picked up straightaway that something was up and had bugged her all through the drive to Mundesley to tell him. Finally, she had caved, partly to shut him up, but also because she wondered if having another perspective might help her figure out what the hell to do.

'So he was the one that got away. But you still like him, right?'

'Well, yeah, but he flusters me. I act like an idiot when he's around.'

'That's because you love him,' Ricky said, affecting a silly voice and Casey rolled her eyes, hushing him as the song that was playing finished. She spoke with her listeners for a couple of minutes, the whole time conscious that Finn might be among them, then lined up another couple of songs.

Ricky had made himself comfortable on the sofa, was lying on his back taking up Phoebe's usual spot, his head propped up by a bright orange cushion and the beagle snoozing on his stomach as he played with her ears. As Casey pulled off her headphones, he glanced over at her, a thoughtful expression on his face.

'You know, all these years later, it's almost like fate you running into him again like this and this time you both being single. You're gonna regret it if you don't at least sleep with him.'

Casey chewed on that thought, the idea of having Finn's hands all over her sending delicious shivers down her spine.

The request half hour was the segment she had really been dreading, but it came and went without incident, all of the requests coming in via text, and she was beginning to believe Steven really was just a crank caller who had been trying to push her buttons.

By the time she was into the last hour of the show, both Ricky and Phoebe were snoring on the sofa, and she was back to being on her own. She didn't mind, though, knew she wasn't actually alone and – snoring aside – she quite enjoyed the time with her own thoughts.

After shutting everything down, she woke Ricky, letting him take Phoebe out for a pee while she switched off all of the lights and locked up the building.

Outside, the night sky was bright with stars and a full moon, the sound of the waves lapping the beach cutting through the silence. Ricky was already unlocking his car, settling Phoebe onto the back seat as Casey went over to join them. As her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she spotted a figure standing on the road beyond the radio station car park and she blinked sharply, trying to focus. Although she couldn't make out any features clearly, she was certain it was a man, and he appeared to be just standing there watching them.

'Ricky?' When he ignored her, still fussing with the dog, her whisper became an urgent hiss. 'Ricky!'

'What?'

'There's someone there.'

'What are you talking about? Where?'

'Don't turn round. Just get in the car.'

Of course, Ricky being Ricky, he didn't listen to her, straightening himself up and blatantly looking round the car park, before announcing loudly, 'Well I don't see anyone.'

Casey looked back over to where the figure was, her shoulders tensing when she realised he was no longer there.

That was all good and well, but where had he disappeared to?

'He's gone. Get in the car, I want to go.'

As Ricky ignored her, continuing to look around the car park, Casey opened the passenger door, climbed inside. Fair enough, it could have been someone completely innocent, maybe a late-night dog walker, but she hadn't

spotted a dog and it was 1.15am, which would make it really late for a dog walk. And whoever it was had been watching them. That was the bit that she didn't like.

'Can you just get in the car, please?'

'Where was he? Let me go check it out.'

'It doesn't matter. He's gone now.' *I hope.* This wasn't the time or the place for Ricky to decide he wanted to find his macho side. The walking stick put him at a clear disadvantage and also slowed him down. If anyone attacked him, he wouldn't stand a chance. Not good when he was in possession of the car keys. Besides, she had seen enough scary movies and knew in this situation it was never a good idea to investigate. 'Please, Ricky. I just want to go home.'

To her relief he finally stopped, hobbled back and got into the car, but Casey didn't feel comfortable until the engine started and he pulled out of the car park onto the road. As the headlights swept ahead, over the area where she had seen the man, she couldn't help but wonder what he had been doing standing outside the radio station in the middle of the night and where the hell he had suddenly disappeared to.



Her friends had taken it in turns to sit with her and Wednesday night Casey had Zoe for company. Tomorrow was her last show of the week and with neither Ricky nor Zoe available, Casey would have to tackle that one by herself, but at least for now she wasn't alone.

She hadn't seen Finn to speak to, and wasn't inclined to go knocking on his door again in a hurry, so he didn't know anything about the man she had seen, and as Wednesday wore on, she began to question if she had imagined seeing him, if perhaps she was still so shaken from Psycho Steven, that her mind was playing tricks on her. When Wednesday's show also passed without incident and there was no sign of the man when they made their way over to Zoe's car, Casey began to relax.

Psycho Steven had just been trying to scare her and the man she thought she had seen was almost certainly part of her overactive imagination. Yes, she wasn't going to lie, for a while there she had been spooked, really spooked, but it seemed everything was going to be okay.

Little did she know how wrong she was.



She knew something was up the moment she opened her door to Finn on

Thursday morning. This wasn't a social visit. He was wearing a suit and a sober look on his face, dispensing with any pleasantries when he asked if he could come in, and declining her offer to make him a drink.

Casey had been working outside on her balcony, enjoying the morning sunshine, and although it was warm in her apartment, the sunlight streaming through the doors and windows, her skin was prickling with goosebumps and she rubbed at her arms subconsciously. 'What's wrong?'

'Can we sit down for a minute?'

He was back to being serious, no teasing smiles or lingering looks today, and that unnerved her. 'I don't want to sit. Whatever it is, just tell me.'

He huffed a little at that, but didn't push the issue, kept his eyes on hers as he spoke.

'We had a call from Suffolk Constabulary early this morning. A dog walker found a dead woman in an abandoned cattle shed late yesterday afternoon.'

He didn't have to say the name for her to know who it was, but Casey murmured it anyway. 'Saffron.'

'We're still waiting on a formal ID, but yes, I think it's her.'

'Did he do it?' It was a loaded question, she knew that, but still, she had to ask.

'It's too early to say. The Major Investigation Team have taken over the case and they will be exploring that avenue. They'll want to speak with you at some point, too.'

'Are you part of that, this investigation team?'

Finn shook his head. 'No, I work for CID, though Saffron was my case, so there will probably be some degree of involvement.'

Casey swallowed hard. He couldn't confirm it, but they both knew it was his missing woman, Saffron, and that there was a good chance she had been murdered by the man who had called in to the radio show. After there had been no further contact from Steven, she had tried to convince herself that it had all been a sick joke.

'How did she die? Can you tell me that?'

Either he wasn't supposed to or he didn't want her to know, because his reluctance was obvious.

'Please,' Casey pushed.

He hesitated for another moment, eventually nodded, though didn't look happy about it. 'This isn't official yet, so I need you to keep quiet about it,

but she was suffocated.'

'A plastic bag?'

Finn neither confirmed nor denied. He didn't need to. Steven's threat had been true. Casey recalled his words.

You have one-and-a-half hours to find her. At 2.30am I will be taping a plastic bag over her head. She won't have long then.

Her legs were unsteady and sickness roiled in her stomach.

If she dies before you get to her, it will be your fault... Only you can save her.

She hadn't even tried. She had thought Steven was a freak, a crank caller.

No police, no friends, no family. You come alone.

Straightaway she had ignored his warning, calling the police.

If you call anyone, the plastic bag goes on sooner.

She had caused this. It was her fault the woman had died.

She dropped onto the sofa, needed to sit down before her legs collapsed. 'I did this. It's my fault she's dead. He warned me not to call the police.' Frustrated, she put her head into her hands, raked shaking fingers back through her hair. It immediately fell forward again.

The cushion dipped and she was aware of Finn sitting down beside her.

'Hey, don't do this.' He brushed her hair back again, so he could see her face. 'Listen to me. You did everything right.'

'But it wasn't enough. She's still dead.'

'Casey, look at me.'

When she ignored him, he cupped her face, gently turned her so she was facing him.

The steady blue of his eyes that had got her so worked up just a day ago now anchored her.

'Tell me. What do you think you should have done differently?'

Casey considered her answer, had a feeling he wasn't going to like it. 'If I hadn't called the police, I wouldn't have spooked him. I had the riddle. Maybe I should have tried harder to solve it.'

'We all had the riddle to work with and none of us were able to solve it. If it wasn't for the woman who stumbled across her, it could have been days before we found her. You honestly think you could have figured it out sooner? Look, you were never meant to save her. I'm sorry if that sounds harsh, but he wouldn't have dangled her there as a clue unless he knew he was going to win.'

‘I didn’t even try though.’

‘And if you had? Say you had solved the riddle all by yourself, what would you have done then? Please don’t tell me you would have considered going off to try and find her by yourself, because that would have been a pretty stupid thing to do and I would have been really pissed off with you.’

‘You were really pissed off with me anyway,’ Casey pointed out.

Finn narrowed his eyes at her. ‘Okay, that’s fair enough, but I would have been a whole new level of pissed off. You really wouldn’t have wanted that.’ The corner of his lip curved and she understood he was teasing her, trying to lift her mood. It was working. ‘You did exactly the right thing, Casey. You called the police. Yes, my ego was a little bruised that you didn’t call me, but I’ll get over that. And I want you to promise me that if this creep, Steven or whatever his name really is—’

‘Psycho Steven.’

‘You’ve given him a nickname?’

‘My friend, Ricky, has. I think it suits him.’

‘Okay, if Psycho Steven gets in touch again, I want you to promise me you will call the police, regardless of what threats he makes. Do we have a deal?’

Casey nodded, knew he was right, though she was really hoping that Psycho Steven wouldn’t call her again.

‘So this friend, Ricky. You guys are close, right?’

Was he fishing? Casey thought she could detect a note of jealousy in his tone. ‘He’s a really good friend. We go back a long way.’

‘I see. How did you meet?’

‘At a therapy group.’ Casey screwed up her nose. ‘I only went to shut my mum up.’

‘Therapy groups aren’t necessarily bad. They help a lot of people.’

‘Maybe. I wasn’t so sure and after two sessions I was toying with not going back, but then at the third session, Ricky walked in. He was a bit younger than me, really anxious about being there. I guess I was drawn to him from the start, but when he talked to the group about his dad’s reaction when he came out as gay, how he had beaten the shit out of him, I wanted to help him. I think those sessions did more for him than they did for me.’

‘Ricky’s gay?’

She was right. Finn had definitely been jealous. The relief on his face was palpable. Was it bad that she liked knowing she had provoked that reaction?

‘Yeah, had I not mentioned that before?’ she asked innocently, knowing full well that it hadn’t come up.

‘Is he going to the radio station with you again tonight?’

‘No, he can’t make it tonight.’

And Casey was dreading being there alone. She hadn’t told Finn that bit yet. Knew he wasn’t going to be happy. But what could she do? Ricky and Zoe were the only two friends she felt she could impose on and they both had plans. The idea of being by herself in the studio, especially after learning about this poor woman, Saffron, scared the shit out of her, but it was her job. She had to go.

‘So who will be there with you tonight?’

Damn it, Finn. Why did he have to ask?

‘Um... no one. I’ll be there alone tonight. Ricky and Zoe are both busy, and there’s no one else I can really ask.’

Finn’s scowl told her exactly what he thought of that idea. ‘Were you actually planning on telling me this at any point?’

‘I haven’t exactly had the opportunity.’

‘You promised me you would make sure you had someone with you each night.’

‘And I have. Ricky was with me Tuesday and Zoe did last night. What do you want me to do, Finn? They have their own lives and I can’t keep making them spend their evenings with me. I don’t really have anyone else I can ask.’

He studied her for a moment, frustration clear on his face. ‘I should be finished on time today. I’ll go with you.’

‘What?’

‘Your show starts at 10pm, right?’

‘Yes, it does, but honestly you don’t need to—’

‘I’m not letting you spend the night in the studio by yourself. Not after what happened to Saffron Pollard. Do you really want to be there alone?’

‘No,’ she admitted, though her heart was suddenly beating faster.

‘Then that settles it. Tonight I’m going with you, okay?’

‘Okay.’ And as relief warred with a fresh fluttering of the butterflies, Casey wondered what the hell she had just agreed to.

It was several months before he trusted me enough to take me out on the road with him and even then I was given strict instructions to stay in the van.

I understood his hesitancy, knew how careful he was and that he took precautions to ensure he didn't get caught, but still it was frustrating. He was teaching me, making sure I understood the rules, but it was all theory, and I was getting bored. I wanted to be a part of this, I wanted to have my turn with the knife.

Still I respected him, hanging on to every word, not only because I knew this was a unique bond that we shared, but also because I realised what a precious gift he was giving me. He had been doing this for a while, made his first kill when he was still in his teens. I knew I had a lot to learn from him.

It was early December when he told me he was going to take me on my first hunt. He called it an early Christmas present, his only instruction to me was to make sure I wore dark clothing. He picked a night when the rest of the family were away, was silent as we pulled out of the driveway and headed out into the countryside.

When we were a few miles out of Norwich, he turned into a lane that was little more than a dirt track, drove half a mile, then pulled into a small wooded car park, killing the engine.

'What are we stopping for?' He hadn't said a word since leaving the house and it made me a little nervous.

'Get out of the van.'

My heart was racing, but I did as instructed, following him round to the back, waiting as he opened the doors and pulled out one of two duffle bags.

'We need to alter our appearance,' he explained, throwing a blond wig at

me.

‘You seriously want me to put this on my head?’ I must have looked unimpressed because his eyebrows creased into a frown.

‘Yes. This is important. Put it on.’

I didn’t question him again, I had learnt that it was better not to, so I did as asked, then stood patiently while he made adjustments, pulling the hairpiece slightly forward and smoothing it down in places until he was happy. ‘Okay, that will do for this time. You’re not getting out anyway. But if we reach the point where you do, you are going to need more than a wig and I don’t want you whining about it or questioning why. If you are going to be a part of this, then you follow my rules. Do you understand?’

‘Yes.’

I watched as he changed his own appearance; the baseball cap and shaggy dark beard enough to make him unrecognisable, marvelling when he took it a step further, adding padding under his thick jumper that made him look much fatter. When he had finished disguising his own appearance he took a screwdriver from the duffle bag and spent five minutes changing the plates of the van.

‘Now we are prepared,’ he told me with a grin, throwing the old plates into the bag and re-zipping it, pushing it to one side. ‘If any CCTV cameras pick us up, they won’t be able to identify us.’

I glanced at the other bag. ‘What’s in that one?’

‘That bag contains the things we will need once we trap our prey.’ His smile widened. ‘Now come on, let’s go find her.’

As we drove he became chattier, explaining what would happen when we found a suitable victim, and he re-emphasised that I was not to get out of the van under any circumstance.

‘There will be a window of about a minute when the opportunity arises. That’s why I need you to observe for now and watch what I do. That’s a minute for me to surprise her, knock her unconscious, get her in the van and tie her up. There’s no time to think about it, no room for error, and I have to act fast, because there are too many things that can go wrong. Even if there is no one around when I grab her, that can change quickly. Another motorist, a cyclist, jogger or dog walker passing by. If they see me, I’m screwed. I have the element of surprise, but only for a second. If I lose that, it gives her a chance to fight back. I need to get that strike in before she realises what is happening. Once she’s unconscious, I have about thirty to forty seconds

before she wakes. Second she falls, I will get her in the van, that's half my time gone already. Doors closed, hood, cuffs and tape out. I silence her first. If she screams, someone may hear, and I can't have that. So tape up her mouth, make sure it's secure. Hood on next. That will disorientate her when she regains consciousness. Then I cuff her, wrists first, ankles second. She will be coming around by this point, but by then it is too late. She will have lost her chance of escape.'

I nodded, excited, couldn't quite believe I was going on my first hunt. He had only taken one other woman since I had caught him that day and he had allowed me in the basement room to observe, letting me touch her, pinch her by the nose, watch her struggle as she fought to breathe, but he hadn't let me touch his knives. Tonight he had promised I could play with his precious blades for the first time.

We drove out of the county, through Suffolk, going as far as the Essex border, passing through tiny villages that all looked the same in the dark. Despite it only being the first week of December, a lot of houses already had their Christmas lights up and decorated trees were visible in some of the lit-up windows. The clock on the dashboard showed it was only 8pm, but it felt a lot later. Would anyone still be out on a cold winter's night?

I asked him that question and for a few minutes I thought he was going to ignore me. He had been quiet for the last few miles and I knew he was concentrating, getting himself mentally prepared. He had been like that in the basement, so caught up in the moment that I am sure he forgot I was there.

'Just trust me,' he answered eventually. 'I know exactly what I am doing.'

We spotted her as she stepped out of the door of a brightly decorated cottage which had gone overkill with the Christmas decs, flashing lights and inflatable reindeer on the roof, while Santa and his sleigh lit up the front garden, slowing the van as she headed in the opposite direction on foot. There were maybe half a dozen houses for her to pass before the road led through the woods, with no more houses for another half a mile. Although there were street lamps, it was fairly deserted and, if luck was on our side, that was where she was heading.

He slowed the van, reversed into a cul-de-sac, then followed the path the girl was taking, passing her before she reached the woods, then pulling over onto the side of the road.

'Wait here,' he ordered, killing the lights, shutting off the engine and

climbing out of the van.

I saw the girl approach a couple of minutes later in the side-view mirror, wondering where he was and when he would make his move. It happened so quickly, so silently, I almost missed it. But then I heard a scream and a grunt and the girl was running as if her life depended on it, towards the van, towards me.

Where was he? What had happened?

He had told me to stay in the van, but this was unexpected. She wasn't supposed to get away. It wasn't supposed to happen like this. I knew I risked his wrath, but I had to do something, I couldn't just sit here.

As I climbed down from the van, stepped into her path, her eyes widened in panic, another scream peeling from her lips. She was younger than I realised. Maybe only late teens and I don't know why that shocked me. She glanced behind her and it was then I saw him, staggering forward in the road. Had she hurt him? She looked back at me, then deciding that I was perhaps the easier option to get past, she ran at me. She had picked wrong though. I might have been younger, smaller, slighter in build, but I had been working out and building my upper body strength, preparing for this moment. I caught her easily by her hair, dragging her back and knocking her to the floor, slapping my hand over her mouth to stop her screaming as I pinned her to the ground.

Then he was with me and he was mad as hell, with me and with her, pushing me off of her and knocking her out cold. I watched him carry her towards the back of the van, unsure if I should follow, deciding I would anyway. The girl came too as he was trying to cuff her ankles together, kicking out frantically and struggling to free herself. Even after she had been secured and locked in the trunk beneath the seat, I could still hear her fighting like a wild animal as she tried to break free.

We drove back to Norwich in silence. I didn't dare speak, knew I wasn't supposed to get out of the van. I had broken his trust. But then I rationalised that I had also helped him. He should be thanking me, not giving me the silent treatment. If I hadn't been there, if I hadn't acted on my instincts, she most probably would have got away.

Much later when we were in the basement and he had her tied down on the table, he turned to me and finally acknowledged what had happened.

'I told you to stay in the van.'

'I know and I was going to, but she g-got away,' I stammered, my bottom

lip trembling. He looked so angry. 'I was j-just trying to help.'

He held one of his special knives and the point of the blade was facing me as he stepped closer. 'When I give you an instruction, you listen. Don't you ever dare to disobey me again. If you do there will be consequences. Do you understand?'

I nodded. 'Yes.'

'Okay, now on this occasion you did well and we avoided what could have been a dangerous situation. I am not saying what you did was right, though, and that's why I had to make you understand that I won't tolerate you disobeying me again. No harm came of your intervention, though, so it is only fair that I reward you.' He dropped the point of the knife so it was facing towards the floor and offered me the handle. 'You helped me bring her here, so I am going to let you make the first cut. Here, take it. You have earned this.'

After taking Phoebe for a late-afternoon walk, Casey indulged in a bath. It was the first time she had used the tub since moving in, usually preferring to shower, but the stress of the day had left her with a banging headache that she was certain was tension-related.

Learning about Saffron Pollard's murder and knowing that the threat from Psycho Steven was real, then the phone call and subsequent visit she had received from the detectives in the Major Investigation Team, had put her on edge for much of the afternoon.

The detectives had insisted on going through everything again, picking apart her original statement and, unless she was just being paranoid, acting as if she might be guilty of something. Then, of course, there was the added stress of Finn Murphy and knowing she would be spending much of the night alone with him was freaking her out, especially after what had happened in his apartment earlier in the week. How the hell was she supposed to concentrate on doing her radio show while he was sitting there right in front of her?

As she poured her favourite bubble bath into the running water and waited for the tub to fill, she pinned up her hair and rolled her aching shoulders, trying to relieve the tension, and telling herself to relax. Finn was going with her as a favour, to make sure she was safe. Tonight wasn't about hitting on her. Besides, she would be working and busy with her show.

Still, she took a little extra time in the bathtub, exfoliating and shaving her legs, then using some of the fancy moisturiser Zoe had given her for Christmas that she seldom bothered with, selecting some of her better underwear and fussing about what top to wear with her jeans.

It wasn't for Finn. There was no way she was going to sleep with him.

No, this was all for her. A confidence boost.

Convincing herself the lie was true, she dabbed on her favourite perfume, then glanced at her watch. She still had an hour before she was supposed to meet him downstairs and guessed she should really have some dinner, especially as she hadn't eaten anything since breakfast. Not that she was hungry. She was far too stressed for that.

Still, she went through the motions, heating up a bowl of leftover chilli and pouring a naughty glass of wine from the open bottle in the fridge. She never drank on show nights, wanting to have a clear head, plus, of course, usually she was driving, but tonight was an exception, and she hoped the one glass might help calm her nerves.

She switched on the television as a distraction, picked at her food, but had no problem emptying her wine glass.

Now Saffron's body had been found, would Psycho Steven make contact again and how was she supposed to react if he did?

Just the thought of talking with a murderer made her want to throw up. Unable to stomach any more chilli, she scraped her plate into the bin, cleaned her teeth, then grabbed her handbag. As always, she left a couple of lamps on before leaving, hating coming back to a dark home. She toyed with not bothering with her cotton boobytrap, but reminded herself it was better safe than sorry.

Downstairs she drew in a steadying breath before knocking on Finn's door.

He opened it almost immediately, looking sinfully good in worn jeans and a loose blue T-shirt that emphasised the colour of his eyes, his lips curving in appreciation as he looked her up and down. 'You look nice.'

'Thanks.' The compliment made Casey blush and she fussed with the pretty floral gypsy blouse she had settled on. It was over the top and made her look like she was trying too hard. She should have worn a T-shirt. 'Are you ready?'

'I am. Come on, Bert.'

Casey's eyes widened as the beast moseyed on through. 'What are you doing? You can't bring your dog with you.'

'Says who?'

'Says me. He's far too big and clumsy. The studio isn't big enough for him. He'll break stuff.'

Finn nodded to Phoebe who sat obediently by Casey's feet. 'You're

taking your dog.'

'Phoebe always comes with me. She's smaller, better behaved. She—'

'Are you saying my dog has no manners?'

'No, but he... look, this won't work.' She was getting flustered now, as Finn blatantly ignored her, clipping on Bert's lead and pushing past her into the hallway, closing the door behind him. Nothing against the dog, but he was just too boisterous for the studio. If he damaged any of the equipment, Casey would be in a whole heap of trouble. 'I'm sorry. Maybe I should just go by myself.'

Finn was grinning broadly at her now, lines crinkling in the corners of his eyes, and her temper rose a notch.

'This isn't funny, Finn. It's my job that will be on the line if he breaks anything.'

'Casey?'

'What?'

'Relax.' He winked at her, then focused his attention over her shoulder. 'Thanks for agreeing to do this at such short notice.'

What? Confused, Casey turned, realising the door to the apartment opposite Finn was open and he was talking to the woman who had stepped out.

'It's no problem, Finn. I told you, we're happy to take him any time. Buster loves Bert and it's nice for him to have the company.'

'Doesn't he just,' a man agreed, stepping forward with a chihuahua in his arms. 'Look, Buster, who's come to see you for a sleepover?' he cooed to the tiny dog as Finn handed Bert's lead over to the woman who Casey assumed was the man's wife.

She smiled at Casey, clearly amused by the exchange she had overheard and Casey's cheeks heated further. 'Hi there. I don't think we've met yet. And your little dog is adorable.'

'This is Casey. She recently moved in upstairs. The beagle is Phoebe,' Finn introduced, the shit-eating grin on his face suggesting he was enjoying himself. 'Casey, meet your neighbours, Dee and Stuart Beharrie, and Buster the chihuahua.'

'It's nice to meet you, Casey and Phoebe.'

From behind Dee, Stuart gave a little wave. 'Hi, Casey. Finn's told us all about you.'

He has? 'Umm... It's nice to meet you both too.'

Finn slipped his arm around Casey's waist, catching her off guard and pulling her close. 'Dee and Stuart look after Bert for me when I'm on shift and they've kindly agreed to take him tonight. I didn't think it was fair to leave him home alone all night when I've already been out all day.' He glanced down at her, amusement glittering in his eyes.

'That's very nice of them,' Casey agreed, trying unsuccessfully to extract herself from his grip without it looking too obvious to Stuart and Dee.

'Don't worry about Bert,' Dee assured Finn. 'He'll have a great time. Just pop over and pick him up tomorrow, whenever you're ready.' She gave a sly smile. 'We don't want to get you up too early.'

'Thanks, Dee, Stu. You guys are lifesavers. I owe you both another bottle of whisky.'

'We won't say no to that.' Stuart winked. 'You kids have a good time. Don't do anything we wouldn't do.'

As the door closed and Finn guided Casey down the hallway towards the main entrance, the beagle tugging ahead of her on her lead, she tried yet again to wriggle free of his arm. 'Why does he think we're going to have a good time? What did he mean by that? Where exactly did you tell him we were going?'

'I told them I was taking you out on a date.'

'What?' When she couldn't shake off his arm, Casey stopped abruptly. 'Why would you tell them that? This isn't a date.'

'Would you rather I told them the truth, that I'm going with you to the studio because some whack job who was calling your show might have killed someone?'

'Well... no, but you didn't have to tell them we were going on a date.'

'I needed them to take Bert for the night. I had to tell them something.' Finn leant down so his mouth was close to her ear. 'And you might want to keep walking and play along,' he whispered. 'Mrs Fletcher has her door ajar and I can guarantee you that her radar ears will be listening to everything we're saying.'

Casey was tempted to glance over her shoulder and see if he was telling the truth, but thought better of it. 'Can you please let go of me?' she grumbled as they reached the door. 'I am capable of walking out to your car by myself.'

'Sure thing.' He dropped his arm and her body immediately missed the contact, despite her head telling her she had won the argument.

She was being ungrateful and irrational, she knew that. But first he had made her look foolish over his dog and now she had found out he had told his neighbours that they were dating. He was purposely pushing her buttons and making her bite. As she followed him down the steps and over to his car, she wondered again if taking him with her tonight was a huge mistake.



Finn had taken a book to read, but he found himself mostly distracted by Casey, watching her as she spoke into the mic, chatting to her audience, a slight crease in her brow as she checked her email and text messages. She had been fairly quiet on the ride over and initially he thought she was still annoyed with him for winding her up, but as they got closer to Mundesley he realised she was nervous about her show, the telltale signs obvious from the way she fidgeted with her hands in her lap, kept knotting them together, hard enough for her knuckles to turn white, in an effort to keep them still, and she seemed distracted, was biting into her bottom lip each time he glanced in her direction, a gesture that was getting him a little hot under the collar, given that he would like to be the one doing the biting.

Don't go there, Finn. He pulled his mind out of the gutter, reminding himself he was here tonight as Casey's friend. He had promised her he would give her time, would wait for her to come to him, and he intended to do that. Well, within reason. He might give her a few little nudges along the way. He was a patient man, but not that patient.

When they had arrived at the radio station the only other person in the building was the deejay who Casey was taking over from. A guy old enough to be her granddad, with more fur on his face than a womble, who she introduced as Kenny Lee. The man was harmless enough, certainly didn't set any alarms off on Finn's radar. She asked Kenny to lock the door on his way out, settling herself in the chair and getting ready to take over following the news, while Finn made himself comfortable on the sofa with Phoebe.

She was right that Bert would never have coped in the studio and he recalled her panic when she had thought Finn was serious about bringing him. She had bitten so easily, he hadn't been able to resist winding her up, enjoying her reactions as her eyes sparked with anger and her cheeks heated as she became flustered. Looking at her now, headphones on as she spoke into the mic, she appeared cool, calm and collected, but he knew she hid her fears well, that beneath the surface she was a jittery bag of nerves.

Psycho Steven. He had chuckled at that nickname, but guessed it was

quite apt. The arsehole was scaring Casey, had likely murdered Saffron Pollard. Finn wanted to nail him. It was out of his hands though. The case was with the MIT now. The best he could do was try and keep Casey safe on his own watch.

She hadn't spoken to him since the show started fifteen minutes ago, hadn't even seemed to notice he was there, and he enjoyed the view of her over his book, her long dark hair tied back in a loose knot, tendrils that had escaped framing her face whenever she leant towards the mic, and that pretty pink blouse she wore, covered in delicate flowers, demure on the sleeves, but thin enough for him to see the outline of her bra, and dipping low enough in the cleavage to have his mind really working overtime. He had listened to her show a couple of times in the last week, her voice always conjuring up a picture of her in his mind, but the reality of what she looked like sat behind the big desk with those oversized earphones on, was far better than anything he had imagined.

As the next song started playing she glanced up, locking eyes with him, and slipped the earphones off her head, a half-smile lingering on her lips. 'Why are you looking at me like that?' She pushed a strand of her hair back self-consciously.

Because I'm thinking about that blouse you're wearing and how much I would like to rip it off you with my teeth.

Seriously, do not tell her that. You'll freak her out.

Finn grinned, tried to push the thought away. 'I like watching you work. You get caught up in what you do.'

That was better. Casey wasn't a Vicky. He needed to take it slower, be a little more patient, but that was okay. He figured she was worth the effort.

Her smile widened and she gave a nervous laugh, shoved at her hair again. 'Yeah, I guess I do get a little caught up with it all.'

Was he really making her that anxious? He didn't like the idea of that at all.

But then her eyes drifted to the clock and he mentally kicked himself, understanding. She wasn't scared of him. It was twenty past ten and that meant the request half hour started shortly. She was worrying about Psycho Steven, was fretting in case he made contact again.

'He may not call.'

'Huh?' She had been distracted, caught up in her own thoughts, and she looked back sharply at him, having missed his comment.

‘I said he might not call. It’s nearly the request half hour, right?’

Her smile was tight this time. She was definitely worried. ‘I know that. He hasn’t called for the last two nights. No need for him to call tonight, right?’

When Finn went to speak again, she raised a finger to silence him, slipping the earphones back on. ‘You’re listening to Casey Fallon on East Coast Radio and we’re coming up for the request half hour. If you have a special song you would like played, either for yourself or a loved one, give me a call, or if you’re shy, you can drop me a text or an email.’

He listened to her give out the mobile number for texts and her email address, before cutting to an advert break, and she immediately turned to her computer screen to check the emails.

‘Anything suspicious?’

She had told him about the odd email exchange with another ‘Steve’ that had happened on the Thursday night, recovering the messages from her deleted folder and pinged them over to him. Given the song request, ‘Harder to Breathe’, and the fact the email exchange had taken a lewd and creepy tone, Finn was convinced it was the same person.

‘No, nothing from him. Just one sixtieth birthday song request.’ As she set up the song, the mobile pinged a couple of times and as soon as she had finished, she read the texts. ‘These are fine too. There’s nothing from Psycho Steven.’

Still, for the next half an hour Finn could tell she was on edge, her relief clear when she played the final song before cutting to the news.

After the clock struck eleven she started to relax, going through into the breakroom while the adverts played and making coffee, and she was far more talkative between songs, seemed happier in Finn’s company. As Phoebe snoozed they chatted about everything from the paths their lives had taken including past relationships (one failed marriage and two steady girlfriends for Finn, quite a few short-term boyfriends, but zero engagements or marriages for Casey. That had him curious, wondering why she had never settled, but he decided to save poking that wasp’s nest for another day), Finn’s career in the police and Casey’s freelance web design work, and their friends, Casey telling him more about Ricky and how protective she was of him and Zoe, who he remembered from that fateful night in the pub, while Finn told Casey how he was still best mates with Johnny, who Zoe had hooked up with that night. Neither of them mentioned Steve or Gareth

Noakes or that Gareth had taken his own life. Instead, they kept to lighter topics, Finn groaning about some of the music that was being played, teasing Casey for having terrible taste despite her protestations that she didn't get a say in the music, that the radio station bosses decided on her playlist. They also discussed the book Finn was reading, *Helter-Skelter*, about the Manson murders, Casey admitting she preferred chick-lit, no longer having the stomach for anything darker, then they had fun creating their top fives – bands, foods, smells, dinner-party guests and movies among the topics.

The more time he spent with her, the more tempted he was to break his promise to give her the space she had asked for. Pushing her away that night all those years ago was one of his biggest regrets and, while it had been the right thing to do, he still wished he had done things differently. Now she was back in his life and they were both single, and he didn't want to waste any more time.

As her show entered the last half hour, he got up to stretch his legs, taking their empty cups through to the breakroom and washing them up before using the loo.

Out in the hallway of the building he spent a couple of minutes checking out the place, wanting to be certain that the building really was secure and that if Casey was here by herself in the future, no one could get in.

Satisfied it was, he returned to the studio, heard Casey announce she was going to play a Rod Stewart track followed by a Fleetwood Mac classic back-to-back. He studied her for a moment as she removed the earphones and busied herself with checking her emails. The knot she had tied her hair back in had become looser as the night wore on and she kept flicking the loose tendrils back in annoyance.

Sensing he was there, she glanced up from the screen, arched an eyebrow when she saw him leant against the door frame. 'What's up with you?'

'Nothing. Just watching you.'

She gave an impatient little laugh at that, turned back to her emails, looking up again when he wandered over to her.

'What are you doing?' she demanded as he stepped behind the desk, moved to stand behind where she was sitting. 'I need you to stay over there. If you accidentally touch anything, you could mess everything up. Go!'

Ignoring her, he swung her chair around so she was facing him, leaning over her when she started to get up, placing a hand on each arm of the chair, his legs straddling hers, effectively trapping her.

Her eyes widened. 'This isn't funny. Go sit down. I mean it, Finn. Shoo!'

'Shoo?' Finn wrinkled his nose. 'Did you seriously just tell me to shoo?'

'You're annoying me. Go sit down! The song is almost finished and I need to go back on-air.'

Damn it, she was bossy.

'The song has only just started and you have two lined up back-to-back.' She opened her mouth to argue and he raised a hand, put a finger over her lips. 'I was paying attention.'

That shut her up and rather than remove his finger, he gave in to the urge to trace a path along her bottom lip.

Casey went very still, her breathing slowing and becoming deeper as she watched him, the spark of annoyance in her eyes melting into something else. She reached up, caught hold of his hand, but made no attempt to move it, just as she made no attempt to stop him when he leaned closer so his lips were almost touching hers.

'You said you were going to give me some time and...'

He didn't give her a chance to finish the sentence, his mouth pressing against hers. He kept the kiss light, fighting against the need to deepen it. That wasn't for now, not for tonight. He just wanted a taste.

Still, he almost gave in when she made a little noise in the back of her throat, her arms moving to link around his neck, trying to pull him closer. He forced himself to pull back, freed himself from her grip, saw the anger flash back into her eyes.

'What the hell was that?'

'You were right. I said I'd give you time and space. That wasn't fair. I'm sorry.'

'What?' She was furious, but he could see she wasn't sure how to act on it. Did she get mad at him for kissing her or for stopping it before it went further? If she did the latter, she would have to admit that she didn't want the time and space. As she looked ready to wallop him, he quickly retreated back to the sofa, half expecting something to be thrown his way.

She ignored him after that, but made sure he knew she was pissed off, her movements jerky and angry, as she punched the keyboard and shoved things about on the desk, and Finn questioned if he had just made a really stupid move, knowing that he had to ride home in the car with her.

She had just signed off with the final song of the night and was starting to shut everything down, and he was toying with the best way to make peace

with her before they left the studio, when she suddenly went completely still, her concentration focused on her computer monitor, her expression one of shock.

‘Casey?’

She didn’t answer him for a moment, just continued to stare at the screen, but then she eventually spoke. ‘It’s him.’ Her words were barely more than a whisper and without glancing up, she beckoned Finn over.

This time, she didn’t protest when he stepped behind the desk, placing a hand on her shoulder as he leant over her to read the screen.

Are you ready to play another game, Casey?

You fucked up last time and Saffron had to die. I told you not to call the police.

Poor Saffron. I made sure she suffered as a consequence of your stupidity. She knew it was all your fault when she took her last breath.

I believe in second chances, though, so I am going to give you one. This weekend I will take another. When I have the game set up I will be in touch with another riddle. I will give you a chance to save her.

Try a little harder this time, bitch. If you screw up again, I will make sure her last minutes on this earth are a living hell.

‘Why is he doing this?’

‘I don’t know, but I promise you we will find out who he is.’ It was a promise he knew he shouldn’t make, but Casey sounded so broken, it was all he could offer. ‘It’s not your fault, Casey.’

‘I shouldn’t have called the police.’

‘Hey, don’t you dare say that.’ He pulled her chair round again to face him, though this time there was none of the same tension. Instead, he dropped down beside her so they were eye to eye. ‘I want you to listen to me. Calling the police last time was the smartest thing you could have done. He wants to isolate you. He wants you fighting him alone. You won’t beat him that way, I promise you.’

She nodded at that, though he could see that she was torn, part of her wanting to believe he was right, the other part convinced she was responsible for what had happened to Saffron.

‘Can you forward me that email?’

When she nodded, he reminded her of his work address, waited until she had sent it. ‘All done.’

‘Come on, shut everything off and let’s get out of here. There’s nothing

else you can do about this tonight.'

While she logged off the computer and shut down the system, Finn got the lights, waited for her to join him by the studio door. 'You okay?'

She nodded, though the spark had gone out of her, and he wasn't quite sure how to get that back. He ran his hand down her arm, gave her fingers a brief squeeze.

Whoever the fuck this Psycho Steven was, he had fixated on Casey, seeming to want her to save his victims. It had to be connected to Noakes. Somehow they needed to figure out what his endgame was. Did he intend to keep killing women and inviting Casey to try and save them or did he have something more sinister planned?

Friday passed in a whirl of activity, Casey barely able to think straight as she dealt with yet another visit from the police. They then wanted her to go over to the radio station with them, which delighted her boss, Justin, especially when he was dragged into answering their questions, too, and he didn't look overly thrilled when the detectives announced they would be sitting in on Casey's show on Monday night.

Finn was there for some of it, talking with the leading detective, their hushed conversation getting heated at one point. From what Casey could make out, DC Walsh from the Major Investigation Team did not like Finn, who was in the Crime Investigation Department, poking his nose into what Walsh now viewed as his case. He hadn't looked overly impressed that Finn had been in the studio with Casey on Thursday night, though she guessed there wasn't a whole lot Walsh could do about that. It had been off the clock and Finn had been there as a friend. As much as he had annoyed her last night, she preferred the idea of being with him rather than a couple of officious detectives who kept making her feel like she had done something wrong.

Finn had exchanged a couple of glances with Casey, but they hadn't spoken, and when he had eventually left, he hadn't looked happy.

They hadn't talked much after leaving the radio station following her Thursday night show. Casey was in shock, sick to her stomach over the email she had received, while Finn was mostly silent as he drove home, and she suspected his mind was working overtime as he considered the threat and how best to deal with it.

Casey still hadn't forgiven him for the shitty stunt he had pulled, kissing her and then backing off when she had reacted, leaving her feeling both

stupid and confused, but she had put that to one side after the email came in, relieved that he was with her and she didn't have to deal with Psycho Steven while she was in the studio all alone.

When they had arrived home, it had been a muted parting of ways. Casey had thanked him for coming with her, though kept her distance in case he tried to pull another move on her, then gone upstairs alone to her own apartment, where she had a restless night, unable to sleep because every time she closed her eyes all she kept doing was replaying the bloody kiss.

At some point she was going to have to address her feelings for Finn and figure out exactly what it was that she wanted. For now, though, she had put them into a box to come back to later.

After the chaos of the day, she jumped at a late invitation from Ricky to go to the cinema with him, switching off her brain as they enjoyed a laugh-out-loud comedy, then grabbed a bite to eat from Ricky's favourite takeaway shop. As they sat down by the river enjoying the warmth from the early evening sun and munching on kebabs, they laughed about the movie, the conversation becoming more serious when Ricky made a joke about Psycho Steven.

Casey debated about whether to say anything to him, knew DC Walsh had urged her to stay quiet about the email. Ricky knew her too well, though, picking up that something was wrong, just from how she went quiet and her expression became guarded.

'Something else has happened, hasn't it?'

'What?'

'You can't fool me, Casey. It's written all over your face.'

She would never make a good poker player. Both Ricky and Zoe could read her like a book. 'He emailed the show late last night,' she admitted. Walsh had asked her to stay quiet, but Ricky already knew most of what was going on. Besides, he was one of her closest friends and she needed to have someone to talk to.

When his eyes widened, she told him about Saffron's murder and then what the email had said.

'Jesus, Casey. Are the police taking this seriously? Psycho Steven seems to have a hard-on for you.'

Casey winced at the crude terminology. Typical Ricky though. Say it as it was. 'I've been with them for most of the day, so yeah, I would say they are.'

Talk of the murder and Psycho Steven killed her appetite, the food she

had already eaten sitting heavy in her stomach, and as she got up to throw the rest of her kebab away in the nearby bin, Ricky immediately grabbed at her hand. ‘Hey, whoa, wait a minute. What are you doing?’

‘I’m not really hungry.’

‘It’s polite to offer first.’

‘You’ve just eaten a whole kebab yourself.’

‘And I’m a growing lad.’ Ricky patted at his flat stomach. ‘Besides, I don’t like to see waste.’

‘Of course you don’t.’ Casey rolled her eyes, but handed over the food as asked, amazed at the huge bite he took, almost devouring the half kebab she had left.

‘So was Detective Dishy with you last night?’ he mumbled through his mouthful, spitting out bits of lettuce.

‘You are disgusting. And Detective Dishy? Does anyone other than my mum actually use the word “dishy”?’

‘I think it’s a fine word. Anyway, stop dodging the question. Was he with you?’

‘Yes,’ Casey admitted.

‘And?’

‘And he stayed during the show, kept me company exactly how you and Zoe did.’

Liar. She ignored the annoying voice. There was no way she was telling Ricky about the kiss. Absolutely no way. That stayed a secret until she had decided what to do about it.



Some people will do anything to get their fifteen minutes of fame and that includes the next lady to grace my table.

Lucy Sheldon started out as a budding young reporter for one of the local newspapers and during the early part of her reporting career she was fortunate enough to cover the Steve Noakes murder trial, coining such headlines as ‘How Norfolk’s own Fred West Hunted for his Victims’ and ‘Sicko Steve’s Torture Hellhole Revealed’. Using the serial killer to climb the ladder, she moved to London, working at a couple of the big tabloids before deciding she would write a true-crime book based on – you guessed it – her meal ticket, Steve.

Despite being picked up by a major publisher and touted as the next big thing, the book flopped, and Sheldon eventually returned to Norfolk older,

jaded and still desperately looking for her next vehicle; that one that was really going to make her into a star.

She is now an 'Influential' (define that as you will) Instagrammer and YouTuber with a fairly decent following, blogging and offering support to victims of serious crime, though still wanting something big that is going to lift her to the next level.

I am going to give her that break, but little does she know quite how she is going to get it.

Lucy Sheldon has built her career on the backs of other people, especially those less fortunate than herself. While Steve Noakes languishes in jail, Lucy has cashed in on his name. Therefore, when she gets my carefully worded email, she is quick to jump at my proposal.

Now most women would not be up for meeting a stranger in a remote location late at night, but Lucy is power hungry and knows that to get ahead in life you have to take risks.

She also has videos on YouTube where she teaches women how to defend themselves if attacked. Quite ironic really how I catch her off guard, overpowering her more easily than most of the women I take.

As I drive her home I am excited that Lucy will finally get to see for herself what the inside of a serial killer's lair looks like and understand for the first time how it really feels to be a victim. I am going to ensure that she is famous, that she goes down in history, but first I need to make her understand that those fifteen minutes she wants so badly come at a really high price.



Casey had put Finn in a box and marked it as to deal with later, but that didn't help when they both lived in the same building, and it was inevitable that she was going to keep bumping into him.

After returning home from the cinema she took Phoebe for a short walk around the grounds of the house, her heart catching when she spotted Bert up ahead, nose in the flower beds, knew that Finn would be close by.

As Bert heard their approach, glanced up, a grin on his doggy face as he spotted them, bounding towards Phoebe, all shaggy coat and tongue, Finn appeared round the corner, the surprise on his face when he saw Casey turning into a smile.

'You okay?' he asked, as he wandered over, looking far too good to her tired eyes.

Casey glanced down at the dogs to check they were playing nicely. Bert was scurrying along after Phoebe with his nose up her bum again, but she didn't seem bothered now she was getting used to him. 'Yeah, manic day. It's nice to finally have some downtime.'

'I came upstairs to see you earlier.'

'You did? Why?'

She must have looked a little startled, because his smile widened. 'Don't panic. I just wanted to check on you. You were pretty stressed when I saw you today.'

She processed that bit of information, not sure if she was touched that he had cared enough about her to want to know how she was or was freaked out by the reminder that she was now that accessible to him that he could easily show up at her apartment whenever he wanted. 'I was stressed. They just kept asking the same questions again and again. I don't think they believe me.'

Finn studied her for a moment, giving a little nod. 'Yeah they do. They're just doing their job.'

'I was out.'

'Sorry?'

'You said you came upstairs to see me. I was out.'

'Yeah, I kind of figured that when you didn't answer,' he told her, looking amused. 'Either that or you were hiding from me.'

'I went to see a movie with Ricky. I just needed to switch off, try and forget about everything for a bit.' Why was she telling him this? He didn't need to know the details. She was babbling. A bad habit of hers.

'Okay. And do you feel more relaxed?'

'A little, I guess.'

'Why don't you take Phoebe back upstairs, then come down to my place. I have something that will help you relax.'

Casey's eyes widened, her mouth dropping open. 'What?'

For a second Finn looked slightly confused by her reaction, then he burst out laughing. 'Brandy. I have brandy.'

'Brandy?'

'Yes, I was suggesting you come downstairs for a nightcap. Jesus, what did you think I meant? Get your mind out of the gutter, Fallon. You're sex-obsessed.' He gave her a sly smile. 'Of course, we can negotiate other stuff if you really want to.'

'Negotiate?' She spluttered the word. If her cheeks weren't flaming

before then they were now, and she was just relieved it was almost dark and he couldn't see her properly.

'You getting your hands on my body. I'm open to being bribed.'

'No need. And that was not what I was thinking,' she lied, though knew she had been caught out.

'But what about the nightcap? Are you up for that?'

Casey thought back to what had happened the last time she had been in Finn's apartment. It was a bad idea. 'I'm knackered, so I'm going to pass, but thank you.'

'Okay, well the offer is there if you change your mind.'

From the cocky smile on his face, Casey was pretty certain he was no longer talking about the brandy.



Saffron Pollard was a struggler, fighting for every last breath, and I appreciated that, but Lucy Sheldon is an actress. She is putting on a performance for me, imagining the cameras are rolling, trying to plead with her eyes. We have just had a chat (that's as in, I talked, she listened) and she now understands exactly who I am and how she fits into this game.

I get her type. She is a barterer. When I give her the opportunity to speak, she will beg and plead with me, offering her services. Lucy wants to be famous and she really wants to be alive. She will throw anyone necessary under a bus to achieve both of those things.

Unfortunately, for Lucy Sheldon it is not going to play out that way.



Casey considered Finn's thinly veiled offer as she stepped into the shower, which led to her imagining his body pressed against hers, lips, hips and thighs touching, his hands on her back, on her bum, his tongue in her mouth, on her breasts, between her legs.

Cursing his name, she turned the temperature to the coolest setting, but as she dried herself with the towel she was already warming up, the frustration creeping back in.

She kept her relationships short and sweet, making sure that when it came to severing ties, it was clean-cut. It wouldn't be that way with Finn. He lived in the same building and it would be impossible to avoid him.

Slipping on a skimpy cotton vest, she fetched an ice-cold bottle of water from the fridge and took a long drink, knew she was exhausted and frustrated after a long day. All she needed to do was go to sleep. The horny feeling

would pass.

Except it didn't, and she spent fifteen minutes tossing and turning, sleep seeming a million miles away.

Eventually the Devil won. Finn was an itch that she needed to scratch. Damn the consequences. She would figure out a way to deal with them in the morning.

She didn't bother to dress, crept downstairs in her skimpy vest and knickers, a not particularly discreet robe hiding her modesty, hoping to hell none of her neighbours were still up.

Praying that Stuart and Dee Beharrie didn't open their door, she knocked on Finn's, willing him to answer. When he did he didn't seem surprised to see her, lips curving in appreciation as he looked her up and down.

'You changed your mind on that nightcap, then?'

Casey nodded, took that step between them, her intentions clear. It was a plunge off the cliff that she would figure out a way to deal with later.

Was she making a huge mistake?

But then Finn's hands were cupping her arse, the door had closed and she was pressed up against it, his mouth on hers, showing her how badly he wanted her, and there was no going back.

As he pulled her closer, lifting her up so her toes barely touched the ground, trailing hot, tormenting kisses down her neck, she hooked her legs around his thighs, let him carry her through to his bedroom.



When it is time for Lucy Sheldon's performance, I will dress her and I will pose her. Saffron Pollard was a warning shot, Lucy will show that I mean business, and she will hopefully provide enough clues for Casey and her arrogant copper friend to start joining the dots. Before her performance, though, it is time for my own personal indulgences. After all, it would be unfair for me to do all this work and not reap any of the rewards. For the next three days, Lucy is my house guest and I have so many fun things planned for her.

I consider my tools carefully, deciding how I will torment her first. This time, I have to be careful not to get carried away. I must not go too far. Saffron almost didn't make it off my table and that would have been a catastrophe.

That is why I am playing it differently this time. I never spoke to Saffron until we were in the cow shed, preferring to draw out her fear through my

silence, but Lucy reacts better to words, so I am giving them to her, considering it a kind of foreplay as I taunt her by going into detail about how I am going to hurt her. By the time I take out my knives she is hysterical.

I choose my favourite one, resting the blunt edge against her cheek, slowly tracing it down her jaw and neckline and teasing it across her throat. She goes very still, begging me with her eyes, and I dip the knife lower, enjoying this game, feeding off her fear as she tries to prepare for the first cut.

It won't come yet. I need to pace myself with Lucy, stay in control, and unfortunately for her, that means she has a long night ahead of her.

As early morning sunlight streamed through the open blinds, waking Finn, he shielded his eyes and rolled over on to his side to face Casey. She had managed to position herself towards the centre of the bed, her long dark hair spilled across the pillow she was hugging, one leg drawn up between them and her lips slightly parted. At the moment she was out for the count, unsurprising as they had been up most of the night, and she looked peaceful, but he suspected that once she was awake she would try to flee. Given that he liked having her in his bed, despite how much bloody room she was taking up, he needed to figure out a way to keep her there.

Although he was tired, he knew he probably wouldn't nod off again, so instead he contented himself with watching her sleep, her face just inches from his, resisting the urge to touch her, for fear of waking her. Eventually she changed position, rolling over so her back was to him and he gave in to the urge, brushing her hair to one side, leaving her neck and shoulder exposed, before tracing his fingertips lightly down her arm. Hearing her stir and realising she was awake, probably having a mini panic attack when she remembered she was in his bed, he slipped his arm around her, pulled her close against him, and whispered against her ear. 'Good morning.'

She immediately stiffened, didn't answer straightaway and he pressed his mouth against the nape of her neck, trailing hot little kisses just beneath her hairline, pleased when she let out a tiny gasp, well aware that it drove her crazy. Last night he had taken his time learning exactly what made her react and now he was aware of all of her weak spots, he intended to use that knowledge to his advantage.

She wriggled against him, managed to pull free, twisting over to face him, her cheeks flushed. 'Hi. What time is it?'

‘Just gone six thirty.’

‘I need to go. Phoebe’s upstairs alone and I have stuff to do.’

‘It’s still early. Besides, I can think of a far better way to start the morning.’ Finn ran his palm down her side, over the curve of her hip and round to squeeze her bum cheek.

Her eyes widened slightly at that and for a moment she seemed to be considering his suggestion, but then she dug her heels in again. ‘I didn’t get hardly any work done yesterday, so I should really play catch-up and Phoebe needs to go out.’

‘Phoebe will be fine for another hour. You don’t normally take her out this early.’

‘Yes, but—’

‘And you have all day to work, if that’s really how you want to spend your Saturday.’

As she continued to protest, he shifted his weight, rolling her on to her back and pinning her beneath him, silencing her with a deep kiss.

‘If my dog pees on the floor again, you’re cleaning it up,’ she grumbled when he came up for air, though she made no attempt to push him off, her dark eyes heavy with lust.

‘Deal,’ he agreed, sliding lower and turning his attention to her breasts, liking it when she let out another gasp as his tongue teased her nipple. An extra hour would give him time to figure out how to keep her here for longer.



It was actually gone quarter past eight when she asked the time again. This time she was flat on her back and Finn wasn’t sure she would have the energy to get up straightaway. After he had managed to persuade her that morning sex was a good idea, she had been a more than willing participant and if he hadn’t already been smitten with Casey Fallon, he was halfway in love with her now.

She surprised him, bolting out of bed before he could stop her. ‘Okay, this time I really do need to go. If Phoebe’s peed on my new rug, you are paying to have it cleaned.’

Finn propped himself up on one elbow, didn’t bother to move, enjoying the view as he watched her hunting around the room for her clothes, recalling exactly what had happened to them. ‘If I agree to pay for the rug anyway, will you come back to bed?’

She shot him a look that warned him he wasn’t to mess with her, before

disappearing out of the bedroom, and he waited patiently for her to return, for the penny to drop.

He heard her curse, fought to hide his grin as she reappeared in the bedroom, this time wearing the skimpy robe she had shown up on his doorstep in late last night. It barely hid anything and only made him want to rip it off her, much the same as he had done last night with her knickers and vest. Both items were in her hand, the vest with the broken spaghetti straps and the knickers with the... well, there wasn't really much left of those, and he couldn't quite decide if the colour in her cheeks was from embarrassment or annoyance.

'I can't wear these. They're ruined.' Her tone was calm, considering her heated expression.

'No, you can't,' he agreed. 'I guess we got a bit carried away last night.'

'We?' She raised a questioning eyebrow.

'Well, you were there and I don't remember you objecting a whole lot at the time.' When she scowled at that, he quickly added, 'Look, I'll happily buy you some new underwear. I'll even come with you and help you pick.' He chanced a cheeky grin at that, noted she wasn't quite back at the joking around stage yet.

'I can't go upstairs like this.'

'You'll be fine. I doubt anyone will be about.'

'It's nearly eight thirty. I can guarantee you if I leave your apartment dressed like this I will run into all of the neighbours.'

'I guess you'd better stay here until it's dark then and they've all gone to bed.'

'This isn't bloody funny.' She balled up her ruined underwear and threw it at him. 'You need to lend me some clothes.'

'I don't have anything that will fit you.'

'I'm sure you must have something.'

'Look, tell you what. Give me your key and I'll go upstairs and get you some clothes.'

He saw her consider that idea, though she didn't seem to like it. 'You must have a T-shirt and a pair of jogging bottoms I could borrow.'

'They'll drown you. And then you really will look like you're doing the walk of shame. Just give me your key. It's the simplest solution.'

She huffed a little, clearly uncomfortable with the idea, before agreeing. 'There's a pair of jeans and a T-shirt over the back of the chair in my

bedroom. Just bring those down, please.'

'Okay, nothing else?'

'Nothing else.'

'I do have one stipulation if I am going upstairs to get your clothes.'

'Which is?' She sounded wary.

'You stay and have breakfast with me before you leave.'

'I can't, Finn. I have to walk Phoebe.'

'I'll take her for a walk. I can bring her down when I go to get your clothes. I've got to take Bert out anyway.' He climbed out of bed, found his jeans on the floor and pulled them on.

'I don't have time to stay for breakfast. I'm already having a late start,' Casey grumbled.

Finn shrugged on his T-shirt. 'Sure you do. It's just half an hour.'

'Look, just go get my clothes, okay.'

'In exchange for breakfast.'

'This isn't a negotiation.'

'Just consider it, okay?' He slipped his arms around her waist, pulled her close and kissed the tip of her nose before releasing her. 'Where's your key?'

'On the kitchen counter, I think.'

'Okay, I'll be back in a bit.'



Finn let himself out of his apartment and made his way upstairs.

It was probably for the best that Casey hadn't done the walk of shame as Mrs Fletcher was lurking and he was only able to escape when her phone started ringing.

As he let himself into Casey's apartment, Phoebe came running to the door, tail wagging, seeming a little agitated when she realised Finn wasn't Casey.

'Don't worry. You'll see her in a bit,' he assured the dog, bending down to make a fuss of her.'

He went through into Casey's bedroom, a pretty feminine space that smelt of perfumes and creams, and was dominated by a wrought-iron bed, covered in a patchwork quilt of sea-greens. Spotting the chair in the corner of the room, he didn't linger, grabbed her T-shirt and jeans, and headed back into the main living space, Phoebe hot on his heels the whole time.

He wondered where Casey kept her lead. Decided the easiest way to find out was to ask Phoebe. 'Do you want to go out?'

The little dog's ears pricked up and she danced in circles around him before heading to the kitchen cupboard. Finn found her leash, clipped it on, and let her pull him towards the front door. It was then that he spotted it, the thin trail of red cotton that hung from the door handle and he reached down for a closer look. The other end of the cotton hung loose, but had tape attached to it, and he thought back to that night he had followed Casey up to her apartment to return her phone. She had been acting strangely, opening the door just an inch, hesitant to go inside while he was still there.

Putting Casey's clothes on the counter and letting go of Phoebe's lead for a moment, he opened the door and stepped outside, holding on to the taped end and pulling the door almost closed, leaving just enough room to pull the cotton down and tape it to the wall. Is that what she had been doing? Trying to detect if anyone had been in her home while she was out?

Inside the apartment Phoebe started whining, seeming convinced Finn was leaving without her.

'It's okay. I'm now coming back.'

He stepped back inside, removed the cotton from the door knob and folded it up, slipped it in his pocket.

Was this some paranoid thing Casey always did or was she worried someone had been in her new apartment? She hadn't said anything, but then again, she wasn't the most open book. Grabbing Phoebe's lead and Casey's clothes, he locked up and headed back downstairs, determined to find out what she was up to.



Casey lay flat on her back in the centre of Finn's bed, her tired eyes closed, still wondering if she had made a huge mistake. Yes, she had just enjoyed a very memorable night and her itch had been well and truly scratched. She'd had a thing for Finn for so long and he had featured in so many of her daydreams and fantasies, she had feared it could be a let-down, but she need not have worried. If anything, it had been better than she could have imagined.

They lived in the same apartment block though. How could she possibly keep this casual?

She could propose to Finn that they maybe started up an arrangement, one like he'd had with Vicky, but she suspected he wanted more from her than that. If they started dating, how would she run away if things became too serious? Honestly, that scared the life out of her.

Hearing the front door open, she sat up, covering herself with the thin robe, though it barely protected her modesty. It wasn't as if Finn hadn't seen everything already; he had become intimately acquainted with every part of her body over the course of the night.

She blamed him for ripping her underwear, but truth be told she hadn't thought through her attire before coming downstairs last night. What the hell had she been thinking, heading down two flights of stairs wearing just her underwear and a skimpy robe? She really only had herself to blame.

When Finn didn't come through to the bedroom, she got up and wandered down the hallway into the living room, found him in the kitchen area, heating a pan and cracking eggs into a bowl, the kettle boiling.

'What are you doing?'

He glanced over his shoulder at her and gave her a lazy grin. 'Cooking eggs.'

'Where are my clothes?'

He wiped his hands on the tea towel he had slung over his shoulder, reached down onto a chair and produced her T-shirt, throwing it to her. 'Here.'

'And my jeans. Please tell me you brought down my jeans?'

Phoebe picked that moment to bound on through from the open French doors, Bert trotting after her. Spotting Casey, her tail went frantic with excitement and she jumped up.

'Hello, gorgeous, did you miss me?' Casey made a fuss of her, rubbing behind her ears. 'I'm now going to take you out.' She noted Finn had ignored her question about her jeans, had turned back to the counter where he was busy putting bread in the toaster and beating the eggs.

'She's fine here for a bit. They have the garden,' he commented, not bothering to glance round.

While his back was turned, Casey slipped out of the robe and pulled on her T-shirt, glad it covered down to the top of her thighs. 'I told you I can't stay for breakfast. If you give me my jeans we'll get out of your hair. I'm sure you're busy too.'

'I'm in no rush.'

'Finn, where are my jeans?'

This time he did turn, put his hands on the edge of the counter and looked at her.

'I'll give you your jeans, but first I want you to answer a question.'

Casey rolled her eyes, not in the mood for this. 'I haven't got time to play stupid games. Can you give me my jeans now, please?'

'This isn't a game.' He reached into his pocket, pulled something out and held his open palm forward for her to see. 'I just want to know what the purpose of this is?'

Her heart thumped uncomfortably as she recognised the cotton she had tied inside her front door. If she admitted why the cotton was there, and she suspected he already knew the answer to that, she would have to admit to her paranoia that she thought someone had been inside her apartment while she had been out. Normally she removed it, but last night she hadn't been thinking clearly. Not wanting him to peg her as a nutjob, she went for the only defence she had. Anger. 'Is that what you were doing upstairs, snooping?'

'I wasn't snooping.'

'Now it makes sense why you wanted to go upstairs and get my things, why you wouldn't lend me some clothes.'

'I told you I wasn't snooping.' His tone was calm, but Casey saw the flash of temper in his eyes. 'I spotted the cotton hanging from the door when I was leaving. It's red, Casey, for chrissakes. You could have picked a less obvious colour.'

'It was the only colour I had.' She huffed out a sigh. 'Just give me my jeans, please. I want to go.'

'Tell me why the cotton was there and you can have them.'

'It's none of your business, Finn. Do I walk around your place demanding to know about your personal stuff? No.'

'You have questions? Ask me anything you like. I don't have secrets, Casey.'

'Give me my jeans.'

'Tell me about the cotton.'

They glared at each other across the counter, neither prepared to back down.

'It's none of your business,' Casey said through gritted teeth.

'Suit yourself.' Finn turned his back on her, poured the egg mix into the heated pan. It crackled as it made contact.

Casey watched him, the muscle in his shoulder working as he used a spatula to scramble the eggs. The room slowly filled with the aroma of toasting bread and despite her annoyance with him, her mouth was watering,

her belly rumbling.

It was the sex. Good sex always made her hungry.

Damn infuriating man. She was quite certain he would keep her here all day if she didn't tell him what he wanted to know.

'I did it so I would know if anyone broke into my apartment while I was out.'

He didn't respond to that at first, took out two plates and loaded them with toast and eggs, poured coffee into cups. Eventually, he turned to face her again, shoved one of the cups towards her.

'I told you I'm not staying for breakfast.'

'It's a cup of coffee, Casey. Chill out.'

She glanced warily at the two plates, but accepted the coffee anyway. The rich aroma was too much of a temptation. She was a morning coffee girl and it was probably because she hadn't had her fix that she was being so cranky. Well... that and the fact that Finn Murphy seemed to know exactly how to push her irritation buttons.

She took a sip, closed her eyes for a moment as she savoured the taste. Not that she was going to admit it to him, but he made a good cup of coffee.

'So why did you think someone might break into your apartment?'

As Finn asked the question, he brought the plates over to the table, went back for cutlery.

Casey glanced at the eggs. They looked and smelt good, and she took another sip of coffee to try and distract herself.

'Why not?' She shrugged when he returned to the table with knives and forks. 'Better to be safe than sorry, right?'

He gave her a measured look. 'Sit.'

'I told you I'm not--'

'Sit down and eat the damn eggs, Casey. Stop being stubborn just for the sake of it.'

She glared at him, but did as she was told. Now the food was in front of her she was ravenous. Of course, she didn't admit that. She took a bite of toast and scrambled egg, had to stop herself from making a yum noise. No way was she giving Finn the satisfaction of knowing the food was good. 'Okay, you've won. I'm eating your stupid eggs and I told you about the cotton. I want my jeans as soon as I'm finished. Then I'm going to leave here and I don't want to see your face for the rest of the weekend, because you're pissing me off, okay?'

The cocky bastard actually had the nerve to grin at her demand as he sat down at the table beside her. ‘You’re very cute when you get angry. Your cheeks go bright pink and you get two little creases between your eyebrows.’

‘Fuck you.’

‘Again already? Can I finish my breakfast first?’

He caught her eye, his grin widening and Casey shovelled more food into her mouth to stop her own smirk. How did he do that, manage to make her laugh when she was angry with him?

‘So, is the cotton really a thing you always do, or is it just since you moved here?’ Finn asked when he had finished eating, setting down his knife and fork and picking up his coffee. He glanced at her over the top of the mug, blue eyes now sombre. ‘I’m not going to push. If you tell me it’s something you always do then fair enough. I just want to be sure nothing has happened here that’s made you feel unsafe.’

Casey considered lying, but she was pretty sure he already didn’t believe her, would only go along with the lie for the sake of keeping peace. He was annoying and pushy and kept sticking his nose into her business, but she was beginning to understand that he did it with no ulterior motive. He simply wanted to look out for her.

‘The first day I got here, we were outside unloading the van and I swear there was someone inside my apartment. I looked up at where my bedroom is and I saw a figure at the window staring down.’

‘Male or female?’

‘I don’t know. It was only fleeting. I told Zoe, but when she looked, whoever... whatever, it was, had gone. When we got upstairs the door was locked, just as it should be, and no one was inside.’

‘Okay. And there was no one due to meet you here? Not from the estate agents, no handy men or removal men?’

‘Nope. I had picked up the keys and I wasn’t expecting anyone.’ Casey paused, debating over telling him the rest. She felt stupid as she knew she couldn’t prove any of it, but she guessed he might as well know everything. ‘There’s more.’

Finn didn’t say anything. He sipped his coffee, eyes never leaving hers as he waited for her to continue.

‘That morning when I ran into you, when Phoebe peed outside your door, after I left you I took her for a walk. When I got back, I was sure someone had been inside my apartment while I was out.’ She told him about the subtle

things she had noticed, aware she probably sounded like an idiot. ‘I know it sounds stupid, as nothing was missing. Why would someone break in if they didn’t want to steal from me?’

Although she had tried to downplay it, she could tell Finn was taking her seriously and that bolstered her confidence.

‘Have you considered getting an alarm, maybe a security camera?’

‘It’s on the list, though I haven’t got around to sorting it yet.’

‘I have a friend. Ex-cop. She can sort something out for you if you want me to speak to her.’

‘I don’t need anything fancy. It could just be that I’m being paranoid.’

‘Maybe.’ He studied her for a moment, blue eyes intense, and Casey resisted the urge to fidget under the scrutiny. ‘I’ll give her a call anyway. After what just happened to Saffron Pollard, I would rather you didn’t take any chances.’

Casey had thought doing her radio show in front of Finn was nerve-wracking enough, but that was before she had the pleasure of DC Walsh and DC Corrigan for company.

After barking instructions about how things were going to work (umm, hello, it was Casey's show and she worked to the East Coast Radio schedule), they had taken up residence on the sofa, and, even though there was room for her, they had made poor Phoebe sit on the floor.

Within ten minutes of the show starting, Walsh was up from his seat and hovering over Casey, seeming to want to take control of everything and she had to ask him repeatedly to sit down.

She couldn't actually decide which one of the two detectives was the most annoying; Walsh with his hovering and interfering, and his blunt superior attitude, or Corrigan, who mostly sat on the sofa staring at his laptop, which had been linked up to the radio station network as soon as they had arrived, and who occasionally glanced up to stare at Casey with emotionless pale eyes.

From the little she knew of him based on past meetings, he had zero personality and the only time she had seen him crack a smile was when Walsh, who viewed himself as something of a comedian, cracked one of his unfunny jokes.

It was going to be a long three hours and she wished to hell that it was Finn with her instead.



Her mind drifted back to the weekend. Despite announcing at breakfast that she didn't want to see him for the rest of Saturday, Finn had completely ignored her request, showing up just an hour after she had left his apartment,

wanting to check her place for himself to be certain there was no way anyone could break in, other than through the front door. After finally getting rid of him and settling down to do some work, he had returned later in the afternoon to tell her he had spoken with his friend, Daniella, about installing a couple of security cameras. It was something he could have told her with a brief text message instead of interrupting her flow and she had been a little short-tempered with him, then had felt bad because Finn passed on a price from Daniella that she suspected included a hefty discount.

She accepted the offer graciously and let Daniella schedule her in.

Finn had left her alone after that, which had given her time with her thoughts to consider the previous night. Not that it left her with any clearer an idea of how to handle the situation.

He was annoying, pig-headed, bossy and too full-on, but equally he made her laugh, knew how to pull her out of a mood, seemed to genuinely care about her, plus, of course, it helped that he was really good in bed.

Finn was spur of the moment and knew exactly how to go after what he wanted, while Casey took a more measured approach. Part of her wanted to open up and let him in, but the thought of doing that scared her half to death.

It was too much and she was a girl who was afraid of giving just a little. It would never work. Still, as she went to bed on Saturday night she was already missing him.

Despite telling him to give her some space, she still thought she might hear from him on Sunday, given that he was off all weekend, so she was a little surprised when he didn't make contact. Of course, she could always be the one to get in touch, send him a text or knock on his door, but she convinced herself it was for the best and it was good he was giving her space.

As the morning rolled into the afternoon and she still heard nothing, she became a little more agitated. Maybe he had just viewed Casey as a one-night stand and he didn't want anything more serious. It was possible she had misread things.

That was cool. She had toyed with the idea of proposing a casual thing to him. If he wanted just one night or something longer, no strings attached, it worked perfectly for her.

So why did she keep checking her phone and going out onto her balcony, which gave her a view of his garden. There was no sign of Finn and none of Bert either.

After taking Phoebe for an early evening walk, Casey finally caved. She

would just knock on his door as she passed. Not to go inside or anything, but just to say hello.

There was no answer, no dog barking, and she went back upstairs to her apartment in a restless mood. Was he out or had he ignored her?

He wouldn't do that to her. Not after his concern about her potential break-in, not after asking his friend about installing security cameras. Unless it was a game.

Maybe this was his way of getting her back for yesterday morning. The idea that he would ghost her because of that was ridiculous. No, Finn was straight up. He didn't play games.

So where the hell was he?

Casey's agitation grew as dusk settled and she told herself to stop overreacting. It was none of her business what Finn was up to.

But seriously though. Where was he?

Knowing that she wouldn't settle, she picked up her phone, started to type a message.

Is everything okay?

No, she couldn't send that. If she did, he would know she was wondering why he hadn't been in contact. She deleted the words. Tried again.

How are you doing?

No, Jesus. Delete, delete, delete. She sounded like Joey from *Friends*.

She tapped her phone against her palm, considered, smiling at what she wanted to send, trying to decide if she dared.

She rooted through her cupboards, found an opened bottle of whisky that she had been given, poured a little into a glass and took a picture, attaching it to her text message.

You have me addicted to nightcaps 😊

She sent the message before she could talk herself out of it, spent five minutes regretting it. She was asking for trouble.

Nine thirty rolled into ten, then ten thirty, and she was kicking herself for being an idiot. Finn hadn't replied. She had made herself look foolish. She had been turning off the lights, getting ready to go to bed when there was a knock at the door, and she had initially frozen, wondering who it was that late at night, before remembering the peephole she had. She glanced through it, shoulders relaxing when she realised it was Finn, and she threw the door open.

He looked exhausted, sad, and any reservations she had were pushed to

one side as she pulled him into the apartment. ‘What’s wrong?’

And then he had told her that his mother had collapsed with a stroke and was currently in hospital, and Casey had mentally kicked herself. She had made today about her when Finn and his sister had been rushing around after their parents.

She had hugged him tightly, understanding that for tonight he needed her to be his anchor. After checking that Bert was okay and learning he was with the Beharries, she had led Finn into her bedroom.

It hadn’t been about sex, it was about comfort, and she had resolved to give him that. Of course, in doing so she had to drop her defences, which meant he burrowed his way just that little bit further under her skin, and it bothered her how badly she was missing him being here with her in the studio tonight.



Casey soon learnt that Corrigan had an annoying phlegmy sniff. As he stared down his long pointy nose at his laptop, seeming oblivious to it himself, she was tempted to offer him a tissue in the hope he might use it. If she drew attention to it, though, he would likely blame Phoebe. He had already been unhappy about her being in the studio with them, complaining that she set off his allergies, and requesting that she be locked in another room.

Casey had lost her temper over that. She might find both detectives a little intimidating and not like the way they treated her, as if they secretly felt all of this situation was her fault, but she wouldn’t have them picking on her poor dog.

As they approached the request half hour, she put out the invitation for her listeners to get in touch, hated hearing the slight tremor in her voice. Would Steven be listening? When he had messaged the show on Thursday, he had threatened that he would take another victim over the weekend, made it clear he planned to call in again, though he hadn’t specified when that would be. His last call had come on a Monday. Would he follow the same pattern?

Last week he had specifically told her not to contact the police. Yet here they were sitting in the studio with her. Not that it was her fault this time. Their presence tonight was out of her control. If anything good came of them being here, she hoped it would be that they deterred Steven from calling. She didn’t want to speak to him again. In fact, if she was completely honest, the

thought of it terrified her.

A couple of texts came in and she lined up the songs, relieved as she watched the minute hand on the clock slowly shift towards eleven. She had one song to go after the Bruno Mars track she was playing finished, knew the torment was almost over, when the red light lit up on the studio phone.

Everything seemed to go still. Casey froze, Walsh stopped pacing, and Corrigan paused typing, all three of them staring at the red light, as Bruno sang about being locked out of heaven, and the clock continued to tick. Casey shifted her glance to Walsh who gave her the briefest of nods before Corrigan started typing furiously again.

She licked her dry lips and answered the call, putting it on loudspeaker. 'East Coast Radio. How may I help you?'

'I don't think you're understanding how this game works, Casey. I said no police.'

She recognised the deep voice immediately, her stomach churning.

'Steven.' Her voice sounded strange, his name catching in her throat.

'I want you to play a song for me. I have a special dedication.'

Casey's eyes widened, as she glanced at Walsh. He shook his head, a scowl on his face.

'I'm afraid I can't do that. I don't have any space left in the request segment.'

There was a disappointed sigh. 'I think we need to have a little chat. That was not a request. It's an instruction. I have her with me, Casey, the girl I said I would take and she is going to die tonight unless you save her. You know I am not messing with you. You remember what happened to Saffron. Now, every time you question me, every time you disobey me, your time to find her gets reduced. I have already docked an hour because you have the police with you. Do say hi to DC Corrigan and DC Walsh for me. But I am a generous man, so I am going to allow you the chance to win half an hour back. To get that half an hour, you will play me a song, do you understand?'

There was a pause as Casey glanced at Walsh again. She shrugged her shoulders. He exchanged a brief look with Corrigan, then looked back at her, gave a sharp nod.

'What song do you want me play for you?'

'That's better. That's more the spirit. My song request tonight is "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds". Do you know that one, Casey? It's by the Beatles.'

'I know it.'

‘I would like you to dedicate it from Steven to Lucy: a special girl who is going to fly so high tonight, her feet won’t touch the ground. Can you do that for me, Casey?’

Another exchanged glance with Walsh and another nod. ‘Okay.’

‘Make the dedication, word for word, announce the song, and while it is playing I will tell you where to find her. Do you understand me?’

‘I do.’

‘Write it down. You really don’t want to screw up this time. “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds”. From Steven to Lucy: a special girl who is going to fly so high tonight, her feet won’t touch the ground.’

Casey grabbed a pen, her hand shaking as she wrote down the message. ‘Okay, I have it.’ She clicked the mouse on her computer screen, quickly changing the track.

‘Good girl. Make the dedication. I will be waiting.’

Casey looked at Walsh and Corrigan, who were both focused on Corrigan’s laptop screen.

As Bruno Mars came to an end, she slipped on the earphones and spoke into the microphone.

‘This is Casey Fallon on East Coast FM and we have one more song for you in the request half hour. This one is from Steven.’ She announced the song and read out his dedication, slipped the earphones back off and let out a shaky breath before addressing Steven.

‘Okay, I have done as you asked. Where is she?’

Steven chuckled. ‘Patience, Casey. Patience.’

‘Where is she, you bastard?’

‘Let me tell you about my Lucy. She has spent her whole life wanting to be famous and she has been so desperate for that fame, she will ride on the coat-tails of anyone to get it, will use whoever it takes, just to get her fifteen minutes. Tonight I am going to give that fame to her. There is a rope around her neck and at exactly 2.30am, I will drag her up to meet the stars. It won’t be a quick or easy death. There will be no drop, so her neck won’t break, and it will take between ten and twenty minutes for her to draw her last breath.’

‘Why are you doing this?’

‘Lucy will die when winter meets summer which, unless you can save her. She is no saint, but tonight she will pray. Find her or it will be your cross to bear.’

‘What?’

‘Pay attention, Casey. I am bored of repeating myself. One more time. Lucy will die when winter meets summer which, unless you can save her. She is no saint, but tonight she will pray. Find her or it will be your cross to bear. Only you can save her and you have until 2.30. Leave the police behind and come alone. Two thirty. Tick-tock, tick-tock.’

‘Wait!’

The line went dead. In the background the song was coming to a close. Unable to speak, Casey cut straight to an advert break. As she remained sat in her chair, fingers shaking as she tried to line up one last song to take her straight into the news, the two detectives conferred, Walsh with his back rudely to her. A clear indication that while this might be about her, it didn’t involve her.

They spoke in urgent hushed tones and Casey didn’t even bother to try and listen. Another woman was going to die. How was she supposed to help her? She’d wrote down the words that Steven had given her. The riddle she was supposed to use to save this Lucy woman. It made no sense.

When she looked up again, Walsh was staring at her, while Corrigan made calls, all the time typing furiously.

‘Are you sure you have no idea who this is? No ex-boyfriend you have pissed off?’

Sure, there are plenty of those. Casey didn’t say that though. How dare he try to make out that she was causing this? ‘No ex-boyfriends. I have no idea who he is.’

He fired half a dozen more questions at her, his tone remaining accusatory, and Casey answered them as best she could, bluntly cutting him off when she had to go back on-air.

There was a tremor in her voice that she couldn’t shake as she addressed her audience and she knew she was distracted. It was going to be a long night. Knowing that Steven had another victim, that the poor woman was somewhere waiting to die weighed heavily on her conscience.

Walsh had turned his back on her again and Casey reached down into her handbag for her phone, saw she had a text message from Finn.

Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds. That was our guy, right? You okay?

She started to type a reply, was aware of Walsh staring at her.

‘Who’s that?’

She was convinced he thought she was behind the murders. He seemed

determined to catch her out. 'A friend.'

'Given that we have a woman missing, in danger, I would ask you don't text your friends about this, Miss Fallon.'

'It's Finn... Finn Murphy.'

His face darkened at that. 'He's not a part of this investigation.'

'No, but he's a police officer, so I don't understand what the problem is.'

Walsh was silent for a moment, as he studied her. 'What exactly is your relationship with DC Murphy?'

Crikey, that was a loaded question. Neighbour, friend, fuck buddy?

'He's my boyfriend.' She almost choked on the word, but the obvious annoyance on Walsh's face was worth it. If he thought Finn was a significant part of her life, he could hardly cut off his involvement.

'I see,' he said stiffly.

Her face reddening, Casey turned back to her message.

He has her and he's going to kill her tonight if we don't find her.

She sent him the riddle, slipped her phone back in her bag, knowing Walsh would be furious if he realised she had shared that information with Finn.

He was busy getting his suit jacket on, not paying her any attention as he conversed with Corrigan, who was packing up his laptop.

'Are you leaving?' Her radio show still had two hours to run and they had given her a lift here.

'There's a police car outside,' Walsh told her, his tone pompous. 'They will stay until your show finishes and give you a lift home. DC Corrigan and I will keep you updated if there are any developments.'

The song playing was finishing and she didn't have time to argue further, slipping on her earphones and returning to her listeners as Walsh and Corrigan let themselves out. They had insisted she leave the keys in the door and she just hoped they locked up after they had let themselves out and posted the keys back through the letterbox.

She would have to go check when the next song started playing.

As the intro kicked in, she started to get up. As she did, her phone buzzed in her bag. It was Finn again.

Do Walsh and Corrigan have any ideas where to look?

Honestly, Casey didn't have a clue.

They just left, but they never said where they were going. I guess maybe yes.

Barely a second passed before his next message.

They left you alone?

The song playing was already kicking into the chorus. Casey was running out of time to go check the door.

There's a car outside. Walsh said the officers would give me a lift home.

Not that it made her feel particularly safe. A car outside was hardly the same as having someone in the studio with her. Though Psycho Steve wasn't a threat to her. At least she was safe here. Poor Lucy, whoever the hell she was, was the one who was in danger.

Still, when Finn's next message came through, the nerves in her belly settled a little.

I'm coming over. Be there in half an hour.

Lucy will die when winter meets summer which, unless you can save her. She is no saint, but tonight she will pray. Find her or it will be your cross to bear.

Casey stared at the words she had written down as she waited for Finn to arrive, trying to figure out what the hell the clues meant.

Had the song Steven picked been simply because his victim was called Lucy or was there a clue in the title? She jotted down the words sky and diamonds just in case.

Lucy will die when winter meets summer which, unless you can save her.

When winter meets summer would surely be spring. It was July, so they were already in the middle of summer. She wrote spring down anyway. She is no saint, but tonight she will pray. Both saint and pray suggested a church, as did cross.

Was that where he had taken her? To a church? There were hundreds of churches in Norfolk alone and it was possible Psycho Steven had taken her out of the county, as he did with Saffron Pollard. Lucy could be anywhere.

Casey thought back to the riddle she had been given for Saffron. It had been impossible to solve. But then that was probably the point. Steven didn't want her to find his victims in time. Yes, he wanted to taunt her and pretend she had a chance, but he didn't intend for her to actually save them. Instead, he wanted to make her feel guilty, so she blamed herself for their deaths.

Why was he doing this? It had to somehow be connected to Steve Noakes. It wasn't just the shared name. In his first phone call, Steven had mentioned about Casey saving them all. It had to be a direct reference to Amanda Haines. Was this an act of revenge because she had helped put Noakes behind bars?

It wasn't Gareth. Casey knew her ex-boyfriend had killed himself two years after the trial. The guilt of dealing with that had been part of the reason why she had gone to the trauma group.

That left Julie and Gareth's younger brother, Ethan. What would Ethan now be? About twenty-six, twenty-seven? Was he looking to avenge his dad and brother?

No, she wouldn't even go there. Ethan Noakes had been a sweet kid, whose life had been totally screwed up by the actions of his sick father. It was unfair to blame him and Julie for what was happening now. They had been innocent victims in all of this.

Julie was back in Norwich, though, and the timing of Casey bumping into her just before Saffron Pollard's murder was a little coincidental. But if Julie or Ethan were behind this, why would they target an innocent woman? Saffron hadn't done anything to either of them. Why not come directly after Casey if they wanted revenge?

Saffron's murderer was far more likely to be a sicko unconnected to Noakes. The trial had been huge and the case well known. It wouldn't have taken much digging for someone to find out who Casey was. That was probably why she was being targeted. Psycho Steven was some random who thought it would be fun to mess with her.

And now he had Lucy and the riddle suggested she was in a church. Saint, pray and cross all pointed to that. But which one? Was the clue in sky or diamond?

She was scrolling through Google looking at churches in East Anglia when Finn texted to say he was outside. Casey asked him to wait for a couple of minutes, chatting to her listeners and setting a couple of tracks to play back-to-back before going through to let him in.

As he followed her back into the studio he was cursing Walsh and Corrigan, still unhappy that they had left her by herself, the annoyance rolling off him in waves.

'They didn't leave me completely alone,' Casey pointed out. 'There's a couple of officers in a car outside keeping an eye on things.'

'I know. I just spoke to them, but that's not the point. Someone should be in the studio with you. Walsh can be a real dick at times.'

Casey could imagine. She hadn't warmed to Walsh or Corrigan, though she didn't say that. Finn sounded like he didn't need any further ammunition. 'I don't think he's a fan of you either,' she instead commented drily.

Phoebe got up from the sofa, where she had settled herself following the two detectives' departure, and wandered over to see Finn, her tail wagging.

'He's not. We've clashed before,' he told Casey, as he bent down to make a fuss of the dog, scratching behind her ears. 'We used to work together and I told him he was a lazy twat on more than one occasion. Then we both went up for the same position and I beat him. He really didn't like that. God knows why MIT ever took him.'

Which would perhaps explain why Walsh had been so annoyed when he found out Casey had been texting Finn. 'So is he your superior now?'

'No. We're the same rank, but we're different departments and this is their investigation, so they get to call the shots. He doesn't like me poking my nose in. I wouldn't appreciate it either if it was our investigation.'

'But you're still going to poke your nose in anyway.'

'Yeah, I am.' Finn finally cracked a smile as he stood back up, hooking an arm around her waist and tugging her close so he could kiss the tip of her nose. 'I'm not going to sit back while this sick arsehole plays games with you, so Walsh is going to have to find a way to deal with that.'

Casey's heart thumped and she eased out of his grip. That was a little proprietorial.

While she appreciated Finn's concern, was grateful to him for driving over to the studio, they weren't in a relationship and she wasn't his responsibility.

'I have to go back on-air, then we need to look at this riddle,' she told him lightly. 'Go sit down for a minute.'

It was her own fault. She had blurred those lines last night when he had shown up on her doorstep. He had looked so tired and sad, though, the worry about his mother clear on his face, and she had hated seeing him like that. Her immediate instinct had been to give comfort.

She was going to have to redefine boundaries with him, suggest keeping things more casual. It would be easier that way. It would probably suit Finn too, as she wouldn't be cramping his bachelor lifestyle.

Right now, though, that conversation would have to wait. She had to finish her show and they needed to try and figure out where the hell Psycho Steven had taken Lucy.

Slipping on her earphones, Casey spoke with her listeners as the song that was playing drew to a close. It was tough trying to remain calm and upbeat with everything going on and she had to keep reminding herself that she was

a professional and that it was her job to somehow keep her shit together.

As she chatted, her eyes were on Finn who had turned his back to her as he looked out of the dark window at the rise and fall of the sea. Broad shoulders, hands shoved in his pockets, long legs and his bum looking tight and toned in jeans. She mentally undressed him, then kicked herself.

A woman's life was in danger and she was being distracted by a man she didn't even want to be distracted by. *So shallow, Casey.*

She cut to an advert break, set up the next song. There was just over an hour of her show left. Psycho Steven had said she had until 2.30am. That gave them two-and-a-half hours to figure out where the hell this poor Lucy woman was.

Did Walsh and Corrigan have any idea where to look for her? They had been in a rush when they left, but neither of them had given any indication that they understood what the riddle meant. Surely Lucy's best chance was to have as many people trying to find her as possible.

'I think he has her in a church,' she told Finn as he came over and leant against her desk. 'Cross, saint and pray all suggest that. But the problem is, there are loads of churches in Norfolk. How do we even begin to narrow it down? Plus we don't even know if she is still in the county.'

'Yeah, I had already thought church.'

'I've been googling them, but I can't find any that have a connection to diamonds. There has to be a clue to which church it is. When winter meets summer would be spring. There's a place called St Helen's Well, sometimes known as St Helen's Spring, down near Brandon. No church there now, but there used to be one on the site.'

'I was thinking more along the lines of cross perhaps being in a place name. There are three words there relating to churches, but cross... or possibly saint, could be to do with the place. Stoke Holy Cross, Walpole Cross Keys, Rockland All Saints, Horsham St Faith. They all have churches.'

Casey stilled. 'I used to live in Stoke Holy Cross. What if he has taken her there because of that connection?'

Finn was silent for a moment as he considered. 'I'll call Walsh.'

He left the studio to make the call and Casey tried to concentrate on her show, doing her best to ignore Finn's raised voice out in the hallway. From the sounds of things, Walsh was annoyed again that Finn was interfering in the case.

She glanced at the clock, saw she still had forty minutes of the show left.

Was it possible they had cracked Psycho Steven's riddle and would get to Lucy in time?

An Aerosmith rock classic had just started playing when Finn stepped back into the studio, one of three tracks Casey had lined up back-to-back, and as he closed the door behind him, she slipped off her earphones and looked up expectantly. 'What did he say?'

'They were thinking along the same lines, too, though they've been looking at the saint connection instead of the cross.'

'Are they going to go check Stoke Holy Cross Church out though? It has a direct tie to me.'

'Yeah, he's sending a car, though he's not happy about it. He didn't like that the suggestion came from me. Apparently it doesn't matter that I'm your *boyfriend*. It's his case and I need to butt out.' Finn smiled slyly as Casey's face flushed. 'I didn't realise we were official, Fallon. Bit soon, isn't it? We've only slept together a couple of times.'

'What? We're not... he's got the wrong idea. I just told him that to get him off my case because he didn't want me texting you.' *Fuck!* Casey was going to kill Walsh, even if that was technically what she had told him. She hadn't realised that he would go repeating it to Finn. She was such an idiot. 'Stop smirking at me like that!'

'I'm not smirking, I'm smiling... at my *girlfriend*.'

Paul Powers' purple stress ball sat beneath the monitor and Casey picked it up, hurled it at Finn who, to her annoyance, caught it easily. Deciding that it was easiest to just ignore him, she turned to her monitor, checked her emails.

There was nothing new, nothing from Psycho Steven.

'He's going to hang her, slowly suffocate her. He suffocated Saffron too.'

'Don't think about that. Hopefully, we have the church right, and Walsh and Corrigan will get to her before anything happens. He said you had till 2.30am, right?'

'It's how Steve Noakes killed his victims. I know he used the knives to torture them, but he killed them all by suffocation. I read somewhere that when he got bored of them, he got his kicks from slowly starving them of air and watching them take their last breath.'

Finn was silent as she spoke. There was no point in him telling her she was wrong. They both knew she wasn't.

'That's why I'm being targeted, why he is trying to get me to save them.'

He knows what I saw, he knows I was one of the main witnesses on Noakes's trial. I kept wondering if it was someone connected to Noakes trying to get revenge, but I guess it could be any sicko.'

Finn went over to her, the stress ball still in his hand. He placed it down next to the monitor, settling himself back against the desk. He was in her space again, but Casey wasn't so bothered this time. If she was being truthful, she actually found it comforting to have him close by. Not that she intended to admit that to him.

'My name was in the papers and it was all over the net. Anyone can find out who I am just from a few clicks. I guess the fact I'm a deejay, too, is a temptation for any idiots looking to make themselves famous.' She laughed humourlessly. 'Perhaps I should have picked a stage name.'

'Maybe. Look, we're going to figure out who he is, Casey. Just remember, none of this is your fault. You never asked for it, didn't do anything to encourage it. Whatever he does is on him alone.'

'I do know that. Deep down I really do know. But I guess it's human nature to question if there is anything I could have done... could still do to save them. Will Walsh call us when he gets to the church?'

'I asked him to, but he probably won't. I'll call him again before we leave.'

Casey glanced at the clock. Just under half an hour left. It was a slow crawl tonight and she was eager to get out of the studio. Though to where? She didn't know where to look for Lucy. She had to trust the police to find the woman. So she would go back home, then what? There was no way she would be able to sleep.

She finished her show, relieved when she had signed off and began to shut everything down. Walsh hadn't been in contact and Finn called him again, sounding irritated as they spoke. He shook his head at Casey as he ended the call. 'She wasn't there.'

'Really?' Casey was so sure they had cracked the riddle and the rush of both disappointment and panic realising that she had an hour and a half to stop a murder was overwhelming. 'We have to find her, Finn.'

She grabbed at the piece of paper where she had jotted down the riddle, looked at the words again. Where the hell had Psycho Steven taken Lucy?



They were almost back at Coltishall when the thought struck her.

'What if he doesn't mean summer as in the season?'

Finn took his eyes briefly off the road to look at her. ‘What do you mean?’

‘What if summer is a place? Somerleyton maybe?’

He chewed on that for a moment or two. ‘There’s a church there, so yes it’s possible. Though what would the winter connection be? The two seasons have to be linked somehow.’

He was right and, frustrated, Casey went back to the drawing board. Maybe saint was the clue to the location, in which case they were screwed. There were several places with saint in the title. But then, Psycho Steven was never going to make it easy to find Lucy. He wanted to win.

‘Unless it’s not Somerleyton, but East Somerton.’

Casey glanced at Finn. ‘East Somerton? I think I’ve heard of it. Where is it exactly?’

‘Close to the coast, near Winterton-on-Sea.’

‘Lucy will die when winter meets summer.’ Casey barely breathed the words as Finn nodded.

‘Is there a church there?’

‘Yup. Two, in fact. One still standing and one in ruins. And did you know there’s a legend to the ruined church?’

‘Which is?’

‘The East Somerton Witch.’

Lucy will die when winter meets summer which.

It took a second for the penny to drop.

‘Shit, Finn. It’s witch as in broomstick, not which as in which one. That’s where he has her. It has to be.’

Finn was already indicating, taking a cut-off that led back towards the coast.

As they passed through Wroxham, he called up Walsh on hands free, swearing when his phone continually rang. Eventually the call cut and he tried again. This time it went straight to voicemail and he left a message telling the detective to call him urgently.

They were passing through Potter Heigham when Walsh called back and his voice was laced with both sarcasm and irritation when it filled the car.

‘DC Murphy. Three times in one night. You’re spoiling me.’

‘East Somerton, that’s where he has her.’

‘East Somerton?’

‘Where winter meets summer. Winterton-on-Sea and East Somerton.’

There's the ruins of an old church in the woods.'

'I know it,' Walsh snapped.

'Good. We're on our way.'

'You don't need to be on your way. I'll get someone to go check it out.'

'There's no time. We're just six miles away. Tell them to meet us there.'

Finn ended the call as Walsh started to protest.

He glanced briefly at Casey. 'You okay?'

'I think so.' She was silent for a moment. 'Finn?'

'Yeah?'

'He told me I had to go alone. No police.'

He gave her a measured look. 'That's not happening.'

'But what if—'

'No what ifs. It's not happening, Casey. There is no fucking way I am letting you walk into a dark wood by yourself to meet some psycho. We go together, okay?'

She had never heard him sound so angry, knew there was little point in arguing with him.

Instead she nodded. 'Okay.'

Lucy hasn't stopped crying since we arrived at her final resting place.

She knows she won't be leaving here tonight. I told her repeatedly that Casey was her only hope, but now she knows that Casey has been selfish again and has let her down. That we now have to teach Casey another lesson.

The instruction should be so simple to follow. Come alone.

But because Casey can't follow one simple rule, another woman has to die. It's true, she can't save them all, but it annoys me that she's not even bothering to try.

Lucy's death will be spectacular though. I am going to give Casey Fallon a show she won't forget. She is on her way here now, bringing her copper boyfriend with her. How fitting that they are back in each other's lives. It is right that they should witness this together.

I tug on the rope I hung over the high branch earlier. It's a thin, slippery cord that should do the job perfectly. It took some practice getting it in place, but a handful of YouTube tutorials put me straight. Lucy watches me wide-eyed as I tie the noose and she starts frantically fighting against the knots that bind her wrists and ankles. I dressed her in a sparkly silver leotard before putting her in the van. It is fairly skimpy, not leaving much to the imagination and what is on show of her body is a beautiful patchwork of cuts and bruises from our fun weekend together. It almost seems a shame to cover my artwork, but needs must. Finished with the noose, I reach down into my bag, pulling out the wire strings, and I spend a few minutes wrapping them carefully around her limbs and torso. When I have finished with my Lucy, she will be a glorious angel, a shining light.

I want to spend some more time telling her this, explaining that I am

giving her what she has always craved, but Casey and her boyfriend will be here in less than half an hour and there simply isn't any time to waste. As I slip the noose around her neck and tighten it, tears spill from her eyes, dripping onto the back of my hand, and I lick at my flesh, savouring the salty taste of her fear.

'It will be okay,' I tell her. 'She can't save you all. I'm going to make you a star though. You will like that.'

She begs me with her eyes, frantic mewling sounds escaping from her gag. I would love to ask her for her final words, but if I remove the tape she will start screaming and that won't do.

Instead, I leave her sitting on the ground, move to stand behind her, the other end of the rope in my hands, and I start to tug. With her wrists behind her, it's not easy for her to keep her balance and she is choking before I have her on her knees. I give her a moment to steady her balance, then another hard yank on the rope pulls her up into a standing position and she is struggling to keep her feet on the floor.

I pull hard on the rope again, lifting her off the ground. By the time I have finished with her, my Lucy will be flying high in the sky with diamonds.



As they approached East Somerton, Casey's apprehension grew. She glanced at the clock on the dashboard, saw it was almost 2.15am, and she understood that they were running out of time. Would they find Lucy alive? And if they did, would Psycho Steven still be with her? Worse still, would he be close by, hiding and watching?

What exactly was his endgame? Casey had started to wonder that. If she managed to save his victims, what was his plan then? And why did he want her to go alone? Did he have something sinister waiting for her?

Finn pulled up on the side of the road, turned off the engine. They hadn't spoken much since Casey had suggested going to the ruins alone. Now he turned to face her. 'Are you ready?'

She knew he didn't mean just physically. This was a huge step and now they were here, her anxiety levels were going through the roof. What if Psycho Steven was waiting for them? What if he attacked them? What if he hurt Finn?

'Should we wait for the police car?' she suggested, her earlier moment of bravado gone.

'We have less than fifteen minutes to find her.'

He was right, Casey knew that, but still this felt like a defining moment. They had no idea what they were walking into. If they were just going to find a victim or if a killer would be waiting for them.

Finn reached across her, taking a large torch and a pair of handcuffs out of the glovebox. He switched the torch on and off, checking it worked, looked at her again. 'I can't leave you in the car. You're safer if you're with me.'

'I don't want to stay.' *Hell no.* If Casey waited in the car, she would be even more vulnerable. Although the thought of getting out and going into the church ruins to look for Lucy scared the shit out of her, there was no way Finn was leaving her behind. She intended to stick to him like glue. 'What about Phoebe?' She glanced at her beagle, sitting on the back seat, tail wagging expectantly.

'We'll lock her in the car. She'll be fine.'

Casey didn't like the idea of leaving her behind, but she guessed they had no choice. She would be too much of a hindrance if she went with them, and Casey wasn't about to let anything happen to her dog.

It was a warm night, but still she was shaking as Finn took hold of her hand, pulling her onto the path that led into the darkness of the trees. Although he had the torch with him, he hadn't switched it on, still held it in his free hand as he used the light from the moon to guide them down the path, and she wondered if he had brought it as a weapon. 'Try to stay as quiet as possible,' he whispered. 'If he's still with her, we don't want him to hear us approach.'

He obviously thought Psycho Steven would still be there, as he had brought the cuffs. Casey couldn't help thinking they were walking into a trap. She wished the police car that Walsh was sending had arrived. This wasn't safe. What if Psycho Steven had a knife? If anything happened to Finn...

Don't even go there.

And much as she was trying to be quiet, everything was too loud; the sound of their footsteps, Casey's breathing, her heartbeat. It wasn't yet 2.30am. Steven would be with Lucy and he would hear their approach; he would have the upper hand. They should have waited for backup.

Still, she didn't voice these arguments, instead gripping Finn's hand tightly, letting him lead her further into the thicket. About a hundred yards in they reached a stone wall. Finn turned her round, pressed her so her back was up against it, raising a finger to her lips.

‘This is the place, the ruined church.’

‘I don’t hear anything. Where do you think she is?’ Although her voice was a faint whisper, Casey could hear the tremor in it.

‘If I am right, she will be inside. I want you to stay here while I go check it out.’

‘No way. You’re not leaving me behind.’

‘Casey, it’s safer.’

‘You don’t know that. He could be anywhere. Besides, you’re not invincible. I’m not staying here. We stick together.’

Although it was dark, his face immersed in shadows, she could make out his scowl as he stared at her. ‘Okay,’ he muttered eventually. ‘Come on.’

This time he didn’t take her hand and, scared they might get separated, Casey grabbed hold of his belt as she followed him inside the ruins. In the darkness it was taking her eyes a few seconds longer to take in her surroundings; the broken walls of the old building, the large tree that grew up through the centre of the floor. No one appeared to be there. The place so quiet and spooky. Did they have the riddle wrong?

This had to be the place.

As she followed him around the empty, ruined building, a creaking noise cut through the silence. A tree branch swaying in the breeze? Except there was no breeze.

Casey glanced up at the tree. ‘Finn?’ She tugged on his belt, her whisper urgent, as she pointed up. ‘There’s something up there.’

It took a few seconds for her eyes to adjust, to realise what she was seeing. As the woman came into focus, head dipped forward, hanging several feet above where they were stood, she suddenly lit up, hundreds of tiny lights wrapped around her body, her sightless eyes wide in terror, and Casey started to scream.

Julie was still wondering if moving back to Norwich had been a mistake. It had been fifteen years since the trial, thirteen years since her first husband, Steve, had been jailed for murdering five women.

Back then, Julie's life had slowly unravelled. She had always considered herself lucky. Married to a man she thought to be good, kind and gentle, an enviable house in the countryside, on a large plot of land, two perfect sons. She had a wide circle of friends, wanted for nothing, and she had been happy.

How quickly things could change.

She thought back to that day, arriving home to find the street cordoned off, her home swarming with police. Learning about the terrible accusations they were making against Steve.

Her life had changed overnight and over the coming months she lost everything. Her husband, her beautiful home, her friends. Yes, she had learnt how fickle they could be. Initially they had been shocked, believing it had to be a mistake, but then the rumour mill had started and gradually she was frozen out. Oh, one or two of them had stuck by her, but even they began to distance themselves after the trial.

How could she not have known?

Julie knew that was the question they were all asking each other.

She was aware of the whispers, calling her another Rose West. It was one of the reasons she had agreed with Dennis to move away.

Steve's half-brother had been her rock after the arrest, trying to shield her from everything. Dennis was nothing like Steve and the attraction wasn't there, but he had put a roof over her head and he had taken in her sons. He had been widowed young and Julie and Steve had always looked out for him, aware of how lonely he was. She knew Dennis would look after her and he

proved her right. He stood by her throughout Steve's trial and was there for her when her beloved Gareth killed himself.

For years she had clung to the hope that the police were wrong. They had never found his body. Maybe Gareth had staged his death, wanting a fresh start. She didn't begrudge him that. Knew things were tough on him too. He had idolised his dad and didn't have the easiest relationship with Dennis.

One day Gareth would come forward and seek her out, but it never happened that way and as the years passed, she finally accepted he was definitely dead. Now she threw herself into being the perfect mother to her youngest son, Ethan.

It had been Ethan's idea to move back to Norwich. Julie was widowed now, Dennis having died after falling down the stairs. Kelvin and Rod had both left home long ago and there was nothing for either Julie or Ethan in Sizewell. Besides, Dennis's will had split everything three ways between his second wife and his sons. The house would have to go as Julie couldn't afford to buy Kelvin and Rod out. If they had to move, Ethan rationalised, they might as well move home to Norwich.

Now she was back here, though, she wondered if she had made a huge mistake.

It had been years and she had foolishly hoped that no one would recognise her now she had a different surname. How wrong she had been.

Yes, okay, so initially most people didn't realise who she was, but it didn't take long for the rumours to spread and then their stance towards her changed. She had already received hate mail, her neighbour, who had been quite welcoming, now gave her a wide berth, and of the friends she had bumped into, one had been coolly polite, while another had ignored her completely.

Then, of course, there had been the worst encounter, when she had run into Casey Fallon. The girl who had destroyed her entire family.

Ironically, Casey had been the friendliest to her, but Julie knew that was probably out of shock and guilt. Julie hadn't been able to speak to her, barely able to look at her. There was so much she wanted to say to the girl and she had practised her speech many times over the years, but when it actually came down to it, when the encounter had finally happened, she couldn't find the words.

Casey was on her mind now as Julie watched the two detectives walk down the driveway heading back to their car. Apparently, she had pointed the

finger at Julie again and the detectives had been asking questions about her move back to Norwich, showing her pictures of two women who had recently been murdered. She knew they were also on their way to speak with Ethan.

What was wrong with Casey Fallon? Had she not done enough to Julie's family already? Would she not be content until she had destroyed every single one of them?

Julie feared for Ethan. He was such a kind and sensitive soul and what had happened to Steve and Gareth had affected him deeply. He had been just a teenager when Steve was arrested, still at school, and he had become the target of cruel bullies. As a result he had suffered both mentally and academically. He still carried the scars, had been unable to go to college, as he had hoped, after failing all of his exams, and for a while he had battled with panic attacks. He was now twenty-seven and still living with Julie, and to her knowledge he had never had a girlfriend and showed little interest in socialising outside of the family circle.

He had managed to secure a job working for a local skip hire company, but if the police started showing up at his workplace and giving him grief, then there was no telling how he would react or what view his bosses might take.

What if he lost his job? Julie had some savings, but it wouldn't keep them forever, and her part-time work at the local Tesco Metro paid a pittance. If they couldn't afford to pay the rent, where would they live? Julie's parents were dead and she had no siblings. No one to turn to for help.

Kelvin and Rod wouldn't be interested either. Kelvin had his own family, while Rod was in the army. And they had never really accepted her marrying their father. How different to the days before Steve's incarceration, when they had all been one big family unit. Now, Julie was quite convinced Kelvin and Rod wouldn't care less if her and Ethan ended up on the street. All they were interested in was getting their share of the money and moving on.

It wasn't their fault, she guessed. They had lost their mum at a young age, then watched everything happen with Steve. They hadn't understood Julie marrying their dad as soon as her divorce came through.

And now they had their own lives to lead. She wasn't their problem.

It was Casey Fallon who had ruined everything for the Noakes family, but it seemed it still wasn't enough and she wanted to dig the knife in further.

Julie thought back to the first time Gareth had brought the girl home. She had seemed so sweet and innocent. Such a pretty girl with her wide dark eyes

and genuine smile. Back then, she had believed Gareth had landed on his feet, was so pleased he had met such a lovely girl.

But of course, that was before Casey had set out to destroy them all.

Now Julie wished that Casey Fallon was dead.

Psycho Steven's second victim had officially been identified as Lucy Sheldon, author of the Steve Noakes biography, *Where Evil Lurks*, indicating a direct link between the two killers. What Walsh's team now had to establish was whether Casey's tormentor was actually connected to Steve or if he was an aspiring copycat who was targeting her simply because he knew of her connection to Noakes.

Walsh hadn't been at all happy that Finn and Casey had been the ones to crack the riddle and he was downright furious that they had beaten him to the murder location, seeming to view it that they had got one up on him rather than they had just been trying to help. It had been all too late to save Lucy Sheldon anyway. Psycho Steven had jumped the clock again.

Casey had beaten herself up over that and Finn knew she had been in shock after finding Lucy's body. As soon as the patrol car had arrived, the crime scene had been cordoned off, and after speaking briefly with Walsh, Finn had taken Casey home.

Of course, by then she had already seen everything and he knew the vision of Lucy Sheldon trussed up in fairy lights and hanging from the branch would haunt her for a long time to come.

She had been quiet on the ride home, her face drained of colour, and he realised just how shaken she was when she didn't argue with him when he suggested he take Phoebe out with him when he took Bert for a late walk. Same as she didn't protest when he told her he was going to stay with her for the rest of the night.

Finn hadn't slept a whole lot, his mind working overtime as he stroked her hair and held her close, and he was exhausted by the morning, aware that a full day of work lay ahead. So he had been relieved when Casey told him

she was calling in sick. Psycho Steven might have a preference for Mondays, but that didn't mean he wasn't watching her at other times.

If she had been intent on doing her show, Finn would have insisted on going with her, screw what Walsh thought, which would have left him operating on fifty per cent brain power.

It was better this way and an early night would do him good.

As soon as he had arrived in work he had tried to find out what he could about the investigation, though was hampered by Walsh at every turn. The idiot had even put in a complaint about Finn's conduct to his boss.

Officially he had been rapped on the knuckles. Unofficially his boss had given him a pat on the back, but he was conscious he had his own workload to deal with and couldn't spend all day trying to crack a case that wasn't even his.

Still, as he dealt with a couple of burglaries and a sexual assault, his mind kept going back to Lucy Sheldon. She had once been a journalist, had always been hungry to make a name for herself. Did she meet her killer voluntarily or had he attacked her?

Finn had done his own digging, knew that she had disappeared some time during Friday night. There was no sign of a break-in at her home, which suggested she had left of her own free will. The cuts and mutilation to her body, though, plus the deep cuff marks on her wrists and ankles told him she had been held captive somewhere and there was no doubt she had been tortured over an extended period.

Was Psycho Steven really just a fan of Steve Noakes or did they have a more personal connection?

He pondered that on the drive home, heading upstairs to Casey's apartment once he had walked Bert and showered, palming his dog off once again on the Beharries. He felt bad about that, knew Bert deserved some 'me' time and was aware that he was neglecting his dog. But right now his focus was Casey.

She had been here before and he was aware that the barriers she put up were a direct consequence of everything that had happened with Steve Noakes. Part of him still felt guilty that he hadn't been there for her all those years ago. She had reached out and he had pushed her away. At the time he had done the right thing, at least that's what he kept telling himself, but everything was different now. She didn't have to fight this alone and he would find a way to knock those barriers down.

She opened the door to him, didn't seem overly surprised to see him, maybe because he had called to check up on her a couple of times during the course of the day, but still she was wary as she let him in. Last night she had been in shock, but tonight there were sparks of the old Casey back. The one who would be questioning why he was becoming a fixture in her life, the one who would be putting her emotions back in a box and locking them away.

He pulled her close for a kiss, felt her tense, understood she was torn between need and protecting herself. She eased back, eyed him cautiously.

'Do you want a beer?'

That was a start, at least she was inviting him to stay. 'That sounds good.'

She popped the caps on a couple of bottles of Heineken, took them out onto the balcony where her laptop was still set up on the patio table.

Finn knew she did a lot of freelance work and it probably helped to have something to focus her mind on, especially as she had called in sick at the radio station.

'How did your boss take the news?' he asked, glancing over the wall and realising for the first time quite how clear a view Casey had of his garden. He looked back at her as she shrugged.

'He wasn't happy, but what could he say?' She took her seat back at the table, closed down her MacBook, and took a long drink of her lager.

Finn had left for work before she had made the call, knew from when he had checked in with her earlier that Justin Walters had been out at a meeting and she was waiting for him to call her back. 'He can't say anything. I'm not surprised by his attitude though. He didn't strike me as someone who cares much for his staff. Do you know who he has arranged to cover your show?'

'Yup. Jade Armitage.' Casey pulled a face at that, clearly disapproving. 'She works with Paul Powers on the breakfast show.'

'And that's a bad thing because?' When she raised a questioning eyebrow, he added, 'It's written all over your face that you don't like her.'

'I wouldn't say, don't like. She wanted the late show and wasn't happy when it was given to me. Paul was campaigning hard for her to have it and he threw a real diva strop when it was announced I would be doing it. He's been waiting for me to trip up, they both have, so they will be loving this.'

'You haven't tripped up.' Finn pulled out a chair, sat down opposite her. 'What's happened is not your fault.'

'No, it isn't. But that doesn't matter in the cut-throat world of radio. Jade will get her feet under the desk and I'll have a battle on my hands to keep the

show.’ She managed a grin at that. ‘It’s all happening at East Coast Radio.’

‘How much do you rely on it financially?’

‘I don’t, if I’m honest.’ Finn’s surprise must have been evident in his expression, because she elaborated, gesturing to her closed MacBook. ‘This... my freelance stuff, pays the bills. I get paid for the marketing work, but it’s only a couple of mornings a week, so not enough to make a huge difference. I only took it on to get my foot in the door, in the hope I would eventually get on-air. I don’t get paid for my show though. I do that voluntarily.’

‘Seriously?’ Finn thought back to the way Justin had spoken to Casey. And she didn’t even get paid for the show?

‘It’s how it works. Unless you’re with a bigger station, many of the shows are often done by volunteers.’ She shrugged. ‘It’s good experience for the CV.’

‘And that’s the end goal, what you ultimately want to do, work for a bigger station?’

‘It was.’ Casey took another swig from her bottle, looked out at the view. It hadn’t rained in weeks and the sky was almost cloudless. ‘Now I don’t know. This has kind of soured the dream.’ She was silent for a moment with her thoughts. ‘I don’t think Walsh was happy either when I told him I wasn’t going in to do the show.’

‘Walsh isn’t happy, period. What did he say?’

‘Just grumbled a bit about how it would be helpful if I was in the studio and he would arrange to have a police car outside.’

‘He doesn’t need you there tonight. It’s highly unlikely there will be another call. If anything, it makes sense for another deejay to take over the show for a few nights. It will confirm for sure if Psycho Steven is targeting you specifically.’

Casey gave him a measured look. ‘I think we both know he is, Finn. It’s too big a coincidence that one of his victims would be the author of a Steve Noakes book.’

It was, but Finn knew Walsh and his team couldn’t deal with coincidences. It had to be hard facts. Having another deejay covering the show would confirm what they all already knew.

Plus, if Casey wasn’t at the station, he wouldn’t have to worry about her so much.

He studied her now as she stared out again over the fields, a slight frown

on her face, her hair twisted back in a clip, a few strands escaping, dark eyebrows slashed across long-lashed eyes, and her lips almost pouting as she contemplated. There were a few odd lines fanning out from her eyes and at the corners of her mouth, and she wasn't as skinny as she had been at nineteen, but it added to her appeal.

As if sensing him watching her, she turned away from the view to look at him, the frown deepening when he didn't look away, instead grinning at her. 'What are you looking at? What's funny?' She raised a hand self-consciously to touch her face.

'I was just thinking about how pretty you are.'

Her cheeks glowed pink and he liked that he could put that colour in them either with a simple compliment or by winding her up.

'Was Saffron Pollard linked to the Steve Noakes case?' she asked, ignoring him.

It was a question Finn had considered and he had mentioned it to Walsh, though had no idea if it had been followed up. 'There's no obvious connection,' he told her. 'But it's possible.'

'It just seems odd that there was a connection with Lucy. Why would he take a random girl, then one connected to Noakes?'

She had a point. 'I'm sure Walsh and his team are looking into it.'

Or perhaps not. He didn't seem to like following any of Finn's suggestions. Out of bullheadedness, Finn assumed. Saffron's case was with MIT now, but he guessed he could make a few discreet enquiries. If there was a connection between Saffron and Noakes, then it would definitely point to a copycat and explain why Casey was being targeted.

By whom though? Gareth Noakes was dead, allegedly. Finn knew Casey's ex-boyfriend had drowned himself off the coast of Sizewell. His body had never been recovered though. Was it possible he had staged his death?

If so, then where the hell had he been living for the last fifteen years?

There was a younger brother too. Ethan Noakes.

Like father, like son.

Was it possible?

He was going to have to start doing some more digging himself. Yes, it might be with MIT, but it involved Casey, so Finn figured he had an invested interest.

As he finished his lager, Casey got up to walk back into her apartment,

gathering up her MacBook. Finn followed her into the kitchen, noted from the clock it was nearly seven thirty. His belly rumbled, reminding him he hadn't eaten in a while. 'You hungry?'

Casey levelled him a look as if it was a trick question. 'A little, why?'

'Want to grab some dinner? We can go out or I can cook.'

Her mouth opened and shut at that and he could see that she was going to fob him off with an excuse.

'Listen, the last few nights have been nice, but...'

Here we go. He started to prepare his argument as he let her speak.

'I'm not looking for anything serious. This has been... is fun. I'm no good at relationships though. But I'm up for a more casual kind of thing, if you are, of course.'

She wants to be fuck buddies? He hadn't been expecting that, but it was better than the flat-out rejection he had readied himself for. Fuck buddies was a start. He could work with that.

He feigned an expression of shock. 'Whoa, slow down. I was simply asking you if you fancied grabbing some dinner. I never proposed we have a relationship.'

That wrong-footed her, had her eyes widening and her cheeks darkening. 'I never... that's not what I meant.'

'You're the one who told Walsh I'm your boyfriend.'

'Yes, but only because—'

'And now you want to talk about how serious we are?' Finn fought to hide his smile. He had her completely flustered. 'You're moving a little too fast for me, Casey.'

'I didn't mean it like that... I wasn't proposing...'

As she tailed off, he stepped into her space, stole a quick kiss, quickly moving back when her eyes widened. 'You're cute when you get flustered. And yes, if you want to keep things casual, we can do that.'

'We can?' She sounded surprised by that, and did he detect a little bit of disappointment, or was that just wishful thinking?

'I'm a red-blooded male. Do you really think I would turn down the chance of no-strings-attached sex?'

'I... um, I guess not.'

'So now we've had that discussion, can we please eat?'

'But—'

'We can be friends and fuck buddies, right?'

‘Well... yes.’

‘And friends have dinner together.’

‘They do.’

‘So it’s just a friend thing, it’s not a date.’

‘I guess.’

‘Sorted. So what do you fancy, then? Eating out or letting me cook for you? I’m pretty good in the kitchen.’

‘Umm, okay, eat in, I guess.’

Finn pulled her close for another kiss, this one longer, deeper, more possessive, leaving her looking both flushed and a little bit confused. ‘I’m gonna go downstairs. Why don’t you come down when you’re ready?’

He grinned to himself as he stepped out into the hallway. Hearing a creak, he glanced up at the door of the apartment opposite, as it clicked shut. Had the place been sold? It had been sitting empty for a while, but he hadn’t seen anyone move in though.

He made a mental note to ask Casey.

Casey was still in bed when Finn left to go to work on Wednesday morning. She had intended to go back to her own apartment after he had cooked her dinner, determined to put some boundaries between them, but he had weakened her resolve with a serious make-out session on his sofa, which had been a little distracting at first as Bert sat close by, watching them intently, his tongue hanging out, then when Casey had tried to leave, Finn had reminded her that as they were now fuck buddies they were technically supposed to fuck, all the while nibbling at that little spot on the back of her neck which made her legs turn to liquid, and she had given up on excuses as to why she couldn't stay.

It bothered her how easily he was inserting himself into her life, the familiar smothering of claustrophobia starting to close in on her. She couldn't be in a relationship with Finn. It wouldn't work.

She glanced at her phone, saw it had just gone eight. Finn's bed was so comfortable and she could easily roll over and go back to sleep for another half an hour, but Phoebe needed a walk, and Casey also had to speak with Justin and DC Walsh and let them know what she had decided to do about her show. Cover had already been arranged, but she had asked them to give her until this morning to decide whether she was comfortable going back on-air tonight.

After dressing and making Finn's bed for him, she let herself out of his apartment, heading back upstairs. Last night, for the first time, she hadn't put the cotton across the door and although she told herself it was unnecessary, she still glanced warily round her apartment after stepping inside.

Her phone pinged, making her jump, and she glanced at the message from Ricky, asking if she fancied any company. Like Casey, he worked remotely

and they were often able to shuffle their working hours to meet up. Casey did need to finish the website she was designing first though. She fired him a quick message back asking if he fancied lunch.

He ended up bringing Zoe with him and the three of them sat outside on Casey's balcony eating takeaway fish and chips as they enjoyed the afternoon sun, Phoebe lying under the table hoping for crumbs. It was a greedy lunchtime treat, but Casey figured they had burnt a few calories helping Ricky up the stairs, so they deserved it.

She hadn't realised the lift was out of order when she had invited her friends over, which made it difficult for Ricky with his walking stick, and they had to help him negotiate the stairs shouldering the bulk of his weight.

Ricky had been a little bit sulky about that. Casey knew he found it difficult to give up control and he had been mortified that one of her neighbours might have seen him being half-carried up the stairs by his friends. He had sniped at them both until the food was put in front of him, then he slowly calmed down.

Her friends were full of questions about the latest murder and Casey answered them as evasively as she could, aware that Walsh wanted her to keep things under wraps. Instead she tried to steer the conversation on to lighter and safer topics, though Ricky soon put paid to that.

'So how is Detective Dishy?' he wanted to know after they had finished eating.

'Dishy?' Zoe was pulling a face 'That's a mum word.'

'Exactly what I told him,' Casey agreed, keen to change the subject. Zoe still had no idea about Finn and now wasn't the right time to tell her.

Ricky rolled his eyes dramatically. 'Whatever. You're avoiding the question, Casey. How is your lovely downstairs neighbour? Have you slept with him yet?'

'Slept with?' Zoe was staring at Casey. 'You're seeing your neighbour?'

'Well... yes and no.'

'He's a detective,' Ricky helpfully chipped in. 'Finn, isn't it?'

'Finn? As in Finn from years ago? He lives here, in this building?' Zoe didn't look happy.

Casey glowered at Ricky. He had just done that on purpose.

'I only found out recently.' Her cheeks were heated as she tried to dig her way out of the hole. 'He lives downstairs. I never said anything because there was nothing to tell.'

‘So is it serious?’

‘No. You know I don’t do serious. It’s just a... it’s just a sex thing.’

‘I knew it.’ Ricky clapped his hands together.

Casey wanted to wipe the smug smile off his stupid face. Zoe was her closest friend and she felt bad about telling Ricky and not her.

Things weren’t quite the same after that. They finished eating, made small talk, but Casey could tell that Zoe was upset. Her friend had gone quiet, while Ricky was now monopolising the conversation, peppering it with sexual innuendos and talk about his own love life.

They left about an hour later, Zoe muttering something about needing to get home, and Casey joined them out in the hallway, aware they had to help Ricky with the stairs again.

Not that Ricky appreciated it, channelling his inner bitch as they negotiated the first set of stairs, complaining about how they weren’t supporting his weight properly and he could probably get downstairs better by sliding down on his bum. Casey still hadn’t forgiven him for earlier and her patience was wearing thin, so she wasn’t in the mood for the sly, smirking face of Rupert that was waiting for them on the first-floor landing.

He could have stepped forward to help, but no, he simply stood there looking thoroughly entertained as he watched them assist Ricky, who, realising Rupert had spotted them, was mortified, trying to shrug off Casey and Zoe, wanting to go the last couple of steps alone.

‘Give me my damn stick,’ he snapped bad-temperedly at Casey as they reached the landing and snatched it from her hand before she could pass it to him. He glared at Rupert.

‘Can we help you?’

‘Don’t mind me. I’m Casey’s neighbour. Rupert. Have you been in the wars?’

‘No,’ Ricky snapped again, turning his back on Rupert and leaning heavily on his walking stick as he made his way to the top of the next flight of steps.

Casey wasn’t a Rupert fan, but there was no need for Ricky to be so rude to her neighbour. She smiled apologetically at the man. ‘The lift is out of order. The stairs are a struggle with his walking stick,’ she explained, her tone low.

‘Can we go please?’

Casey exchanged a glance with Zoe. They both knew Ricky didn’t like

them talking about his injury. 'We should go.' She smiled again at Rupert, didn't wait for him to respond, turning to where Ricky was waiting.

'He's a bit weird,' Zoe whispered across Ricky to Casey when they were part way down the stairs.

'Seemed like a complete twat to me!'

'Ricky!' Casey tried to glance over her shoulder to see if Rupert was in earshot, but she couldn't see him. 'Yes, he's a little strange, but he's also my neighbour, so can you please try not to piss him off?'

'Okay, tetchy!'

'You can be a real dickhead sometimes.'

Ricky was still grumbling when they reached the bottom of the stairs and Casey handed him his walking stick, actually relieved her friends were going. She loved them both dearly, but today had been hard work and it would be the last time she trusted Ricky with a secret.

As she went to go back upstairs to her apartment she was relieved that Rupert was no longer loitering. She really wasn't in the mood for another conversation with him and just hoped he hadn't heard Ricky call him a twat. Although Rupert hadn't struck her as overly confrontational, he was certainly strange and she was unsure how he would react.

Back up on the top floor landing, she fished for her keys, her eyes drawn to the part-open door at the other end of the short hallway.

She kept meaning to ask Finn if he knew who lived there. Rupert had never elaborated, only saying they were away, and telling her he had a key. Were the neighbours home or was it Rupert in their apartment again?

Curious, she approached the open doorway. If it was her neighbours she should just briefly say hi and introduce herself.

She didn't hear voices and thought it would be rude to call out, so, even though the door was open, she decided to press the doorbell. It rang loudly.

After a moment she heard footsteps on the other side. As she readied her smile, the door slammed shut in her face, making her jump. She took an involuntary step back, her heart thumping.

What the hell?

It crossed her mind that perhaps she should ring the bell again. But no, whoever it was had definitely heard her. The bell had been loud enough.

She glanced at the peephole, her spider sense tingling. Was someone looking at her?

Unsettled and keen to get off the landing, she fumbled with her keys and

hurried across the landing to her apartment, all the time wondering exactly who might be watching her.

Ethan Noakes had always been the shy one in the family. His mother called him a quiet soul, while his outgoing father had cajoled him into various activities, all without success, eventually resigning himself to the fact that Ethan was a loner.

He was happiest when he had his nose buried in a book or computer game, had just a handful of friends, and only felt the faintest pang of envy when he saw his dad and Gareth heading off to football or for afternoons out bowling without him.

Although he didn't want to join them, he adored his dad, watched him doing everything with his older brother Gareth, and just wished he had something in common with him too.

It was less than a year before Steve's arrest that father and son finally bonded, and then that was snatched away from Ethan, his world imploding and he became even more withdrawn, unable to cope with the spiteful things that were said about his family.

Being in the courtroom, listening to Gareth's ex-girlfriend giving her testimony, had been one of the hardest days of his life. The worst, though, had been when the jury had returned their verdict, sentencing Steve Noakes to life in prison. Ethan remembered sitting there with his mother and brother, Uncle Dennis and his sons, Kelvin and Rod in the row behind. Of course, Dennis hadn't been a very good brother, as he had quickly poisoned Julie Noakes's mind after Steve had been found guilty.

Everything had changed after the trial, Dennis worming his way further into Julie's life, persuading her to move away and then to divorce Steve and marry him instead. Kelvin and Rod became Ethan's stepbrothers as well as his cousins, much to his distress, and then Gareth had killed himself.

Things hit rock bottom for Ethan after that. Although he and Gareth had been so different growing up, Gareth more outgoing and popular, while Ethan shied away from any kind of attention, they had become closer since their dad's imprisonment and both shared a mutual hatred for Kelvin.

Gareth got on well with Rod, but Ethan felt that both Dennis's sons were bullies, though so different in their approach. Kelvin was brash and blustery, while Rod, although the quieter and more studious of the two, was definitely more manipulative. It was worse when Gareth was no longer there to stick up for him and Ethan had been beyond relieved when they finally moved out, even if it did leave him stuck in the hellhole that was Sizewell with just his mother and Dennis.

Dennis with his rules, Dennis who continually sniped, Dennis who had turned Ethan's mother into his own personal maid. He was nothing like Steve and Ethan guessed that was perhaps because they were half-brothers. They had shared a mother, but had different dads.

Ethan hadn't minded Dennis so much when his dad had been around, but now Steve was out of the picture, Dennis's true personality had come out.

The accident that had killed him, when he had tripped and fallen down the stairs had been a relief. Was it bad to say that? Ethan would never admit that aloud to anyone, just as he knew he would never reveal that it wasn't an accident.

Still, when the two detectives had tracked him down at work this afternoon and asked to speak with him, he had nearly shit himself.

They couldn't find out the truth.

Not now things were finally going right and he had his mother back to himself. If she knew what had really happened that night, she may never be able to forgive him for the part he had played, and it would ruin everything.

The move back to Norwich had given him hope. It was the chance to start afresh and to finally have the opportunity to confront the past and everything that had happened, to put things right.

If the police were onto him, if they really did know what had happened, then it was going to ruin everything.

‘**B**ut what if Arthur is right?’

Poppy Cooper wiped at her snotty nose, looking to Amanda for reassurance that Annabelle the creepy doll from the popular horror movies would not be hiding inside her wardrobe when she went to bed that night.

Arthur Norton’s parents had apparently allowed him to watch the film over the weekend and he now had a YouTube clip on his phone that he was using to scare some of the other kids.

‘I promise you, nothing will be hiding in your wardrobe tonight or any other night, sweetie. It’s just a scary story. Monsters aren’t real. They don’t exist, I promise.’

Poppy blinked her wide blue eyes and nodded. ‘Do you really promise, Miss Haines?’

‘I promise, I promise.’

It was a lie. Amanda knew better than anyone that monsters were real, though not in the form that Poppy thought. She didn’t need to be afraid of a doll hiding in her wardrobe or a werewolf outside her window. The real monsters had human faces and human voices and they could smile and laugh and talk to you, pretending everything was okay while they sliced you open with knives and taped up your nose and mouth to stop you from breathing. The real monsters enjoyed themselves as they watched you bleed. And once they had you in their clutches, even if you managed to escape, they still had power over you, still invaded your dreams, and still made you fearful that the nightmare wasn’t actually over. You might think you were safe, but they were still out there, watching and waiting for you.

Amanda Haines had met one of those monsters once. Back when she had

been a twenty-one-year-old student, just wanting to hang out with her friends, full of hopes and dreams for the future, thinking she had her whole life ahead of her.

Meeting Steven Noakes had altered her path and, despite knowing that he was in prison, despite having reconstructive surgery and years of therapy, she knew she would never be able to go back to being the girl she was before.

Steven Noakes and his cruel knives had taken away the chance for her to have children, the chance for her to lead a normal life, the chance to ever trust another man enough to form an intimate relationship with.

She had tried so hard, but dating had brought on panic attacks and eventually she had resigned herself to a life of celibacy. Instead, she lived alone in the home she had turned into a fortress.

It was a wonder that she managed to hold down a job, but the innocence of the children she helped teach were the only bright light in her day. She didn't socialise outside of school, had few friends, never left her home after dark, had her shopping delivered, didn't answer the door to the postman or any cold-callers, and spent every night with the lights on and the TV playing in the background. It was the only way she could get any sleep.

She often wondered if it would have been easier, better even, if she had died on that table.

When Casey Fallon had discovered her, she had been ready to give up.

Noakes had grabbed her while she was out running. She remembered seeing his van passing, though never saw him. He had grabbed her from behind, knocking her unconscious and she had awoken bound and gagged, with a hood over her head, aware she was in a moving vehicle. He had kept her tied up and blindfolded on that torture table for the best part of two days before the police arrived and they had rescued her, but really, what kind of freedom had she returned to? If Casey hadn't found her, Noakes would have killed her. Perhaps a little more suffering to have it finally stop would have been worth it.

Amanda had tried to end her life twice. The first time had been with a bottle of vodka and several sleeping tablets, the second occasion she had slit her wrists in the bathtub. Both times she had been found and rushed to hospital, and it seemed she was damned to live through this hell on earth.

That was why she had chosen to work with children, figuring if she could bring anything good into their lives then at least hers would have some purpose.

As she dried Poppy's tears, watched her run back to join her friends in the playground, Amanda knew she was going to have to ask the head teacher to speak with Arthur's parents again. It wasn't the first time he had bragged about watching unsuitable films at home or scared the other kids. It wasn't on. Mrs Thackeray was away until Friday, though, so unfortunately it would have to wait.

At the end of the school day, she packed up her things, made her way out to her car, keen to get back home.

She lived out in the countryside, in a small village a few miles north of Norwich. A quiet location with a handful of neighbours. It was remote enough that she didn't feel claustrophobic, but equally, knowing there were people close by in case of emergency also reassured her. Over the years she had got to know them all by name and face, and she believed she was as safe as could be.

She had gone a couple of miles, was almost home, having already turned off the main road into the network of quiet country lanes that led to her village, when her car started to splutter, then ground to a halt, the engine cutting out. She tried the ignition, but nothing happened.

For fuck's sake. Her little Corsa might be ancient, but she looked after it, had it serviced regularly to ensure it stayed reliable.

Her heart pounding, Amanda unfastened her seat belt and climbed out of the car. She glanced up the empty road, knew it was about a mile-and-a-half walk back to the village. She couldn't just leave her car here though. She would have to call for roadside assistance.

As she went round to the passenger door and reached inside for her handbag, the sound of an engine came from behind her. Years of paranoia meant her first reaction was fear and her head shot round as a van pulled up.

The fear quickly manifested itself into panic that clawed its way up her throat and for a moment she couldn't breathe. Steve Noakes had drove a van.

He had kidnapped her while she was out jogging down country roads not dissimilar to this one.

Breathe, Amanda, breathe. It's probably someone from the village.

She didn't recognise the van though. And she was careful enough to know every one of her neighbours' cars. She squinted at the windscreen, but the way the light was bouncing on the glass prevented her from seeing the driver.

It was going to be okay. She was overreacting. Whoever it was had seen

she had broken down. They were probably stopping to see if they could help. It was most likely a delivery driver. That made sense. Lots of people had deliveries.

Still, as the door opened, she trembled all over, a scream caught in her throat.

And then she saw the flared skirt, a flash of long hair, the door shutting to reveal a woman. She was older than Amanda, probably by twenty or thirty years, her grey hair loose and curling over her shoulders.

Amanda relaxed a little. She told herself off for overreacting and managed a smile for the woman who was approaching.

‘Having car trouble, dear?’ The woman’s voice was soft and deep.

‘I don’t know what’s wrong. It just spluttered to a halt. When I turn the ignition there’s nothing.’ Even as she was saying the words, it was registering in Amanda’s mind that something seemed a little off.

She squinted against the late-afternoon sun that was hanging low in the sky, sheltering her eyes with her hand as she studied the woman with the thin lips and wide sunglasses.

And then the woman smiled. It was a predatory smile and in that split second, Amanda understood.

The monster was back.

If there was ever any doubt about Psycho Steven being connected to Steve Noakes, Finn was given conclusive proof on Thursday afternoon.

Although it wasn't his case and Walsh had told him to butt out on a number of occasions, he couldn't let things lie. Casey was too important and he didn't trust Walsh or Corrigan to do their job properly. That was why he made time between jobs to pay a visit to Saffron Pollard's parents.

Lucy Sheldon could be linked to Steve Noakes, which meant Saffron had to be too. He didn't believe she was simply a random victim.

Leslie and Doreen West lived just off the ring road in the Mile Cross estate in a house that appeared to have been attacked by gnomes. They were everywhere from what Finn could see and he counted at least half a dozen in the tiny front garden, while another larger gnome wearing a blue hat and green trousers sat on the front porch, holding a sign that welcomed him to the house.

He rang the doorbell, listened to the over-the-top chime, and wondered what the hell he was getting himself into. He had never met Saffron's parents, their daughter had been enough, but he had heard about them from Vicky.

As it turned out, Leslie West wasn't home, however, Doreen was quick to welcome him in as soon as she realised who he was, and Finn didn't miss that she had been dry-eyed and cheerful until the moment he mentioned Saffron's name. Then the waterworks had started.

She ushered him through into the living room. This one contained more gnome-like ornaments on the mantel, alongside a large framed picture of Saffron with her parents, and a couple of large vases filled with flowers that he suspected had been sent in sympathy. While Doreen made tea, he glanced

through the numerous condolence cards that filled every surface, and tried to ignore the cloying sickly-sweet perfume-type scent that clung to the air, from the lilies in the bouquets, he assumed.

‘I didn’t know if you would be hungry, too, so I’ve brought through a selection of biscuits.’

Doreen fussed about, setting down a tray with two fancy-looking cups of tea and a saucer-size chintzy plate containing chocolate biscuits and, what were those? Custard creams?

She hadn’t asked Finn why he was there, simply seeming eager to get him inside once he had shown her his ID.

‘They are the proper biscuits,’ she told him proudly, settling herself down in one of the two armchairs, leaving the sofa to Finn. ‘McVities. DC Corrigan likes the custard creams. He told me they’re his favourite.’

Why was it not a surprise that a gormless work-shy prick like Mike Corrigan would prioritise biscuits over police work?

Finn thanked her, but ignored the biscuits, taking the cup of tea and sitting down on the sofa. He was fairly certain Doreen West had brushed her hair and put a little bit of lipstick on while she had been through in the kitchen. Her eyes were now dry again and she seemed thrilled that he had stopped by.

He remembered back to what Vicky had said, that Doreen was more interested in being on the television than about her dead daughter. While Finn couldn’t relate to that, he soon learnt that it did mean she had a loose tongue, and it seemed she was more than happy to talk, willingly providing him with information, which is how he found out about the connection.

Doreen had been in full flow, telling him all about Saffron’s promising future, barely pausing for breath, when she said something that had him stopping in his tracks, actually halting her conversation as he interrupted her.

‘Sorry, you said Saffron what?’

‘The trial,’ Doreen repeated. ‘It was such a big responsibility for her sitting on that jury. Such a big case.’

‘Saffron was a juror in the Steve Noakes trial?’

‘Yes.’ Doreen seemed a little impatient, as if he should already know this and she was waiting for him to catch up, wanting to get back to her story. ‘DC Walsh and DC Corrigan already know all this.’

And had kept it to themselves. Damn it!

Finn got that he was sticking his nose in, understood that Walsh was

pissed off with him, but they knew he was involved with Casey. They should have damn well told him.

Psycho Steven was going after people directly connected to Steve Noakes. A juror, a reporter who had unfavourably covered him in the news and who had then gone on to cash in on his notoriety, and there was no doubt in Finn's mind that Casey would be a target.

He might be playing games and calling her radio show, but he would have an end goal. And Finn couldn't see any way that it didn't involve Casey.

Making his excuses, he left Doreen West's house, heading back out to his car. It was Walsh's case, but Finn was seeing red, and in the heat of the moment he called up the detective, telling him exactly what he thought about him holding back on the Saffron Pollard link.

The conversation didn't go well. He didn't miss the smirky note in Walsh's tone as he reiterated yet again that Finn was overstepping boundaries, reminding him that he was not required to share any information about the case.

Finn had then hung up on him, knew he would be getting another bollocking from his sergeant for sticking his nose into Walsh's case, but honestly, at this point he didn't care.

The bad mood stuck with him through the rest of the day and after finishing work he went over to see his parents, feeling a little lighter when he saw his mother was looking more her usual self.

Brenda Murphy had been released from hospital, the doctors saying she had been lucky, but it had still shaken them all, reminding Finn and his sister, Niamh, of their parents' mortality and how things could change in the blink of an eye.

Work and family had taken up all of his time over the last couple of days, meaning he hadn't been able to spend any of it with Casey. He had left her in his bed on Wednesday morning, but other than a couple of phone calls and a handful of texts, he hadn't actually seen her since then.

Of course that wasn't completely a bad thing, as it gave her a little space, but the truth was, long term he wanted more. He just needed to figure out a way to convince Casey that she did too. She was jittery with relationships and he understood that, and he knew it would take time and patience to make her realise that not every family was wired like Noakes's.

However, Doreen West's revelation about her daughter changed things. As far as Finn was concerned, Casey was now a target for whoever had been

calling the radio station and he intended to stick to her like glue to ensure she stayed safe.

He had lost her once and had no intention of letting her get away again.



Casey ended up taking the whole week off from her radio show.

She had spoken with Justin again and he had seemed keen for her to stay home, having completely changed his tune to earlier in the week, and she got the impression that he was now viewing her as a problem that he didn't want to have to deal with. Meanwhile, it seemed that Jade Armitage had managed to get her feet comfortably under Casey's desk.

Although that was a concern, reminding Casey just how expendable her radio show was, she hoped that by removing herself from the situation, Psycho Steven might stop, or at the very least, pause his murderous spree.

Wishful thinking, she knew that, just as she was aware she couldn't avoid her radio show forever, but after the horror of seeing Lucy Sheldon hanging from a tree, she just needed a few days away from everything.

By the time Thursday evening rolled around, she had finished the job she was working on and was craving company. Since leaving Finn's the previous morning, the only people she had seen were Zoe, Ricky and her creepy neighbour, Rupert, and the only time she had left her apartment was to take Phoebe out.

Finn had been quiet, but she knew he was busy with work and also had family commitments, his mother having been released from hospital and now back home. Time apart from him was probably a good thing. Psycho Steven's reign of terror had pulled them closer together and Casey was worried about giving Finn the wrong impression. She had told him she didn't want a relationship, but wasn't sure if that message had got through.

A little breathing space was exactly what they both needed.

As she switched off her MacBook, deciding she would take Phoebe out for a long walk, her phone pinged and she glanced at the WhatsApp message from Ricky, moaning about his lodger.

Casey decided to leave replying for now. She was still annoyed with him about yesterday and intended to address that with him before moving on. Ricky could wait until she was back. She knew he would have seen the ticks turn blue, maybe when he didn't get an immediate response it would make him consider.

She clipped on Phoebe's lead, spent a couple of hours walking along by

the river then into the village itself, enjoying seeing a few faces, even if it was only to say a passing hello to.

It had been wall-to-wall sunshine for weeks now, making it one of the hottest Julys on record, but dark clouds loomed overhead as she made her way back to Kimberley House, suggesting that rain was on the way.

She spotted Finn's car in the car park to the side of the big house and glanced at her watch, surprised to see it was already gone seven, and she realised she had been out longer than intended. She toyed with knocking on his door, wanting to check he was okay, but reminded herself it probably wasn't a good move. It was best not to encourage him or give him the wrong idea.

Instead she went upstairs to her apartment, fed Phoebe and had a quick shower. As she was drying herself, another message pinged on her phone. It was Ricky again.

Are you still mad at me? xx

She contemplated her answer. No, she wasn't happy and wanted to make that clear, but likewise, she wasn't someone who kept up grudges. She sent a message back.

Yes, I am, but we're okay. I will just remember never to trust you with a secret again. X

She threw her phone down on the bed. As she had no plans to go out again, she slipped on a pair of loose cotton sleep shorts and a vest top, ran a brush through her hair, tying it back in a low loose knot, then went through to the kitchen and poured a glass of wine.

Despite the humidity of the evening, the sky had really darkened and the sound of heavy rain was pelting the balcony through the open French doors. Casey glanced at the floor outside, considered closing them, but it was so warm in her apartment. Deciding to leave them open, she poked her head in the fridge, considering her dinner options, startling when Phoebe began barking at a knock on the door.

Finn.

Although she wasn't expecting him, she knew he was home, and besides, who else could it be? Ignoring the flutter in her belly, telling herself that it wasn't that she was particularly bothered about seeing him, but it would be good to catch up with any news he may have on the investigation, she went to the door, checked through the peephole that it was him, before letting him in.

His gaze skimmed over her appreciatively, a lazy smile on his face, and

Casey's skin heated. She hadn't thought about her skimpy outfit or her lack of bra before answering the door. Not that it should matter, as he had seen everything already, but still, there was something seductive, sinful almost, in the way he undressed her with his eyes.

'Hey.'

Her lips curved. 'Hey.' She could see he was tired, his face a shade too pale, faint lines around his eyes. Casey knew it was the last day of his four-day shift, plus of course, he had been dealing with family worries. Still, he looked good. Heat in those deep-blue eyes and his dark hair dishevelled like he had been raking his fingers through it. 'How's your mum?'

'She's doing okay. Glad to be home.'

'That's good.'

He kicked the door closed behind him, took a step closer, eyes never leaving hers. 'I've missed you.'

He said the words like he really meant them, as though she was precious to him, and anxiety and lust kicked together in Casey's belly. She laughed nervously. 'It's only been a day.'

'Two.' He backed her up against the counter with his body and the way he looked at her, the emotions rolling off him, she knew it was more than just a casual sex thing to him. That scared the shit out of her. 'I like what you're wearing.'

'What, old PJs? I wasn't expecting company.' She kept her tone light, tried not to react when his arms slipped around her, hands roaming down her back and cupping her arse cheeks.

'Old PJs work for me. You're not wearing a bra.'

'Very observant, Detective. And you're being pedantic. It hasn't been that long.'

'You smell really nice too.' He nuzzled her neck, hands slipping lower onto the back of her bare thighs, lifting her up onto the worktop, and Casey tried to ease herself out of his embrace. It wasn't easy, though, and the butterflies fluttered up a storm in her belly as Finn's mouth found hers, pulling her under with a hot and hungry kiss that completely derailed her train of thought.

'I was trying to decide what to have for dinner before you showed up and started pawing at me,' she half-heartedly grumbled when he eventually came up for air. Although he eased back to grin at her, his crooked eye tooth giving his handsome face a perfectly imperfect edge, his hands were still working

magic, slipping underneath her vest top and cupping her breasts, his thumbs rubbing circles around her nipples, making it difficult to concentrate as little licks of fire burned through her.

‘I know what I fancy for dinner.’

‘You have a one-track mind.’

‘Well, it’s your fault.’

‘My fault?’

‘You shouldn’t have answered the door wearing something so... distracting.’

‘We should talk. You need to update me. Walsh is keeping me in the dark.’

‘We can do that later.’

‘Finn!’

He arched a brow, thumbs still tracing that lazy pattern, and turning her insides to liquid. ‘Do you want me to stop?’

Casey made the mistake of pausing.

‘I didn’t think so,’ he confirmed, kissing her again as he eased her out of the vest. ‘Look, we’ll talk in a bit. We can cook some food and you can tell me what you’ve been up to and I’ll update you on what I know, but right this second I need this and I need you. Is that okay?’

He sounded so earnest, desperate even, and he had been dealing with a lot she realised; his family, work, worrying about her. She had noticed how tired he looked when she had answered the door.

A low rumble of thunder crackled through the open doors, the rain falling harder, and the air was thick with humidity and tension as he waited for her answer. She could give him this; distract him for a bit, she decided. Just because she enjoyed it, just because he made her feel things, it didn’t have to be serious. It was just two people enjoying each other’s company. It didn’t mean she was falling for him.

Locking herself around him and holding him close, she brushed her lips against his.

‘Okay.’

Later, when they were sprawled on Casey's sofa, eating pizza and finishing off the bottle of wine she had earlier opened, Finn updated her on Psycho Steven and his connection to Saffron Pollard.

Casey had preferred to think of her as a random victim; knowing that he had stalked and killed her because of her connection to Steve Noakes was unsettling. First, a juror on Noakes's trial, then a reporter who had covered the case. It seemed Psycho Steven was intentionally picking off people who had been involved in putting Noakes away. So far he had singled out Casey as his adversary, goading her into trying to save his victims. Was that all he had planned for her?

'I know you're not going to like this suggestion, but I don't want you to be alone until we have figured out who he is.'

'Okay.' Casey kept her tone even. 'So how is that going to work?'

Truth was she was more than a little freaked out, but 'until we have figured out who he is' could be a long time. They may possibly never know. Finn's concern came from a good place, but she couldn't put her life on hold indefinitely because of Psycho Steven.

'I don't know yet, but we'll figure something out. Daniella is coming to fit your cameras next week, right?'

'Yeah, on Monday.'

'We'll get her to sort an alarm too.' When Casey opened her mouth to protest, he quickly added, 'She owes me a couple of favours. Trust me, she won't mind doing it, especially when she knows the circumstances.'

Finn was quiet for a moment. 'Are you going back to do your show next week?'

Honestly, Casey wasn't sure. Part of her wanted to step away from the

radio station. After all, where was the fun in going on-air, when she was stressing about getting a call from Psycho Steven. But then, she also hated that the sick freak was dictating how she lived her life, pushing her into giving up the things she had worked hard for. 'I haven't made a decision yet. Justin says Jade is happy to carry on for now, but the longer she does my show, the more difficult it is for me to go back.'

Finn frowned at that and she couldn't quite decide if he thought her going back was a good idea or not. 'I'm off for the next four days.'

'Okay, and what's your plan? You're going to babysit me the whole time?' Casey raised her chin a notch. 'I understand I need to be careful, but I don't need a twenty-four-seven bodyguard and you don't need that either. You have other stuff going on.'

'I do. Tomorrow I am free, though, so how about we hang out? We can see how it goes and make a decision about the rest of the weekend later.'

'I have work to do.'

'You can take one day off. We'll go out and do something.'

'Like as in a date?'

'Well I was thinking more as in friends hanging out, but if you want it to be a date.'

'I never said that. Stop putting words in my mouth.'

'Unless, of course, you'd rather we spend all day in bed.' Finn grinned, picking up his wine. He reached down with his free hand, fingers lightly caressing Casey's leg. 'I could be talked into that.'

'Yeah, I bet you could. And no, that won't be happening.'

'So we'll go out, then.'

'Where?'

'Just leave the details to me.'

It was sounding suspiciously like a date, but Casey didn't push it, figuring it would be nice to get out. Yesterday hadn't quite gone to plan with Zoe and Ricky. Maybe the change of company would be a good thing too. She hadn't spoken with either of her friends since and she was still annoyed with Ricky, not just for the Zoe thing, but also about how he had been rude to her neighbour.

'Do you know all of the people who live in this building?' she asked Finn.

Apart from the Beharries and nosey Mrs Fletcher, who were both on the ground floor, they had never spoken about the other residents.

‘Most of them, at least well enough to say hi to. Why?’

‘Rupert in number seven. What’s the story with him?’

Finn frowned, shaking his head. ‘Don’t know him. I thought it was a woman was in number seven.’

‘No, definitely a bloke. Maybe early fifties. Light sandy-brown hair, starting to recede. Bit of an oddball. I think you’d remember him if you knew him.’

‘He doesn’t ring a bell, but there are a couple of people I haven’t met, and I could be wrong about number seven. Why do you want to know about him anyway? Has he been bothering you?’

‘No, not at all. He just seems to always be loitering around. Very strange guy. Harmless though.’ Casey paused, recalling the door slamming in her face across the hall. ‘What about the people who live opposite me?’

‘It’s a rental. Empty at the moment, I think.’

‘Oh... okay.’

‘Why?’

‘It’s nothing. Just stupid.’

‘Casey? Tell me.’

‘Well, Rupert said there was a couple living there, but that they were away. Then yesterday afternoon when I came upstairs, the door was open. I went to see who was there, thought it would be a good time to introduce myself, but then the door shut in my face.’ She shrugged. ‘See, I told you it was nothing.’

‘Maybe someone new has moved in. I work shifts so I don’t see everyone.’

‘Yeah, you’re probably right.’

‘You don’t seem convinced.’

Casey wasn’t. It all seemed so stupid. She was wary of one of her neighbours, worrying about who lived opposite, and then, of course, there was the paranoia that someone had been in her apartment. The string she left had never been disturbed, but still, she thought she had seen someone at the bedroom window before moving in, then there was that feeling that someone had been touching her stuff. She told all this to Finn. Could see that he was taking her seriously, but also that he was trying to be logical.

‘Do you think all of the stuff with Psycho Steven is fuelling this?’ he asked gently. ‘I’m not saying it’s your imagination, but the whole situation is going to be eating at you, maybe making you a little more jumpy than

normal.'

'Maybe.' She shrugged again. 'I just can't shake the feeling that something is off. Stupid, eh?'

'Not stupid.' He put down his wine glass and moved Casey's legs off his, getting up and holding out his hand. 'Come on.'

'Come on where?'

'Let's go say hi to the new neighbours.'

'Finn, it's late. We really don't need to do that.'

'It's just gone nine. Not that late.' He caught her hand, gave it a tug.

Casey glanced down at what she was wearing. No way was she leaving the apartment in her pyjamas and especially with no bra. 'I'm not going out like this.'

'Go get dressed, then.'

'No, I don't want to. Just leave it for tonight. I'll try them again tomorrow.'

'Okay, then, you stay here. I'll go say hi.'

'Finn!' He had already dropped her hand, was heading to the door. Casey quickly clambered off the sofa, charging after him as he opened the door, disappearing out onto the landing. 'Finn!'

She halted by the door, kept it part closed to disguise her lack of clothing, as she watched him stride across the hallway to her neighbour's and ring the doorbell.

Infuriating bloody man.

When there was no answer, Finn tried again.

'Just leave it,' Casey hissed across the landing, her voice not much more than a whisper. 'They're obviously out or don't want to be disturbed.'

When Finn ignored her, she shook her head in irritation, going back inside, leaving him to stubbornly pester the neighbours alone. Her phone was sitting on the side, a message lit up on the screen and she remembered that it had beeped a couple of times shortly after Finn had arrived. At the time she had been so distracted, she had forgotten all about it, but now she picked it up, saw it was a handful of WhatsApps from Ricky in reply to her last message.

I promise you can trust me next time. Xxx

What are you up to? Fancy hanging out over the weekend? Xx

Where are you? Answer me. Xxxxxx

Casey rolled her eyes. Ricky was so bloody needy at times.

She replied to each of his messages, keeping them brief.

I don't think so. You need a zip on your mouth.

Maybe. I'll think about it.

Stop being so impatient. I have company. xx

Ricky's reply came within seconds.

Who's there. Is it Detective Dishy?

Casey replied, a smile on her face.

Maybe. Now go away. I'm busy. Xxx

As she went to put her phone back down, it pinged again. She quickly glanced at the GIF Ricky had sent of a humping teddy bear and burst out laughing.

'What's funny?'

Glancing up, she saw Finn had finally given up trying to get an answer from across the hall.

'Nothing. Just a friend. So your plan worked, then?'

Finn shrugged. 'No answer.'

'I guessed you wouldn't get one.'

'Maybe they are out. I'm sure it's nothing sinister.'

'Yeah, you're right,' Casey agreed, though she wasn't sure of that at all.

The man Casey Fallon knew as Rupert watched from the window of Kimberley House as Casey and the guy who lived on the ground floor approached his Audi. They both had their dogs with them, which was good. It had been fear of running into the noisy beagle that had kept him away from Casey's apartment. They also had bags and a blanket, suggesting they were maybe going out for the day and wouldn't be back for a while.

Casey was wearing a pretty little strappy red dress with white flowers dotted on the material, that fell mid-thigh, leaving her legs bare. Her dark hair was tied back and large sunglasses swallowed her face. 'Rupert', real name, Robert Brown, watched her settle the dogs on the back seat of the car, then straighten up. She smoothed the material of her dress down and he studied the curve of her breasts, imagined what underwear she might have on, and he brought her knickers to his face, breathing in the sweet musky fragrance and feeling himself harden. She was so pretty.

She closed the door and went to join her friend by the boot. Finn Murphy. Robert was sure that was his name, just as he was fairly certain he was a copper. Murphy was someone Robert tended to give a wide berth to, not wishing to draw attention to himself.

He watched Murphy hook an arm around Casey and draw her in close for a kiss.

So they were involved. He had suspected it, but hadn't known for sure. Murphy had been with her last night. Robert had seen him through the peephole.

He imagined it was his arm around Casey, his lips touching hers. As they got in the car and disappeared down the long driveway to the road, he unbuttoned his jeans and slipped his hand inside, fondled himself as he

continued to sniff the underwear, imagined Casey was here with him right now.

She was the prettiest resident he had come across so far. Robert had taken underwear from most of the females living in the building, but he had lost interest in everyone except Casey Fallon. That was why he was eager to get back into her apartment. With both her and the dog gone it was the perfect opportunity. She wouldn't miss another pair of knickers and maybe he could take a little time to have a poke around her place.

He left it for twenty minutes, wanting to be certain that they definitely didn't come back, then he let himself out of the place where he had been staying and crept across the landing to Casey's apartment, unlocking the door and stepping inside.

Closing the door behind him, he took in the light and airy space. Since he had last been here, she had rearranged a few things to better suit the layout of the apartment and everything now seemed in its rightful place. The faint smell of bacon and coffee clung to the air. Two plates, two cups and two sets of cutlery were washed up and sitting on the drainer. Murphy had definitely stayed the night.

He spent a moment snooping through her things, looking at the pictures she had collated in a frame and put up on the wall, guessing that the people featured were probably family. There was a woman in a hippy dress and floppy hat posing beside an elephant, the same woman featured in another photo with a man who had greying hair. She was Casey's mother he assumed from the similar dark eyes and wide smile, so the man with her was probably Casey's dad. Then there were pictures of two men, one with curly black hair and a surfboard, another looking tanned and toned, sitting on a motorbike. A photo of both men with their arms around Casey, who was centre of the picture, suggested that she had two brothers.

He helped himself to a glass of juice, careful to rinse, dry and return the glass to the cupboard, nosed through her post and rooted through a few drawers, though there was nothing there that was of any interest to him, then he made his way down the hallway to where the real treasure was.

Casey's bedroom was filled with feminine smells and Robert went to the dresser first, sniffing at the various bottles and jars, looking through the trinket box that contained rings, bracelets and delicate-looking earrings. He glanced at the wrought-iron bed, the patchwork quilt neatly pulled across and crease-free and imagined Casey asleep.

Was she a side sleeper or did she lie on her back, or even her front? And did she have a preferred side or hog the whole mattress? She would sleep naked, he was certain of that. He was growing hard again, a picture of her in bed, her hair splayed on the pillow and her mouth slightly ajar, forming in his mind, when he remembered that Murphy had stayed overnight, knew that he would have slept in this bed beside her. He may have had his arm around her while she slept, almost certainly would have had sex with her right in this spot, pumping his filthy seed into her.

Robert was sick at the idea and couldn't shake it from his mind. Angered by the image, he turned back to the dresser, opening the drawers where he knew Casey kept her underwear.

He had several pairs of knickers and a couple of bras out and was debating what he could get away with taking, trying to figure out what pieces she wouldn't notice were missing, when there was a very distinctive click. He recognised it immediately.

A key turning in a lock.

They were back.

He froze in horror, panic burning through his veins, the sound of the door opening spurring him into action. Quickly, he stuffed the underwear back into the drawers, holding on to just one pair of knickers, then glanced around, wondering where the hell he was going to hide.

If the copper found him here he would be... honestly, he couldn't even consider it.

There was the bed, but would he be able to get under it quick enough? Or the wardrobe.

That was the safest bet. It was a built-in one and looked big enough.

If Casey came in here, though, and opened it...

He couldn't think about that. If it happened then he would have to try and figure out a way to deal with it.

As quietly as possible, he crept across the room and eased the door open, climbing inside. He pulled the door shut, peering through a tiny crack, and waited.

It was really quiet in the apartment and all he could hear were footsteps, but it sounded like there was only one set. And there was no talking. Had Casey returned alone?

That gave Robert a bigger dilemma. How would he react if Murphy wasn't with her? He was in her apartment, alone with her. He had never

found himself in this situation before. Usually, he just went for the underwear and left. But if she found him hiding in her wardrobe, what might he do in the heat of the moment?

He held still, tried not to breathe too heavily. It felt like there was little air in the wardrobe and surrounded by Casey's clothes, the scent of her fabric conditioner filling his senses, he bent forward slightly so he didn't hit the hangers; it was uncomfortably hot. Sweat beaded on his top lip and ran down the sides of his face.

After what seemed like ages, but was probably only a few minutes, the footsteps sounded in the hall that led down to the bedroom and a figure entered the room.

Robert tried to see if it was anyone he might recognise, but the angle wasn't quite right, the figure dressed in a cap and dark clothing had their back to him. He could see enough, though, to realise that it wasn't Casey and it wasn't Murphy.

So what were they doing here?

And then he saw the tiny device, realised exactly what the person was doing, and he couldn't help but wonder, why would someone want to bug Casey Fallon's apartment?

Who is your hero?
I don't mean like as in a superhero. Not a fictitious comic book character like Superman or Ironman. I am talking about everyday people who you know, the ones who do magnificent things, the ones you respect, the ones who you idolise.

For me, it was the man who showed me that I wasn't a freak, that it was okay to act on your darkest desires. He taught me how to hunt, how to capture, how to torture and he had shown me how to kill.

And he taught me how to avoid detection.

Things had changed after that day in the basement and Casey Fallon had a lot to answer for. She had ruined everything. If she hadn't shown up at the house that day, if she hadn't gone snooping where she wasn't supposed to, our secret would have been safe and Steve Noakes wouldn't be in jail.

Amanda Haines was supposed to be my first proper kill. It was my birthday and she was in the basement waiting for me. He had promised me I could play with her and that this time he wouldn't stop me from going too far.

I had been so excited about meeting Amanda, looking forward to our time together, but then Casey had shown up and well... you know how that panned out.

The bitterness I feel towards her is immeasurable. She destroyed my family and she ruined everything. I have never and can never forgive her for that.

I had hoped that one day I would get the chance to make her pay for what she did, so when he contacted me and told me that he needed my help, I was immediately willing and ready to go along with his plan for revenge. His plan

involved others too, but Casey has always been the main target. She is the one who ruined everything.

He explained to me that we would need to take our time, though, make sure that there was a foolproof plan in place. It has been years in the making, but during that time I have become a masterful hunter. I have followed the rules and added a few of my own, and the women I have killed have all been guinea pigs, serving to quench the thirst of my twisted pleasures. And while I have tortured and killed, we have plotted and planned and weaved webs. It has taken years to put everything into place, but finally it is time to take revenge against Casey Fallon.

Over the past couple of weeks I have taught her that she can't save them all, but by the time this is over, she will understand the real price she has to pay for her betrayal.

Amanda understands. She should have died years ago and she knows she has been living on borrowed time.

It was so easy to take her. She had taken all of the correct precautions, securing her home and making it difficult for me to get in without detection and she only ever ventured out to go to work. Her one downfall was her car, a twenty-five-year-old Corsa that she couldn't afford to replace. It was easy for me to slip into the school car park, to clamp the fuel pipe, then wait for her to drive home, following her at a distance and ready to strike when her car cut out.

At first she thought I was there to help her, but then she understood, and she froze like a frightened little rabbit when she understood the monster that haunted her nightmares had returned, barely putting up a fight as I secured her in the back of the van. I had expected her to struggle, but it was almost as if she went into shock. Or perhaps she was simply accepting her fate, knowing deep down that this was always going to happen.

After I had moved the van off the road, I went back and took off the clamp, turning the engine over until the pump sucked the petrol through, then I drove Amanda's little Corsa into a quiet wooded spot where I was certain it would remain hidden, at least for a couple of days. A text to her head teacher in the morning, saying she was feeling unwell and wouldn't be in work, and no one should spot she was missing.

Not that I was too bothered about the police finding out who I had taken, but this one would affect Casey. I liked the idea of hearing that moment of delicious shock when I revealed to her that she is going to have to fight to

save Amanda Haines all over again.

There have been no tears from Amanda, the only screams coming when my knives have torn into her flesh. She hasn't begged or tried to bargain with me, or even struggled against her restraints. Instead, she has waited with a sense of finality, almost willing it to be over, her eyes squeezed shut, and her sometimes violent trembling the only sign she is still alive.

Amanda wants me to give her peace, but she will have a long wait.

She is the one who got away, the one who helps me to bring this full circle. It is almost time to bring Casey back into the game, and make her realise that she can't save any of them.

Friday turned out to be a lot more enjoyable than Casey expected. She hadn't been quite sure what Finn had in mind when he had proposed a day out, but her concerns had eased this morning when he told her they were taking the dogs. She had guessed they were heading to the beach, judging from what he had brought with them, so was surprised when they pulled up in the Broads village of Wroxham, and she learnt of his plan to hire a boat for the day.

She hadn't been out on the Broads in years. This was going to be fun.

A haven for tourists, the place was heaving with shoppers and day trippers, no one in a rush as they ambled along, most dressed in shorts and T-shirts, several of them eating ice creams.

Last night's heavy rain had cleared to leave a dry, warm day with barely a cloud in the sky as they headed out on the boat from Wroxham passing spectacular riverbank properties onto the main waterways, Casey clinging on to both dogs' leads, despite Finn's assurances that they would be fine.

Phoebe would behave, Casey was sure of that, but Bert was half hanging over the edge, his big pink tongue sticking out, and looking ready for a swim. Finn might think he was in charge of his dog, but she suspected it was the other way around. Bert was going to do exactly what Bert wanted to do and Casey was fairly certain Finn was just along for the ride.

They took it in turns driving the boat, stopping at a dog-friendly pub for a long lazy lunch, Casey having fun and enjoying Finn's company more than she cared to admit.

As the afternoon wore on and they meandered back along the river towards Wroxham, she wished she could stay out here for longer. Just with Finn and their dogs, away from the concerns of the real world, the worry

about Psycho Steven, the stress about her radio show and whether she was being pushed out of her job.

As they headed back to the car, Finn's hand slipped into hers and she didn't feel that usual burning need to pull away. It actually felt right, just as he was starting to feel right. She wasn't cut out for relationships and knew she couldn't allow herself to get too close. It was okay to enjoy this for just a little bit, though, wasn't it?

Maybe Finn was different to the other men she had dated. Perhaps it could somehow work. She liked spending time with him. Okay, like was too mild a word. When he walked into the room, her heart beat a little faster and she missed him like hell when he wasn't about. The sex was great. Actually, better than great. But it wasn't just that. She could really talk with him, and not just about silly stuff. He got her and it felt like he really understood what made her tick.

Or was she getting carried away? It had been one day out on the Broads. The date that he had promised wasn't a date. She was being sappy and uncharacteristically sentimental. Yes, she knew Finn, trusted him too, but he was just one man and she didn't know where he came from, what dark skeletons might be hiding in his family's closet.

'I just need to make a quick detour,' he told her now, taking a turn-off that led back towards Norwich, instead of cutting across country to Coltishall.

'Okay.'

Casey didn't give it much thought, assuming it was perhaps work related, but then a few minutes later he turned off into the village of Spixworth, pulling into a residential cul-de-sac.

She glanced around warily. 'Where exactly are we going?'

'I want to check up on my parents.'

'What?' Panic bubbled in her gut.

'I thought it would be easier to call in now rather than have to head out again.'

'You never told me we were going to see your parents.'

'I didn't realise it would be an issue.'

'I look a mess. Besides, they don't know me. This is too weird.' She was babbling now, excuses tumbling out, one after the other.

'It's not weird, you look fine, and they know who you are.'

'They do? You've told them about me? Why would you do that?'

Finn pulled the car to a halt outside a modest, neatly-presented bungalow.

Hanging baskets filled with pretty pink petunias hung either side of the front door and the garden looked well cared for. It seemed like a nice, unassuming but welcoming home, but still Casey didn't want to go inside.

'I'll wait in the car.'

'Don't be stupid. You can come in with me.'

On the back seat, Bert, realising where he was, started barking and moving around excitedly, trampling on Phoebe, whose tail had also started wagging.

Finn turned off the engine and climbed out of the car. When Casey refused to move, he went round to the passenger door, opening it, and holding out his hand.

'I said I would wait here.'

'Stop being an idiot. Come on.'

At that point the front door opened, a woman poking her head out. Casey wasn't quick enough to look away and they made eye contact, the woman smiling at her.

She was young, maybe around Finn's age. His sister she guessed from the dark hair and similar angular features. And then she was stepping out of the bungalow and crossing the lawn towards them.

Oh fuck!

'Finn, I didn't know you were stopping by. Is this Casey?'

'It is. She's really looking forward to meeting you all, aren't you, Casey?'

Casey shot a glance at Finn, didn't miss the challenging look he gave her or the part smirk on his face.

She was going to bloody kill him.

Cheeks burning, knowing she was now backed into a corner, she got out of the car, forced a smile for the woman she assumed was his sister. 'Hi, it's nice to meet you.'

'This is my sister, Niamh. She's been staying with Mum and Dad since Dad had his fall.'

'It's good to meet you, Casey. Come on in. I've just put the kettle on. Finn has told us all about you. I know Mum and Dad are keen to meet you.'

Yes, she was definitely going to bloody kill him.

'I have my dog with me. You really don't want her traipsing through the house.'

Niamh waved off her protests. 'Phoebe, isn't it? She'll be fine. If my parents can cope with Bert in the house, she won't be any bother.'

With all of her excuses gone, Casey found herself following Finn and Niamh into the bungalow. Finn had taken hold of her hand again, despite her best attempts to discreetly shake him off, as if he suspected that she would bolt if he let go.

He wasn't far wrong there. Her belly was in knots, her palms clammy, terrified she was going to have a panic attack.

But then she was in the living room being introduced to Brenda and Patrick Murphy and they were both so lovely and welcoming and kind. It was obvious they were a close family, that Finn thought the world of them, and her nerves eased while her anger began to thaw.

No, she hadn't wanted to come, and no, he shouldn't have forced her, but perhaps it was good that he had.

'See, that wasn't so bad,' Finn told her as they drove back to Coltishall an hour later.

'You shouldn't have forced me to go,' she grumbled in protest, but her anger had now completely gone. 'Next time you want me to do something, how about you ask me instead?'

'If I had asked you, would you have said yes?'

'No,' she admitted, after a pause.

'Exactly. That's what I thought. It was painless enough though, right? My parents are good people, my sister is too. Not all families have secrets. You don't need to be nervous about them.'

'I'm not. You shouldn't have told them I was your girlfriend.'

Finn glanced her way, a teasing glint in his eyes. 'Like you told Walsh?'

'That was different.'

'It was?'

'You know it was. This isn't a relationship, Finn.'

'You keep telling yourself that, Casey.'

'It isn't.'

'We'll see.'

He was so infuriating and it was like trying to argue with a brick wall, as he turned the radio up, cutting off any further protests. She glowered at him, not missing his stifled smirk as he focused on the road.

As they drove the rest of the way home in silence, she mused again over this thing they had started. Finn was moving things forward at a hundred miles per hour and dragging her along for the ride, despite her protestations. All of her finely laid-out plans were thrown up in the air and she was learning

there was no halfway mark with him. She was either all in or all out.

At this point she wasn't sure she could bring herself to walk away.

That meant that she had a lot of thinking to do.

But for now it was back to reality, as she discovered, her phone pinging with a text ten minutes after she stepped back into her apartment. She wanted a shower and a change of clothes, had left Finn to take both dogs for a walk, agreeing to his suggestion to go downstairs for dinner and a movie with him later.

She had just spent the whole day with him, should really back off and put a bit of space between them, but he was like a drug and the more she had of him the more she wanted.

She had just stepped out of the shower and was walking back into her bedroom, a towel wrapped round her, when the message came through, and she sat down on her bed, grabbing her phone, expecting it to be from Ricky, Zoe or one of her brothers.

The number was unknown and she frowned at the screen as she opened it, assuming it would be a cold caller text.

It wasn't.

I have missed listening to you on your show this week, bitch.

Have you decided to run away?

Our games haven't finished yet, so there is no point in trying to hide from me.

I have taken another one and only you can stop me, Casey.

Are you going to try and save her this time?

Casey dropped the phone on the bed, gripped on to the edge of the mattress, sickness swirling in her gut.

Suddenly the walls of her apartment were closing in on her, her head spinning and her temperature heating up, and for a moment she was certain she was going to be sick. She drew a couple of deep breaths, willed it to pass.

He had her mobile number. That made it really personal and it also had her wondering what else he knew about her. Did he know where she lived? Had he followed her? Did he know who her friends and family were?

With shaking hands, she picked up her phone again and called Finn. As she waited for him to answer she wondered exactly what was Psycho Steven's endgame?

Casey had hoped that her day out with Finn would be the prelude to a relaxing and enjoyable weekend, but Psycho Steven's text put paid to that, with the obnoxious Walsh and Corrigan blustering into her apartment and occupying her time, making demands and treating her like she was an idiot.

This time Finn had insisted on being there with her, refusing to leave, despite Walsh's protestations, and things had become heated to the point that Casey thought Finn might punch him. Fortunately, he managed to rein in his temper, which was the best scenario for all of them. The last thing she wanted was him getting into trouble at work or being kicked out of her apartment while Walsh and Corrigan gave her the third degree.

Psycho Steven had killed both Saffron Pollard and Lucy Sheldon on a Monday night. There was no reason to believe he would deviate from his pattern, Walsh insisted, convinced the text to Casey had been a warning that she needed to return to her radio show.

He wanted her back in the studio on Monday evening, planned to be there with her again, with a larger police presence ready for when the killer called.

Finn wasn't happy, telling Walsh to think outside the box. Psycho Steven was presently calling all of the shots and it was idiotic to believe he wouldn't try to move the goalposts, just as he already had with the time frames he had given to save each victim.

This was his game, his rules, and he was never going to let them win.

While Walsh wouldn't budge on getting Casey back in the studio, he did agree to a panic button in her apartment and also put a marker on her, so if she had to call the police she would be treated as a priority.

It was Sunday evening when she finally had some peace. Finn had been

sticking to her like glue all weekend, refusing to let her out of his sight, and while she had initially found this reassuring, she was now in need of some 'me time'. It wasn't that she didn't appreciate him or like him being there, but her apartment had been swarming with police officers and she had barely had a moment to think all weekend.

They had not long been back from a walk with the dogs when his phone rang. While he took the call, Casey went through into her bedroom, planning to change into a pair of comfortable old joggers. She toyed with indulging in a bath, would suggest to Finn that maybe they watch a film. Although she wasn't sure she would be able to concentrate, she needed to try and switch off, to relax a bit. The thought of going back into the studio tomorrow was terrifying her and her muscles were all knotted up.

Finn wandered through into the bedroom while she was changing, his phone still in his hand.

'I need to go over to see my parents. Dad's being stubborn, insisting he can walk without his crutches and he's giving Niamh a hard time.'

'Okay, you should go. It's not fair for your sister to have to deal with that by herself. I'll be fine for a couple of hours.'

Finn frowned. 'I'm not leaving you here alone. You'll have to come with me.'

'What?' Casey's eyes widened. 'No I don't. I'll be fine here. It's not like I'm planning on going out anywhere.'

'You're not staying here alone.'

'Says who? You?' Her hackles were rising now. 'I appreciate everything you've done for me... Are doing for me,' she corrected. 'But you're not my boss, Finn. You don't get to dictate what I do and don't do. I'm staying here.'

'You're being ridiculous. You've already met my parents once.'

'And that's not the issue. Look, I've had a crappy weekend, I've had to put up with Walsh and Corrigan, and I just want some me time. You don't even know for sure that I'm in danger.' When he opened his mouth to interrupt her, she held up her hand. 'You're going to be gone, what, a couple of hours? I'm home in a top-floor apartment. The door is locked and I have the panic button.'

Finn scowled at her, nostrils flaring, and she could tell he wasn't happy, but at least he was now listening to her. 'I'll speak to Niamh,' he suggested. 'Tell her tonight's not good.'

'You don't have to do that. She needs you right now and I need a couple

of hours for me. I just want to run a bath, put on some music and chill for a bit. I'm shitting myself about tomorrow night. It's really stressing me out and I just need to try and relax. Please let me have that.'

The scowl softened, his annoyance fading, and he closed the gap between them. 'You promise you will keep the door locked?'

'I will lock it the second you leave and I won't open it until you're back.'

'And you'll keep your phone with you?'

'I promise.'

He hesitated, seemed to consider it some more, then tilted her chin so she was looking up at him. 'And you'll call me if anything, I mean, *anything*, happens?'

'Nothing is going to happen.' When Finn's eyes narrowed, she quickly added, 'But I will, I promise. I'm just going to chill and have some me time while I wait for you.' She reached up on tiptoe, hooking her arms around his neck and pressed her lips against his. 'And I was thinking that when you get back maybe you might help keep me distracted.' She raised a suggestive eyebrow.

Finn grinned, pulling her closer, his hands roaming over her back. 'I can do that.'

After he had left, Casey went through into the bathroom and started to fill the tub. She threw in one of the bath bombs Zoe had bought her as a congratulations gift for getting her own radio show, the delightful peachy scent filling the room as the water frothed with bubbles.

She would find a chilled playlist and relax in the tub with a glass of wine, then put on her favourite PJs and read a few chapters of the new Jack Foley novel that she had downloaded earlier in the week.

Leaving the bath running, she tied her hair up and went through to the kitchen, selecting a nice bottle of Malbec. Phoebe was snoozing on the sofa, while Bert was zonked out on the floor, snoring. Finn's dog had so much energy and Casey was relieved to see he did actually have a limit. Both dogs seemed worn out from their long walk, their bellies full of dinner.

She had just poured a glass of the wine, when her phone started ringing. Assuming it was Finn, she snatched it up from the counter, frowning at the unknown number.

Psycho Steven.

If it was him then he was jumping the gun. It wasn't Monday night and she wasn't in the studio. He had her number though.

She watched the phone ring, heart thumping, waiting for it to cut to voicemail. If it was important the caller would leave a message. When it stopped, she stared at the screen, waiting, jumping when it started ringing again.

What if it wasn't him? It could be someone trying to get hold of her urgently.

No, she had the numbers of the people she cared about. Finn, her parents, Liam, Nick, Zoe and Ricky. Unless someone else was trying to get hold of her because something had happened to one of them.

The call cut to voicemail again. No message. It didn't ring again.

She let out a shaky breath, wondering if perhaps she should have answered it. Now she was going to be worrying that everyone was okay.

Telling herself off for overreacting, she picked up her wine glass, took a generous sip, then went through to the bathroom and turned off the taps. It was probably just a cold caller. Everything that had happened this last couple of weeks was getting to her, and knowing that Psycho Steven had her mobile number was making her paranoid.

She had stepped out of her joggers, was undoing her bra, when the phone beeped, indicating a text message. Was it the person who had been trying to call her?

She threw her bra on the bed, looked at her phone, fear coursing through her veins when she read the opening line of the text on her lock screen.

Don't ignore me when I call you, bitch.

With shaking fingers, she swiped her phone screen and read the rest of the message.

I have an old friend of yours with me. Do you want to say hello?

As Casey read the words, another message pinged through. A photo attachment of a woman's face, puffy and bruised, tape over her mouth and wrapped tightly around her head. One of her eyes was badly bruised and swollen shut, the other one staring at the camera, seeming resigned to her fate. Her chin was jutted up, the tip of a knife pressed against her throat.

The text said, 'an old friend', but she didn't recognise the woman, though there was something familiar in that one staring eye.

Oh God. She needed to call Finn.

Before she could pull his number up, another message came through.

Next time I call you, answer your phone, or I slit her throat.

Shit! Shit! Shit!

As she clicked into her contact list, the phone started ringing again with the unknown number. Casey stared at it as if it was a bomb. Although she wanted to ignore the call, needed to speak with Finn, Steven had a knife to the woman's throat. She had to answer it.

'Hello?' Her mouth was dry and she realised she was trembling as she waited for him to speak, but instead of his voice she just heard music.

It was a song, one that sounded familiar, but for a moment she was struggling to place it, then the chorus kicked in and realisation dawned. It was the Barry Manilow song, 'Mandy'.

Casey paused, understanding. The old friend was the one that got away. She knew now why the woman had seemed familiar. He had taken Amanda Haines.

'Let her go. Please! You can't put her through this again.'

A soft laugh on the end of the phone. 'It's in your hands now, Casey. If you don't want her to die, then you need to save her.'

The panic button. She needed to alert the police.

'You won't get away with this,' she told him, heading back into the hallway and through into the living area, where the black box sat on a side table next to one of the two sofas. 'They will catch you.'

'Press that panic alarm, Casey, and she dies. No game, it's over.'

Casey froze. How did he know about the panic alarm?

'Good girl. You're listening. You're also wondering how I know about the panic alarm and what you were about to do. Just as you're now going to wonder how I know you are standing there in the middle of your living room, wearing just a blue vest and black knickers, and have a look of shock on your face.'

'You're watching me.' Panic bubbled. He was here in her apartment. Self-consciously, she put her free arm across her body, cautiously turning in a circle, eyes searching for his hiding place. 'Where are you?' she whispered.

Another chuckle came down the phone. The creepy arsehole was enjoying this.

She realised she couldn't hear his voice other than through the call, which didn't make sense, but then it dawned on her and she glanced nervously around. 'Is there a camera in here? How long have you been watching me, you bastard?'

On the floor, Bert cracked an eye open, looking at her, probably wondering why she had raised her voice.

‘Long enough to know that the police were here over this weekend and fitted that panic alarm. Long enough to have watched your boyfriend fucking you on that sofa last night. Long enough to know that he left a short while ago, that he has gone over to see his parents and you are home all alone.’

‘You sick fuck.’

He had watched her and Finn, would have seen her naked. She needed to put some clothes on.

‘Stop!’ He yelled the word as she went to go back to her bedroom, making her jump.

‘I want to get dressed.’

‘You can get dressed in a minute. Right now I need you to stay exactly where you are and listen to me. Do you understand?’ When she didn’t respond immediately, he repeated his command more aggressively. ‘Do you understand?’

‘Why are you doing this?’

‘There are cameras set up all around your apartment, Casey, and I am watching everything you do. If you try to find them, Amanda dies. If you press the panic button, Amanda dies. If you try to call or text anyone, Amanda dies. Are we clear?’

Fuck, what was she supposed to do?

‘Answer me, Casey.’

‘Yes.’

‘You’re not sounding very convincing. Perhaps I need to be more persuasive.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Your boyfriend has gone to see his parents. Nice couple. Finn’s sister is staying with them. She’s a pretty girl.’

No, not Finn’s family. Her heartbeat quickened. ‘What have you done?’ Casey had to force the words out. Her mouth was so dry now it was difficult to speak.

‘At the moment, nothing. But I am outside their lovely little bungalow and I have a big sharp knife with me. I can kill them all in seconds. Patrick with his broken leg and Brenda, still fragile from her stroke, they will be easy to take down. Then Niamh, she’s pretty. I might take her with me. And Finn when he arrives, he’ll be so preoccupied with checking on his parents I can easily catch him off guard.’

‘Don’t do this, please.’ Casey didn’t care that she was begging. She

couldn't let Psycho Steven hurt Finn's family, couldn't bear the thought of him hurting Finn. She had to find a way to warn them, but how?

'They are my collateral, Casey. If you do as you're told, I won't have to hurt them. Disobey me, though, and I will kill every one of them before I go and put poor Amanda out of her misery.'

'What do you want me to do?'

'I want you to try and rescue Amanda. No riddle this time. I will give you the location, tell you exactly where she is. If you find her, you both go free.'

'And if I don't?'

There was a pause. 'If you don't find her before I get back... well, you're probably best not to think about that.'

Casey swallowed hard. She had no idea how she was going to play this. Right now she was just agreeing and going along with him while she tried to figure a way out. Desperate to keep him on side, terrified if she didn't that he might hurt Finn and his family. 'Where is she, Steven?'

'Listen carefully. You have one chance to get this right. As soon as this call ends you are going to go into the kitchen and fill the sink with water, then you're going to put your phone in it—'

'But how are you—'

'Don't interrupt me. Pay attention. This is important. You don't want to fuck it up. You put your phone in the water, then you go get dressed and go downstairs to your car. You have exactly five minutes to do this and I will be watching you the whole time. You do not try to contact anyone, you do not speak to anyone. There is a camera in your car and if you are not sitting in the driver's seat in exactly five minutes, the game is over and I will kill Finn's family. Then I will go and kill Amanda. Now do you understand?'

Oh God. What the hell was she going to do? If she followed his instructions, what did he have planned for her? But then if she didn't, Amanda, Finn and his family were all in danger.

'Please, you don't have to do this. We can talk.'

'No talking. You need to be listening. Do you know Captain's Pond near North Walsham?'

'Yes.' Casey had been there a couple of times with Zoe to walk Phoebe.

'Once you are in your car, I want you to drive there. Once you pass the pond on your right, there will be a turn-off to the left called The Hill. Keep going. A couple of hundred yards past that is a dirt track, also on the left. Follow the track to the house. That is where you will find Amanda. Now do

you understand?’

‘Captain’s Pond, dirt track past The Hill. Yes, but–’

‘No buts. The game is simple, you have the rules and you know what to do. Five minutes, Casey. Destroy the phone, get dressed, get down to your car. If I see you do anything other than that you know what happens. Get to Captain’s Pond, find Amanda. You saved her once, can you do it again?’

The phone went dead.

‘Hello?’

Shit. He was gone. Christ, what the hell was she going to do?

Think, Casey. For fuck’s sake, think.

She glanced warily around the room, almost too scared to move, but then she remembered she only had five minutes and she willed her shaking legs to work, running through into the kitchen, putting the plug in the sink and turning the taps on full blast.

She drew in a couple of deep breaths, tried to calm herself, knowing that she didn’t have a choice. She was going to have to do this. She couldn’t let anything happen to Finn and his family, or Amanda, but if she was going to follow Psycho Steven’s instructions then she needed to find a way to alert Finn to where she had gone.

Reluctantly, she dropped her phone into the sink, aware she had just cut all contact to the people she loved and cared about.

There was no time to feel sorry for herself though. She had lost what... forty seconds, a minute, already? Why hadn’t she looked at the time? At least she would know how long she had left. She had to get dressed, had to get down to her car.

Both dogs were now wide awake and looking at her. She couldn’t take them with her, couldn’t risk putting them in danger.

In her bedroom she pulled on her jeans, picked up her bra. Suddenly conscious that there was likely a camera in the room. He had said he would be watching her.

‘I’m going in the bathroom to put this on.’ She held the bra up, slowly turning round as she spoke, hoping that he wouldn’t penalise her for leaving the bedroom. He hadn’t said it was against the rules. ‘And I need to pee,’ she added, figuring it made things more plausible.

She didn’t need to go, but it gave her extra seconds alone.

She went into the bathroom, closed the door, quickly put on the bra as she glanced around, hoping there wasn’t a camera in there.

What could she use? What could she use?

She opened the cabinet, rummaged through the wicker basket unit that sat under the sink. Shampoo, shower gel, hairbrush, tampons. It was all useless.

Then she remembered she had a wheel wrench in the boot of her car. It wasn't perfect, but it was better than anything she would find in here. Unless...

Her eyes fell on her make-up bag and the lipstick that had rolled out.

She could leave Finn a message.

Christ, what did she have, two or three minutes left? There wasn't time.

She had to try though. She could use her eyeliner, write on toilet paper.

She pulled off a few sheets of loo roll, fished in the bag for her liner and wrote a message.

This would tell him where she was, but where the hell could she leave it for him without Psycho Steven spotting what she had done?

Think, Casey.

Then she had an idea. It was a long shot, but better than nothing. She folded up the paper, stuffing it in her pocket, and snatched up the lipstick, scrawled a brief message on the mirror.

Finn could be gone hours. What if he didn't see this until was too late?

Don't think about that. He will see it.

Conscious of the time, aware she needed to move, she left the bathroom, apologised to the dogs for leaving them as she let herself out of her apartment and sucked in a breath, guilt kicking in when she heard Phoebe whimper and let out a bark. They were safer here.

There wasn't time to get help from any neighbours. She had to get downstairs to her car. Though first she darted across the landing, pulling the toilet paper from her back pocket and sitting it outside her neighbour's door. She rang the doorbell before heading for the stairs, hoping to hell whoever lived there answered and saw her urgent plea to call the police.

Down the stairs, into the hallway, out of the main door, and then she was sprinting across the car park to her car.

Please let me make it on time. Please let me make it on time.

She clicked her keys, unlocking it, clambered into the driver's seat, catching her breath.

Captain's Pond was about five or six miles away. If she headed out on the North Walsham Road through Scottow, she could be there in ten to fifteen minutes.

She started the engine, gripped the steering wheel, willing her hands to stop shaking and pulled out of her parking space, all the while wondering if she was making a terrible mistake.

By the time Casey reached Captain's Pond she was a nervous wreck, sick with worry in case Psycho Steven broke his promise about hurting Finn's family, but also terrified about what she might be walking into.

All she could think about was Saffron Pollard suffocating to death with the plastic bag on her head and Lucy Sheldon slowly choking as she hung from the tree in the ruins of East Somerton's old church. What was planned for Amanda Haines? And Casey wasn't stupid. Psycho Steven had gone to pains to get her here alone. Was he really going to let her leave alive?

She should keep driving, go to the police. It's what she should have done in the first place. Driving out here alone was quite possibly one of the most stupid things she had ever done.

But Finn and his family. She had gone to the police before. She had done the sensible thing, done as everyone told her, and, as a result, Saffron had died. Lucy too. If Psycho Steven butchered Patrick and Brenda Murphy, if he did anything to Niamh, how would Casey live with herself knowing she had a chance to stop it happening, but didn't take it.

And Finn. He was a police officer, physically strong, so would surely have a chance against Psycho Steven, but what if he was caught off guard? What if he died? Casey couldn't lose him. And even if he did survive, how would she possibly face him knowing that she had sacrificed his family to save her own skin?

As she drove past the body of water, the warm evening sun glistened over the calm surface. It was too pretty, too serene to be in this situation and in a way it felt like it wasn't really happening. Of course it was, though, and as she passed the turning for The Hill, and slowed the car looking for the dirt

track, saw it come into view, she thought she was going to be sick.

She couldn't go through with this.

Still, she slowly navigated her car down the bumpy track, her leg trembling so badly she was struggling to keep her foot on the accelerator. There was still about twenty minutes of daylight and she could see the path winding through the trees ahead, wondering where the hell she was going and what she was going to find when she eventually stopped.

What if this was a trap?

Psycho Steven had Amanda. That was a certainty, but could Casey be sure she was here or even still alive? Steven had jumped the gun before. What if he was waiting here to ambush her?

She gripped the wheel tighter, forced herself to keep driving. As the track twisted again, she saw a building. Was it a house? Pulling into the clearing she stopped the car, though left the engine running.

The property before her looked fairly old and not particularly loved. Part of the roof was damaged, much of the paint on the window frames had chipped away and the panes of glass were filthy. The borders were overgrown and the paving stones leading to the shabby front door were broken and had weeds growing between the cracks.

Was this where Psycho Steven lived? It looked like something out of a horror movie.

There was no car in the drive and no sign of anyone being home.

He knows you're here though. Go!

Her brain was screaming the action and she desperately wanted to go, but Finn was forefront in her mind. If she drove off now, what would be the consequences of her actions?

She managed to manoeuvre the car, repositioning it so it was facing back towards the road.

If she was really going to get out and go looking for Amanda, she wanted to be able to make a quick getaway. Not that it would make much difference. Psycho Steven had told her there was a camera in the car. He was watching her every move. And he undoubtedly had more cameras set up over the property. She was going to be walking into the lion's den.

The enormity of the moment hit her as a wave of emotion took over, tears spilling as sobs wracked through her. She couldn't do this. She couldn't go in there. Knew if she did that she was going to die.

What did the psycho have planned for her once he had her? Would her

death be quick or would he torture her the same way he had tortured Saffron and Lucy?

Don't even go there.

She thought of her family, her parents, and Nick and Liam so many miles away, understanding that she may never see them again. And Phoebe. Her little dog went everywhere with her, hadn't understood why Casey had left without her tonight.

The tears fell harder until she could barely see and was struggling to catch her breath.

She couldn't do this. She had to get out of here.

Pull yourself together. No one is here to help you.

She swiped at her eyes, sniffed back the tears, glancing at the house in the rear-view mirror, knowing she really was all alone, and fear pulsed through her.

She should leave now, before it was too late. Get to the police.

And if she did that, what were the consequences for Finn?

She thought of him now. The boy she had pined for and the man he had become. He infuriated her at times, didn't know when to stop winding her up, but he was good and he was kind, and despite the fact she kept pushing him away, he had managed to burrow his way through her defences. He wasn't just a casual fling. He was so much more than that.

It came down to him or her, she realised, and she was never going to get the chance to tell him what he really meant to her.

Fresh tears fell as she understood she couldn't leave. She had to do this for him and for his family.

But could she really bring herself to go inside?

Deep breaths, Casey. Deep breaths. You can do this. Figure out a way to outsmart the bastard.

Switching off the engine, she reluctantly got out of the car.

Psycho Steven would know she was here now. What if he had a trap waiting for her? Was he watching her right now, waiting for her to get inside? He might not be here, but what if he had a partner? She hadn't considered that; fresh fear burning through her.

Do this for Finn.

Getting her wrench from the boot, she took tentative steps towards the house, wondering where Amanda was. The sun was getting lower in the sky and she was conscious it would soon be dusk. She didn't have a torch and

honestly, the idea of being here past dark scared her half to death.

She was without her phone too and no one knew she was here. How the fuck was she going to get out of this?

As she neared the house, she almost bottled it, started to walk back to the car.

You have to do this, Casey. You don't have a choice.

Finn, his family, Amanda. There were five lives at risk compared to her one. She had to do this for them.

She forced herself forward again, peered through one of the dusty front windows. It was gloomy inside the house, but she could just about make out a couple of sofas and a television. There didn't appear to be anyone home, but it did nothing to allay her fears. It could still be a trap. Maybe she should walk the perimeter of the house first before making a decision about going inside. Although she didn't have long, she still needed to pluck up the courage.

She glanced longingly at her little Toyota. Although it was only parked a few metres away, it seemed much further. If she had to run, would she make it back to the safety of the car? Her legs were so rubbery she was certain she was going to collapse at any moment.

You can do this, Casey.

The car disappeared from sight as she cautiously followed the path round the edge of the property. It was so quiet, just the sound of her footsteps on the concrete, though she was trying not to make too much noise, scared of what she might disturb.

As she passed the back garden, she was reminded of just how isolated the property was, surrounded by woods and in the middle of nowhere. Her relief at reaching the front of the house again, her car back in sight, was quashed by a fresh wave of fear that she couldn't put off going inside.

And she was running out of daylight too, knew it would soon be dark.

God, she couldn't do this.

She paced outside the front door, wanting to delay the inevitable.

Do it. Do it. Do it.

She tried the front door, the handle slick in her hand, her heart bobbling in her throat when it creaked open.

Oh fuck.

Her bowels knotted as she forced herself to step into the dark, cool house, keeping the wrench gripped tightly in her hand. She left the front door open,

knew there was no way she could bring herself to close it.

She found herself in a long narrow hallway, stairs leading up to the left with doors open to the right, and she could see the kitchen at the end of the hall. There was an overpowering odour too. A staleness and... was that urine?

You can do this, Casey. One step at a time.

She tentatively crept further into the hallway, peering in the rooms.

The place was basically furnished. Whoever Psycho Steven was, he didn't care much for décor, knick-knacks or family photos, and hygiene didn't appear high on his list either. Walls and ceilings were covered in cobwebs and the furniture was covered in a layer of dust. On the floor by one of the sofas in the living room were a couple of glasses and a dirty plate, while the kitchen counters were full of crap and the sink loaded with food-splattered dishes.

Casey wondered if there was a better weapon she could find in the kitchen, hesitantly opening drawers, heart sinking when it became clear that all sharp objects had been hidden away, as if pre-empting that she would do that.

There was no sign of Amanda anywhere, which meant she was going to have to explore upstairs.

She wasn't sure she was brave enough to do that, glancing up the dark, narrow staircase, terrified of what she might find up there.

You're here now. You have to do this.

She put one cautious foot on the bottom step. Willed herself to keep climbing. As she was about halfway up, the stair creaked loudly, cutting through the silence, and she had to cover her mouth with her hand to stop screaming. She stilled for a moment, tried to find the courage to keep climbing. As she reached the landing, someone appeared before her and this time she did scream, legs shaking so badly she lost her footing, landing on her knees.

As she scrambled to her feet, her heart racing, so frightened she thought she was going to pass out, she realised there was a mirror at the top of the stairs. It had just been her reflection.

Momentary relief skittered through her, and she choked down on a sob. Then she spotted the words written on the glass.

In bold lettering and what appeared to be paint, possibly blood. ***She's in the garden.***

Did he mean Amanda was in the garden? Was this message for Casey?
It had to be.

She had spotted a couple of sheds outside, but not the kind of thing that looked like it could hold someone prisoner.

Not needing to be told twice, she hurried down the stairs and out of the front door, eager to be out of the creepy house, sucking in fresh air to try and expel the musty, dank, ammoniac smell of the property.

Dusk was settling now and she looked at her car longingly, wanting nothing more than to get inside it and drive the hell away from this place. Her Sunday-night plans should have been so different to this and she would give anything to be cuddled up with Finn on the sofa.

Was he safe? Please, dear God, let him be safe. She had driven out here and had done exactly as Psycho Steven had asked. She just wanted this nightmare to be over, clinging to the hope that she could somehow find Amanda and get them both out of this.

Sucking in another breath, giving herself a pep talk that if she had been in the spooky hell-house, then the garden should be easy, she made her way round to the back of the property again, heading down towards the sheds.

She started with the bigger of the two, gingerly approaching and peering through the open door. It was dark inside and she gave her eyes a moment to adjust, though there was nothing of interest. There were a couple of pushbikes against the back wall, a wheelbarrow and some plastic sheeting on the floor. No trapdoors, no sign of Amanda. The second shed had a locked door, but was much smaller. She could see through the window that it was filled with boxes. There was no way Amanda was in there.

So where was she?

The tension was killing Casey and her head was thumping. She wasn't sure how much more of this she could take. As she wondered whether to call it quits, knew she had done everything that had been asked of her, she spotted what looked like a large manhole cover between the two sheds.

It was probably nothing, but it seemed an odd thing to have at the end of the garden and it didn't seem like a standard one used by the water and sewage authorities, appearing much bigger in size, with a handle on top. More of a hatch really. Still Casey was drawn to it, knew she needed to check it out.

She gripped the handle, didn't expect it to open, surprised when it did so easily, pulling back to reveal a set of stone steps that descended into

darkness.

Shit. She didn't have a torch. Really didn't want to go down there.

'Amanda?' she called into the silence. Waited, her heart thumping.

Maybe she was wrong and this cellar, bunker, whatever the hell it was, would be empty. As she debated, trying to decide if she was brave enough to go down the steps, she heard a faint moan.

Oh fuck. She was down there.

Casey glanced back towards the house, still fearful of being attacked. There was no sign of anyone in the house. No lights on and Psycho Steven didn't appear to be back, but even so, she knew he was probably watching her. If she went down the steps into whatever the hell was waiting for her, he or someone else could easily close the door and trap her.

But if she didn't...

Seriously, what the fuck was she supposed to do?

The moan came again, this time louder, echoing up the steps. *Shit.*

Casey knew she had no choice. If Amanda was down there, she had to try and help her.

Careful not to trip, she slowly descended the steps, hands on the stone walls either side to try and keep balance, all the while concentrating on trying to keep her breathing steady. The last few steps were almost in darkness and when she reached the bottom, she glanced back up at the open hatch, could see the last remnants of daylight.

She imagined the door closing, being trapped down here in the pitch black and started to shake uncontrollably. She couldn't do this.

You're here now. You can't leave.

'Amanda?' Her voice wasn't much more than a whisper. She had no idea what was waiting for her down here, no idea how big this place was either.

More moaning.

Without the aid of light, Casey had to feel her way along the wall towards the sound. The air was cold, damp and musty, and thick with the scent of sweat, fear and blood.

How many women had been trapped down here? Was Amanda Haines the first or had there been others?

Her arm brushed against something and she squealed, at first assuming it was a cobweb or insect. As it hit her again, though, she knew it was too heavy to be either. Was it a piece of rope or something? She fumbled with her fingers, caught hold of it, realising it was a thin cord. Was it a light

switch? She gave it a gentle tug and a bare bulb flickered to life, casting a dull glow on the room.

Casey blinked rapidly, taking in her surroundings. One wall was lined with hooks of cuffs, chains and various restraints, another with a huge display cabinet that was filled with knives and other tools she assumed were used to torture. In the corner of the room was a coat stand full of overalls and what looked like plastic gowns, and next to that was a desk with a computer and printer on it, as well as a drill, a Norwich City Football Club mug filled with manky-looking liquid, and, rather randomly, a yellow stress ball with a smiley face. But it was the huge worktable that drew her attention – and the woman strapped down on top of it.

Amanda Haines.

Psycho Steven hadn't been lying. She was here and she was still alive, though she looked like she had been through hell. Stripped down to her underwear, bloodied and bruised.

This was déjà vu and for a moment Casey was nineteen again and back in Steve Noakes's workshop, horrified by what she had discovered. Last time, though, Amanda had been alert and pleading with Casey to free her. Now she barely looked up and her fight was gone. Psycho Steven had broken her.

What the hell had this been like for her? Kidnapped and tortured by Steve Noakes back when she was a university student, living a life of fear and dread because of what had happened, only to be taken again, locked down here in this dark, dank room with another psychopath.

She had left the woman alone in Steve Noakes's workshop and had never forgotten that look of betrayal before she had replaced the blindfold and had gone to get help, even if her actions had resulted in Amanda being rescued.

'Amanda?' When there was no response, Casey touched her face, aware her own hand was trembling badly. 'Amanda?'

The woman's one good eye fluttered open, but like in the photo Psycho Steven had sent Casey, her spirit had gone.

'I'm going to get you out of here.'

Brave words. Casey's heart was pounding with fear, her stomach in knots, and she was aware she was struggling to keep her shit together.

She couldn't see a key to the cuffs, wondering if they were perhaps in one of the desk drawers. If not, could she break into the display cabinet and use pliers or a saw? First though, she needed to try and get the tape off the woman's mouth. It was wrapped tightly around her head and Casey wasn't

sure she could remove it without pulling out Amanda's hair, but she could at least get it off her mouth so she could speak.

She managed to get her finger under the tape, giving it a tug, and Amanda winced in pain, made a little moaning noise in the back of her throat.

'I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.'

She needed a knife to cut the tape loose, knew she had to get into the display cabinet. Could she smash the glass with her wrench?

'I'll be back in a second,' she murmured, wandering away from the table.

Amanda didn't react and Casey knew time was running out for her, that she needed to get the woman to safety as quickly as possible.

She smashed the wrench against the display cabinet, readying herself for the shatter of glass. The weapon didn't make a dent though, surprising her as it bounced back. Frustrated, she tried again, harder.

Nothing.

Had the bastard used some kind of toughened glass?

Okay, think, Casey. Figure this out.

'I need to find the keys to that cabinet,' she muttered, as much to herself as to Amanda.

She went to the desk, tried the top drawer. It was unlocked and she fumbled through several pairs of goggles and surgical gloves, coming up empty. The second drawer held reels of duct tape, so she turned her attention to the bottom drawer, her throat constricting when she spotted the photographs. She picked them up, sick to her stomach as she leafed through them.

Various women, some strapped down on the table where Amanda was, others hanging from their wrists, all in various states of undress, many of them sporting cuts and bruises, others with bags over their heads or a rope around their neck.

Ohmigod, ohmigod.

Casey was trembling so badly now, the fear threatening to engulf her. She had to get Amanda out of here, had to get help, but how?

The crunch of a footstep came from behind her and she swung around, eyes widening in horror, her brain trying to comprehend.

'What are you...' She trailed off, realisation sinking in. It wasn't possible.

The figure held up a set of keys and smiled. 'Are you looking for these?'

I was never really close to my real dad, and in a way I guess it was as if I always knew, or at least sensed that we were different.

While he bonded with my brother, I was the one on the outside looking in, wanting to be a part of things, but only to feel included. In all honesty, I was happiest alone when I was doing my own thing.

Dennis was a tough man to please. But although he irritated me, I never wished him any harm. When I discovered his plan to change his will and leave everything to Julie though, I couldn't have that. It wasn't right. I was relying on that money to fund my lifestyle.

That was why I had to end his life, a tumble down the stairs that had been a terrible accident. I almost didn't get away with it. I didn't realise my cousin was in the house, that he had heard us fighting. For a moment I had considered I might have to kill him, too, but I knew it would be too suspicious.

No, I had to make sure he kept his mouth shut. Ethan despised Dennis, so had nothing to lose from his death, still a few well-placed threats had ensured his silence. He was a mouse and I was confident he wouldn't tell.

And honestly, even if he did, it was his word against mine. It wasn't as if he had seen what I really got up to away from home. If he knew the real truth about me, it would sicken him to his stomach.

I always knew I was the odd one out, that I enjoyed a different kind of pleasure to other kids my age. I always found pain and death fascinating, even when I was really young, and as I headed towards my teenage years, I realised that I got off on fear. My brother had a stash of porno mags and he and his friends used to fantasise about the women inside them. I used to fantasise too, but not in the same way. My brother and his friends wanted to

play with women's breasts and stick their cocks inside them. I wanted that too, but I didn't like the idea of the women enjoying it. My fantasies were of rape and of torture. Tying them down and forcing myself on them, hurting them with knives and other instruments, while making them beg and cry.

I wanted to frighten them, make them suffer, and as I later realised, I wanted to kill them.

The woman in Wales, the one who had been walking her poodle when she fell in the river, I guess she was technically my first kill, though I never really think of her that way.

She was significant in so many ways, as I know that day I crossed a line, I understood exactly who I was and what it was I wanted. It had almost been an accident. Yes, I had felt her fear, but it hadn't played out the way I wanted it to in my head.

That's why I never really count her as my first. That honour goes to Samantha Grant.

I was seventeen when I killed Sam. It was three years after the trial, and I was now working alone, and I had a hell of a lot of frustration and pent-up rage building inside of me.

I had been hunting for the right location and found it in an abandoned cottage in the woods close to where we lived. It was perfect, with most of the windows boarded up, far enough away from everyone to be able to have my fun. I planned it for weeks, stealing plastic sheeting from work to cover the walls, floor and ceiling, hanging ropes from the high overhead beams. I already had a decent knife that my dad had given me and I borrowed a hammer, pliers and a shovel from the garage at home.

By the time I took my van out hunting, my torture room was ready and waiting.

I stopped Sam for directions, attacking and overpowering her, bundling her into the back of the van. It was all too easy and I kept her in that cottage for three long days while I had my fun, returning home each night and listening to the rest of the family talking about the missing woman from Northampton, the one who had just disappeared into thin air.

When I finally killed her, I buried her deep in the woods beneath the body of a deer whose carcass I had found. To this day, no one knows what happened to her.

As my bloodthirst grew, I knew I needed to get out of the house, carve my own path.

I no longer had a mentor to guide me, so it was a journey of discovery, learning what I liked. What turned me on. The knives are still a big part of my play today, but along the way I learnt how much I liked suffocation. Taking them to the brink and bringing them back. It has become my favourite method of execution. There is a great intimacy in taking someone's last breath.

It was while I was serving that my mentor got in contact again and I learnt the truth. He wrote me a letter asking me to help him get revenge. I was more than happy to help.

That bitch, Casey Fallon, had ruined everything. Simply killing her would be too easy. I really wanted for her to suffer. She had taken away my dad.

I still remember so clearly the day I found out that Steve Noakes was my dad. It was just a few months before he was arrested and we had been out in the car. I think he had been fearful about telling me, scared I might be angry with him for withholding the truth from me for all of these years. He had been acting restless, fiddling about with the radio stations, before switching the music off completely, making flippant little comments, small talk, nothing of any relevance. It was unusual for him to be like this and I remember finding it a little unsettling.

'I need to talk to you about something,' he said eventually, after we had been driving in silence for a good ten minutes.

'Okay.' My heartbeat had sped up and my palms were damp. Somehow I knew what he was about to share would change things.

'I'm not who you think I am.'

'What do you mean?'

'Your mother...' He paused, seemed to be deciding the best way to continue.

'What about her?'

'Before you were born we were... together.' I looked at him then, waited for him to explain what he meant. 'We had an affair.'

'You slept with her?' My tone was tight, but that was more because he was keeping me on edge, not because I was angry.

He didn't answer the question. Instead, he drove for another half a mile, before indicating and pulling off the road. As we sat on the edge of the field on a cool February day, he turned to face me and told me the words that shocked the life out of me.

'Look, there's no easy way to tell you this, so I'm just going to come out

and say it, okay? I'm your father, Rod.'

I think, deep down, I knew what he was going to tell me. I was so dissimilar to Dennis, yet could see myself in Steve. We had a similar laugh, a way of sometimes finishing each other's sentences, instinctively knew at times what the other one was thinking.

'How do you know?' I had so many questions, but that was the first one that sprang to mind.

'Your dad had an accident not long after Kelvin was born and he couldn't have more kids.'

'So he knows?'

Steve shook his head. 'He knows Wendy had an affair and that you're not his, but he has no idea I'm your dad. And I'm going to ask you to please not tell him. He's my brother. If he found out the truth, this would destroy him.'

'Half-brother,' I reminded. When I saw Steve's eyes narrow, I was quick to placate. 'I won't breathe a word. I promise.'

We were silent for a moment. Steve I think in relief, me trying to take it all in.

I had never been close to Dennis, always preferring Steve's company. Everything suddenly made more sense. Suddenly everything felt right.

And then he was snatched away.

Amanda Haines was supposed to be my first kill. Casey Fallon had ruined that, though, and she had taken my dad away from me.

Of course, she didn't know that.

I was born Roderick Clarke, but only Steve and I know the truth, that I am really Roderick Noakes.

Casey's expression when she sees me enter the bunker is priceless and I can tell her confusion at why I am here is usurped by her fear, as deep down she has already figured it out.

Her tone is uncertain when she speaks and I feed on that tremor in her voice.

'Ricky?'

I watched her approach the house, tried to pluck up the courage to go inside, and I fed on her fear as she gamely followed my instructions, a complete nervous wreck as she lived through her worst nightmare, terrified that if she didn't comply, her boyfriend and his family were going to die.

It had all been a lie, of course. I had been here watching her the entire time, but I was impressed by her dedication to Finn and I will be sure to tell her the truth before she dies, I want her to know that it was all a sham, that she drove out here for nothing. That Finn and his family were never in danger, that regardless of what she does, Amanda is going to die.

Amanda was always supposed to be mine to kill.

'Why are you here, Ricky?'

Casey is still confused, but I think she understands well enough. She is keeping her distance, standing the other side of the workbench, so I know she is fearful of me.

'Why do you think I'm here, Casey?'

I take a menacing step towards her and she flinches, takes a step back, her arse catching the edge of the desk. She is in shock right now. The trauma of what she has been through tonight, trying to come to terms with the fact that her good friend, Ricky, could be responsible for all the terrible things that have been happening. Probably still clinging to a tiny bit of hope that it's all a mistake and she has it wrong.

She hasn't, of course, but it will take her time to absorb that.

We worked so hard and for so long on this, and I followed her, learning everything I could about her as I plotted the best way to insert myself into her life.

Attending the support group she was a member of was a brilliant idea. I knew she would have sympathy for the story I created, that the beating I had suffered from my dad had left me with long-term injuries. I made out that I was nervous and shy and she played right into my hands, taking me under her wing and wanting to protect me.

I knew that her discovery of that basement room, and the trauma of the trial, had left her suspicious of men, that she struggled to form attachments, so to make myself innocuous, I pretended to be gay. If she believed I wasn't a threat to her sexually, then she might allow me to get close to her. As it turned out, it was an inspired move, as over the last few years I have become an important part of her inner circle.

All those lunches together, the boozy nights where I would crash at her flat. She has trusted me implicitly, let me have a spare key to her apartment, even shared secrets that she didn't always tell Zoe. It is going to take her a little while to come to terms with the fact it has all been a lie. That while I played along with our friendship, I was dreaming of the day we would finally kill her. That each time she smiled or laughed with me, I was imagining slitting her throat.

Of course, that would be far too easy a death for her. What we have planned is far more horrific.

'Where's your walking stick?'

She is backing away from me, which suggests she knows I am a threat to her and I suspect she understands that I want to hurt her, yet here she is, worrying about the fucking stick?

Is this some ploy for time?

I glance down at my legs, feigning shock. 'Well, will you look at that? I don't need it. I guess it must be a fucking miracle. You stupid, gullible bitch. You fell for it all.'

Her eyes are wide now with terror and with disbelief. I can see she is still struggling to comprehend what is happening. She flicks a glance at Amanda, who hasn't moved since I entered the bunker. I think our last session was a little too much for her.

'You did this. All of this.' Casey's voice is quiet, it's not a question. She is talking more to herself, as she tries to figure it out. I answer anyway, eager to help her along.

'You have no idea how long I have waited to show you this place. To show you the real Ricky. I have so much—'

She catches me off guard, cold coffee splashing against my face, the shock of it making me gasp and the mug bouncing off the side of my head. It's not enough to hurt me, but it slows my reactions, giving her a precious second to barrel into me, make me lose my balance, stumbling back into the wall.

And then she is heading towards the steps that lead up to the garden and I am charging after her, my fingers skimming her hair as she tries to make her escape, and all I can think is thank God I closed the hatch, that I wasn't arrogant enough to leave it open.

I was taught to always take precautions. Never become cocky and leave things to chance.

She is at the top of the stairs now and pounding on the hatch door, desperate to break free, and as I slowly climb up after her, she glances over her shoulder choking back a sob.

When I make a grab for her leg, she kicks out, but my grip is firm and she starts screaming as I drag her down the steps, struggling desperately to break free.

She won't get away though. I have looked forward to this day for so many years, finally being able to reveal my true self to Casey Fallon and showing her what I am really capable of. I have plotted and planned this in great detail and unfortunately for her, the real nightmare is only just beginning.

Finn let himself back into Casey's apartment with the spare key she had given him, immediately calling out her name.

She hadn't replied to either of the two texts he had sent her and when he had tried to call her on the way home it had gone straight to voicemail. She had said she was going to run a bath, so it was possible she was in the tub or maybe she had fallen asleep. He knew she was tired after the stress of the weekend, so wasn't especially worried, but he would be happier when he had seen her for himself.

The dogs were pleased to see him, both rushing to the door, and he bent down to make a fuss of them. Phoebe seemed a little agitated, kept running in circles, barking, while Bert, in his excitement to see Finn, started slobbering everywhere.

'Have you no manners?' Finn asked him, getting a big doggy grin in return. He shook his head, smiling as he got up, and went to the kitchen sink to wash the slime off his hand. Bert was definitely one of a kind.

Spotting Casey's phone in the water, he frowned, heartbeat quickening as he fished it out. If she had dropped it, why was it still in there? He tapped at the screen, but knew already that it would be dead. It would certainly explain why he hadn't been able to get hold of her.

'Casey? Are you still in the bath?'

When there was still no answer, he wandered through the apartment and down the hallway to her bedroom. Nothing other than the phone seemed out of place, so why did he have a nagging feeling that something was off?

She wasn't in the bedroom, though the joggers she had been wearing were discarded on the floor. Casey wasn't messy. She would have picked them up. And on her dresser stood a glass of wine that had barely been

touched.

He eased open the bathroom door, saw the tub was filled with water, though she wasn't in there.

So where the fuck was she?

Something was definitely off.

She had promised him she wouldn't leave her apartment. Had she opened the door to someone? Was it perhaps more innocent and she was with Zoe or Ricky? That didn't explain her phone, though, or the discarded bathtub.

On a whim, he dipped his fingers into the water to check the temperature, a little knot of fear churning in his belly when he realised it was cold.

She wasn't in the apartment, hadn't emptied the bathtub, her wine glass was pretty much untouched and her phone had been in the sink. Something was definitely wrong.

And with the phone destroyed he had no way of contacting her.

Fuck! Where the hell are you, Casey?

As he turned to leave the bathroom, he caught his reflection in the cabinet mirror, saw the scrawled words on the glass, and froze.

Cap Pond. New neighbour knows where.

New neighbour? Was that his name, Cap Pond?

Casey wouldn't have written on the mirror unless she was in trouble.

She had questioned who was living opposite her and Finn had intended to check it out, but he hadn't got round to it. *Idiot.*

Right now he had tunnel vision, one sole focus, to find Casey, and he stormed out of the bathroom, out of the front door and across the landing to the neighbouring apartment, ringing the bell. When, after a few seconds there was no answer, he knocked loudly on the door.

Still nothing.

Was Casey inside? Did the bastard have her trapped in there?

He knocked again, jammed his finger against the bell, yelling through the door. 'I know you're in there and you'd better open up or I'll break the door down.'



Robert Brown stared at the door, wondering what the hell to do.

He was pretty certain he knew exactly who was standing on the other side, suspected this had to do with the note Casey Fallon had dropped outside the door earlier this evening.

He had watched her get in her car and drive away, wondering why she

had been in such an urgent rush and why she had rang the bell. The boyfriend wasn't with her, but then his car wasn't parked downstairs either, so Robert assumed he was already out.

He had opened the door with the view to letting himself into her apartment again, but then he heard the dog barking and remembered the cameras that had been installed. It wasn't a smart idea.

As he turned to go back inside, he had spotted the tissue on the floor. He was about to discard it when he noticed words written on it, and he bent down for a closer look.

Please help me. Captain's Pond. Dirt track past Hill. Call police. Tell them Casey Fallon in trouble.

He took the tissue back inside the apartment, pondering what he should do. Calling the police wasn't an option. If he revealed his identity, told them where he was, they would soon learn that he had been squatting in the empty flat, and that would bring him a whole heap of trouble.

His previous employer had sacked him last year after the police had been called. He had lost his caretaking role after they discovered he had been breaking into the apartments with female residents and stealing their underwear. It had all been a huge nightmare that had resulted in him getting a suspended sentence and a ridiculous fine. He had struggled to get another job after that, subsequently couldn't pay his rent and had eventually been kicked out of his flat. The unfairness of the situation sucked.

It had been after crashing on a friend's sofa for two months that he had come up with the plan. He knew the apartment up on the top floor of Kimberley House was rented out, that the owner had been struggling to find a tenant due to the high rental charge he insisted on. The place had been empty for months and Robert had a spare set of keys for the building, having been shrewd enough to make copies before he had lost his job.

He would have to be discreet, couldn't risk getting caught, but it would be a warm place to stay, he would have his own bed, and it would allow him time to get himself back on his feet.

He could use the main fire escape door on the first floor and if he kept his movements low-key, tried, where possible, to only exit and enter the building late at night, he should be able to avoid detection.

It had all worked well until he had encountered Casey Fallon. She was the newest resident and had no idea who he was. Still, she had flustered him that first night he had bumped into her, and he had lied, pretending he was a

resident on the first floor, knowing it could make things difficult if she thought he was her direct neighbour.

Of course, it hadn't helped that she was really pretty and he hadn't been able to resist the urge to snoop. He had already been in her apartment that first day, watching her arrive with her friends, his dick hardening when he realised she would be living opposite him.

It wouldn't harm anyone if he had a look around and took a pair of her knickers. Just the one pair and she would be none the wiser.

Except he hadn't been able to stop himself at one pair. He had been in her apartment, had seen the cameras being installed by her friend and knew there was a good chance he would have been on them, though he had done his best to avoid detection when sneaking out. Now Casey's boyfriend was banging on his door and Casey had dropped that bizarre note outside the apartment before fleeing

Robert suspected she was in trouble, knew her friend had been up to no good that day, walking round perfectly able without the aid of his walking stick. He didn't want her to come to any harm, but he couldn't go to the police.

Finn wasn't giving up, though, and Robert knew he wasn't going to go away. Somehow he had to find a way out of the apartment. There was a trellis beneath the bedroom window. Would it hold his weight if he tried to climb down?

He never got the chance to find out, as there was a loud bang and the door was suddenly thrown open, smacking back against the wall.

For a brief moment Robert locked eyes with Finn Murphy, saw anger first then recognition, understanding he was screwed. Still it didn't stop him fleeing for the bedroom, Murphy hot on his tail, grabbing hold of him by the shirt collar as Robert scrambled to open the window, yanking him back, then pushing him hard up against the wall.

'What the hell are you doing in here?'

Robert knew Finn recognised him, knew exactly who he was and what kind of trouble he was in, and his Adam's apple bobbed. He had no defence and his initial reaction was one of panic. 'Get your fucking hands off me.' He had meant for his voice to sound menacing, threatening, but it came out as a high-pitched squeak.

'You're not supposed to be in this building.'

'Let go of me.'

‘Tell me where the fuck Casey is.’

‘I don’t know.’

‘You don’t know?’ Finn’s tone was sceptical. ‘Well that’s funny, because she left me a message saying you do know where she is, so you’d better start talking.’

She had? Shit that wasn’t good. ‘She must have it wrong. I don’t even know her. Why would she tell me where she was going?’

Robert tried to discreetly glance over towards the bed, bowels knotting when he realised that the knickers he had stolen from Casey’s chest of drawers were sitting on the duvet.

Finn’s eyes narrowed as he followed his gaze, saw the underwear, and his frown deepened.

Seizing the opportunity while he was distracted, Robert shoved hard against him, breaking free and running for the hallway, back into the living room towards the open front door.

He was almost out of the apartment when Finn tackled him from behind, knocking him to the ground and pinning him down.

‘Tell me where the fuck she is!’

‘I don’t know. I swear.’

Robert’s face was pressed against the carpet, his arm twisted uncomfortably behind him. Finn had hold of his wrist and twisted it sharply, causing him to cry out in pain.

‘Tell me!’

‘Stop it. You’re hurting me. You’re supposed to be a police officer. I have rights.’

‘Yes you do. Let me make a call and my colleagues can deal with you.’

‘No, no! Please!’

‘Tell me where Casey is, then.’

‘I honestly don’t know.’

‘Stop fucking lying.’ Finn twisted Robert’s wrist again.

‘Ow, please. Okay, stop it. There was a note.’

‘Where?’

‘She left it outside the door. I never spoke to her.’

‘Where’s the note?’

‘Promise you will let me go and I will tell you.’

Another twist on his wrist. The pain shooting up his arm was agonising. ‘Tell me where the note is.’

‘Okay, okay. It’s in the bin beneath the kitchen counter.’

Finn obviously didn’t trust him, because he yanked Robert to his feet, keeping a firm grip on him as he marched him towards the kitchen area. ‘Get it.’

Robert reached down into the bin, found the screwed-up sheets of toilet paper, handing it to Finn, relieved when the brute let go of him. He toyed with bolting for the door as Finn unscrewed the ball of paper and read the scruffy black writing, his scowl intensifying, but thought better of it.

He fixed Robert with a cool blue stare. ‘How long ago did she leave this?’

‘I don’t know. Maybe an hour and a half ago, two hours perhaps.’

‘And she didn’t say anything? Didn’t have anyone with her?’

‘No, she was alone.’ Robert hesitated, debating whether to tell Finn the one thing he did actually know. He was screwed for sure, his temporary home compromised and the police would certainly be wanting to speak with him. But if he showed willing with Finn, if he helped him find Casey, maybe Finn would go easy on him, perhaps even put in a good word for him. It was worth a try. ‘There is something you should know though.’

‘Which is?’

‘There was someone in her apartment on Friday. He was fitting cameras and I think probably bugging devices.’

‘What?’ He had Finn’s attention now. This was good. This was important and could help him further down the line. ‘How do you know this?’

Ah, Robert had forgotten he would have to own up to being in Casey’s apartment. ‘I... umm, I was... I saw him in there.’

‘You broke into her apartment?’

‘I was hiding in the wardrobe.’ When Finn scowled, Robert hastily continued. ‘It was one of her friends. Ricky. She introduced us a few days ago. She was helping him down the stairs because the lift was out of order and he walked with a stick. When I saw him in her bedroom, though, I remember thinking it was odd, because he was walking normally.’

‘And he was putting up cameras?’

‘Yes. And he definitely didn’t need the stick.’

Finn glanced at the toilet paper again, before balling it up in his fist, taking a step back towards the door.

‘I helped you,’ Robert pointed out. ‘I didn’t have to. Remember that.’

He was talking to Finn’s back, watching as he bolted out of the apartment, and, as Robert let out a shaky breath, he couldn’t help but wonder

exactly what kind of trouble Casey Fallon had got herself into.

Casey had no idea how long she had been in the underground bunker. It had probably only been around half an hour, though it felt like much longer as she listened to the man she knew as Ricky Clarke gloat about how he had managed to fool her for all these years, while taking delight in telling her about the sick and twisted ways he sought pleasure, all the while waving his knife about like it was a baton and he was directing an orchestra.

Her fear had escalated when he had unlocked his display cabinet, made a show of selecting which tool he wanted, and she had squeezed her eyes shut, fearing the first cut, fresh sweat beading on her skin, as he had approached her. It didn't come, though, and when she dared open them he was sat on his office chair sharpening the blade, a smirk on his face as he watched her.

She suspected it was all part of the game, that he just wanted to frighten her into thinking he was going to cut her. It was working, though, because she didn't dare let her guard down, knowing that he would hurt her sooner or later.

It was difficult to comprehend that the man she had considered to be one of her closest friends was a monster just like Steve Noakes. Ricky had told her all about learning the truth about Steve being his father and then in detail about his hunting trips, and he kept referring to the man as his mentor, and she had thought back to when she was dating Gareth, could recall the two cousins who were always staying over. Of course, she remembered Kelvin more clearly, as he had been closer in age. She had never taken much notice of his younger brother, Rod, who tended to keep out of her way, usually with his nose buried in a book or playing computer games.

What she did remember of him certainly didn't equate to the man standing before her. Gone were the thick glasses and unfashionable haircut.

Ricky wore his shorter and lighter. She was fairly certain his contacts were a different colour too, and he had lost weight, toned up. He looked nothing like the boy she pictured in her head, though now she knew his true identity, she was picking up on familiar little mannerisms, could see a similarity in that sly smile.

‘Did you like my little plan to get you here?’ he asked now, seeming pleased with himself. ‘I put a lot of effort into pulling that off.’

It was a rhetorical question. She couldn’t answer him even if she wanted to, the tape covering her mouth was preventing her doing anything more than mumbling. Instead, she glared at him, wanting him to know how much she despised him, terror clogging her throat when he got up from the chair and moved towards her.

She didn’t want to react, didn’t want to show him fear, but his move was sudden and he was still holding that big fucking knife. She let out a muffled squeak, tried to move away, though it was impossible, her aching wrists cuffed together and attached to a hook in the ceiling, her toes barely touching the ground.

Ricky raised the knife, grazing the blunt edge against her cheek, and Casey almost lost control of her bladder. She was trembling so badly that the chains holding her up were rattling against each other.

‘It would have been too easy to take you. I wanted to make you come to me. I didn’t know for sure if you would go for it, in which case I would have had to go to my backup plan, but no, you played right into my hands. Finn should be impressed; you’re more devoted to him than you let on. Sacrificing yourself to save his family was very noble, Casey, even if it was unnecessary.’

What? Had he hurt them?

‘I was never there,’ he elaborated, as if reading her mind. ‘They were never in any danger. I was here the whole time waiting for you. And I played you beautifully.’ He leaned in and Casey flinched, thinking he was going to kiss her. Instead, he took an exaggerated sniff, then slowly licked his tongue down her cheek.

‘I love the taste of your fear,’ he told her, and she felt a tear escape, rolling down her cheek, relieved that Finn’s family were safe, but furious for letting herself be tricked this way. How could she have been so stupid?

Was Finn back yet? Had he seen her message on the mirror? She had promised him she would stay in her apartment. Instead she had foolishly

allowed herself to be lured out.

Ricky flipped the knife so the blade was slicing into her cheek. The sharp pain had her tugging on her wrists, her scream caught against the tape, and the tears fell harder.

She wanted to hurt Ricky, wanted to make him suffer, but how could she when he had her chained up like this? It wasn't a fair fight. He had hurt so many women and she wanted him to pay, but not in a jail cell, that would be too easy for him.

She glanced over at Amanda, could see the rise and fall of her chest. There had been a point where Casey had thought she was dead, and deep down she did wonder if that would perhaps be kinder. If they somehow found their way out of this hellhole, how would Amanda survive this?

Without warning, Ricky grabbed hold of a handful of Casey's hair, giving it a hard yank, pulling her head back and holding his blade against her exposed throat.

Oh God, oh God, oh God.

Casey stared up at the ceiling, silently begging for it to be over quickly.

'I could end your life right now, slice you open ear to ear,' he whispered, his breath warm against her hair. 'But that would be too easy.'

He let go of her and she watched him walk away, setting the knife down on the desktop, her legs shaking so badly, she struggled to balance on her toes, the cuffs cutting into her wrists as they bore the full brunt of her weight.

She started to cry again, both with fear and anger. She didn't want to give him the satisfaction of her tears, but she was so damn frightened, her hatred towards him escalating.

'We have bigger plans for you. And I guess we should get going if we're going to put them into action.'

Casey watched as he retrieved a duffel bag from under the desk, going to his cabinet and filling it with various tools. Her heart thumped in her chest. What was he going to do to her? He zipped the bag, threw it down on the desk before taking out a gun, stuffing it in his back pocket. Her eyes widened, not sure if she should be more scared of that or the knives.

He took a pair of cuffs from the wall, went to where Amanda was lying and unlocked her restraints. She never attempted to move or flee, remaining compliant when he rolled her on her front and pulled her wrists behind her, cuffing them together.

Scooping her up over his shoulder, the move so easy to him it only served

to remind Casey how physically strong he was, he headed towards the stairs, winking at Casey as he passed her. 'Don't go anywhere.'

Where the fuck was he taking Amanda?

Alone in the bunker room, she pulled frantically on the cuffs, trying to free herself. The chains didn't budge, though, and all she did was hurt her wrists. She was still struggling when Ricky came back into the room. He grabbed the duffle bag, slinging it over his shoulder in much the same way he had done with Amanda, before going to Casey, reaching for the chain that was hooked between her cuffs and unlocking it.

Without that support, Casey's legs buckled and she tumbled to the floor.

'Get up!' When she struggled to get to her feet, couldn't feel her arms from where they had been pulled above her head, her wrists still cuffed together, he kicked her hard in the ribs and she grunted against the tape. 'I said, get the fuck up,' Ricky repeated.

She rolled on to her front, managed to get her elbows on the ground, and tried to push herself into a kneeling position, but her arms were still numb and too weak to support her. Huffing out a sigh and swearing at her under his breath, Ricky grabbed hold of her arm, dragging her up, almost yanking her off her feet.

He shoved her face first onto the worktable and for an awful moment Casey thought she was about to take Amanda's place. She struggled against him as he pinned her against the table, but he was too strong, and frustration burned as he unlocked one cuff, forcing her arms behind her and relocking them, aware she had just lost a vital chance to break free.

He pulled her up again, pushed her towards the stairs. 'Walk!'

Her legs were rubbery, but she didn't need to be asked twice, desperate to get out of this awful torture room. Still, on shaking legs, her wrists cuffed behind her, messed with her balance and she struggled with the steps, slipping a couple of times. Finally out of the hatch, the warm night air on her skin, she glanced frantically around, knew she had to somehow get away.

As if pre-empting her, Ricky hooked his foot around hers, and she fell forward, hitting the ground hard, unable to use her hands to break the fall.

He laughed at her as she tried to roll over, pulling her back onto her feet and Casey winced as pain shot through her ankle. 'Clumsy bitch. Come on, up you get. We're going for a little late-night stroll.' He glanced at Amanda, who hadn't moved. Casey could see she was awake and conscious, but she seemed to have switched off. 'You too, sweetheart. Get on your feet.'

When Amanda ignored him, Ricky kicked her in the side with the toe of his boot. Still she didn't react. Annoyed, he let go of Casey and leant down to check on her.

Seizing the opportunity while he was distracted, Casey slowly backed away towards the house, trying to ignore the blistering pain in her ankle. She kept her eye on him, trying to decide the point when she would run.

'Casey?'

The familiar voice had both her and Ricky turning.

Finn.

Spotting him by the side of the house, Casey stumbled towards him.

'You fucking bitch!' She was aware of Ricky chasing after her and her heart pounded as she tried to move faster.

Then Finn was running towards her and there was a sweet moment of relief when she fell sobbing against him, his arms folding around her. It was short-lived, though, as she heard the unmistakable click.

‘Put the gun down, Ricky.’ Finn kept his voice calm, rational, though he felt neither. The sight of Casey running towards him, relieved at knowing she was alive, but also wondering what the hell Ricky had put her through, had his heart racing and anger raging. ‘There are more police on the way.’

‘Let go of her and step away.’

Casey twisted in Finn’s arms, spotting the gun that was aimed at both of them, and he felt her stiffen. Ricky was sick, crazy even, and Finn didn’t doubt he would shoot them both if he had to. He had found out enough on the drive over here and had called in the location, requesting patrol cars to attend urgently. Unfortunately, the location meant it would take them a little while to get here. ‘It’s over. Drop the gun.’

‘Let go of her and step away,’ Ricky repeated. When Finn didn’t comply, he took aim at Casey, firing a shot that grazed just past her leg, making her flinch. ‘The next one hits her. Step away. I won’t ask again and I will give you the count of five to do it. Five... four...’

Fuck.

Finn hugged Casey tight to him. She was trembling and he didn’t want to let go of her, but he couldn’t risk getting her shot. He whispered against her ear. ‘If you get a chance, there’s cuff keys in my jacket pocket.’

‘Three... two...’

He squeezed her arm in reassurance before releasing her and taking a reluctant step back, promised himself that the second he got the opportunity, he was going to knock Ricky’s head clean off. ‘You’re not going to get away with this. You have five minutes if you’re lucky. Even if you shoot us both, Ricky. What’s your plan then? How will you explain all of this?’

Finn glanced at Casey. He could see that she was a nervous wreck and as she watched Ricky pointing the gun at him, her eyes were wide with horror, fresh tears streaming down her face. Frustration burned in his gut, knowing that he couldn't do anything to comfort her.

'I'm not going to shoot you, as long as you do as you're told.' Ricky smiled slyly. 'In fact, you showing up here is perfect, DC Murphy. Casey and I were about to go on a little trip. I think you should come with us. It will be quite fitting to have you there at the end given your history and how the pair of you betrayed Gareth.'

Finn exchanged a wary glance with Casey. What did Ricky have planned?

'I was trying to get you kids back together for years, but things never quite worked out. When I saw the apartment come up for sale in Kimberley House, I knew it was perfect for Casey, especially given that you would be her new neighbour. I didn't know if she would go for it, but I guess it was fate. As is you showing up here. I wanted you to mourn her, but now you can watch me kill her. That's even better. Now come on, let's get going before your colleagues arrive.'

Finn didn't move. 'We're not going anywhere you sick, twisted fuck.'

'Well I guess you won't be if I put a bullet in your head.'

Either brave or reckless, Finn decided to call his bluff, taking a bold step forward, his eyes never leaving Ricky's. 'Really? You're going to shoot me?'

Casey started mumbling frantically against her gag. Finn couldn't make out what she was saying, but was fairly certain she was trying to tell him not to challenge Ricky.

Ricky seemed to hesitate, consider, and for one awful moment he was certain he was about to pull the trigger, but then he gave a cold smile, shifted the gun so it was pointing at Casey, and everything inside Finn went cold.

'Nope, but if you don't do as I tell you, I will shoot her.'

Fuck.

Now it was Finn's turn to hesitate, unsure if it was a bluff call. 'You've gone to all this trouble to get back at her, I doubt you would do that, Ricky. Or am I supposed to call you Rod, Roderick? Which one do you prefer?'

Ricky's lips thinned and Finn could tell he had scored a point. He didn't respond to the question though, the gun still pointed at Casey. 'She's going to die tonight regardless. I have a preferred way, but if it has to be with this gun, I know exactly which shot to make that will leave her to suffer in agony. It

will be a slow and painful death.'

Finn couldn't decide if that was true or not, but it was a risk he wasn't willing to take. He scowled at Ricky, though didn't challenge him further.

Sensing he had won this battle, Ricky grinned broadly, took a step towards Casey, grabbing her by the arm and keeping the gun aimed on her. 'After you, DC Murphy.' He nodded to the bottom of the garden where Finn could see another woman on the ground. Amanda Haines, he assumed. Was she still alive?

Reluctantly, Finn did as instructed, staying alert for the slightest concentration slip from Ricky. He suspected his chances would be few and far between and knew he would have to take one if it presented itself.

'Your showing up was quite good timing in more ways than one,' Ricky commented, conversationally, seeming almost jovial now he had the upper hand. 'Poor Amanda doesn't seem up for walking, so I'm thinking perhaps you can carry her.'

Finn glanced at the woman lying on the ground. She had been stripped to her underwear and the marks on her body suggested she had been extensively tortured. *Sick fuck.*

One way or another, he would find a way to get Ricky for what he had done. Had he hurt Casey? Finn had spotted the cut on her face that had been bleeding. If Ricky had done anything else to her, Finn was going to kill him.

He bent down, checked Amanda's pulse. She was still alive and he wondered if perhaps she had just shut down. Her eyes fluttered open as he picked her up and she stared up at him with one haunted eye. The other one was swollen shut.

'I'm going to get you out of this,' he promised, his tone hushed, hating that it could be a lie.

Ricky made Finn walk ahead with Amanda, while he kept hold of Casey and the torch. With Amanda in his arms, there was zero opportunity for Finn to try anything and he knew he would have to wait until they came to a stop.

After walking for about ten minutes, Ricky directed him to take a narrow path that led off the main track. It was dark and strewn with brambles, stinging nettles and tiny flies, but eventually the track opened out into a small clearing.

'We're here,' Ricky announced, seeming pleased with himself. 'You can stop.'

Finn set Amanda down on the ground and watched as Ricky dropped his

duffle bag, then dragged Casey with him towards a large oak tree, returning a few seconds later with a shovel. Seeing it, Finn's heart sank, and suddenly he had a very good idea what the sick bastard had planned for Casey and Amanda.

Ricky threw the shovel so it landed at Finn's feet, then sat himself down beside Amanda, pulling Casey down with him. He slipped his arm around her, pressed the gun against her temple.

'Okay then, Casanova. Dig.'

He planned to bury them here, of that Casey was certain. She just didn't know what he planned to do to them beforehand. He had brought his knives, which scared the shit out of her.

Was he planning on slicing her and Amanda up first or was he going to bury them alive?

She wasn't sure which idea frightened her the most.

And he was making Finn dig the graves.

The woods were so silent, just the sound of Finn digging, the occasional rustling of bushes and the noise of a scurrying animal, birds tweeting, and it gave Casey far too much time to think, knowing that unless she could figure a way out of this, she would never see her parents again, would never see Nick or Liam again, or Zoe, or Phoebe.

Who would look after her dog?

It was such a stupid thing to worry about, given everything that was happening, but still it played on her mind. And what about Finn?

There was no way Ricky would leave him alive. What was his plan? Would he execute Finn after he had buried Casey and Amanda?

Finn had said there were more patrol cars on the way, but Casey wasn't sure if he had been bluffing or not. She hadn't heard any sirens.

Ricky had initially been quiet as he watched Finn digging, seeming to take satisfaction that he had someone to do the job for him, but it wasn't long before he started to become agitated. This was a part of his personality that Casey did recognise and she guessed it wasn't an act. The Ricky she knew was impatient, tended to get animated and mouthy if he was made to wait, and as he wandered around the grave, goading Finn on, it was for a moment as if her so-called friend was back.

‘So how does it feel knowing you are digging your girlfriend’s grave?’ he questioned, obviously baiting for a reaction.

Finn ignored him, slamming the shovel into the ground.

‘I’m going to need you to dig a little bit faster. We don’t have all night.’

Ricky looked at his watch. Casey noticed he had done that a few times while Finn had been digging, and he kept glancing around at the dark woods. What was he waiting for?

Casey kept her eyes on him. He had bound hers and Amanda’s ankles after making them sit down, otherwise she would have tried to run for it. Realistically, though, she still would have struggled with her busted ankle. It had been agony walking on it into the woods.

She was debating, trying to figure out if there was anything she could do, when Finn dropped the shovel, glaring up at Ricky as he backhanded sweat out of his face.

‘What are you doing? You can’t stop now. That hole isn’t nearly deep enough.’ Ricky had raised the gun, was pointing it at Finn, along with the torch, the beam in Finn’s face.

‘I just need a second,’ Finn told him, shielding his eyes.

‘Dig!’

‘I will, but I need to take my jacket off. I can work better without it.’

Ricky seemed to consider, then nodded. ‘Okay, but quickly.’

Finn scowled at him, saying nothing as he removed his jacket. He threw it to where Casey and Amanda were sitting and it landed close to Casey’s feet. He caught her eye before he reached for the shovel again, glancing at the jacket, then back at Casey, and she recalled what he had said about the cuff keys being in the pocket.

Would she be able to get to them without Ricky cottoning on to what she was doing? She had the cover of darkness.

She waited until his back was to her again, as he circled the grave Finn was digging, seeming to be preoccupied in taunting him, before reaching out her feet and trying to drag the jacket closer to her. Each time Ricky was facing in her direction she stopped.

It took some effort, but eventually she managed to manoeuvre it behind her and he hadn’t appeared to notice.

Her fingers found a pocket and she felt inside, panicking when she couldn’t find the keys.

She glanced at the grave, saw it was getting deeper and time was running

out, and panic bubbled in her throat.

Focus, Casey. There is more than one pocket.

She breathed deeply through her nose, forced herself to concentrate. Sweat rolled down into her eyes as she managed to twist the jacket with her cuffed wrists. She found another pocket, her fingers reaching inside, her heartbeat quickening when they touched metal.

She pulled the keys out of the pocket, gripped them tightly in her palm, barely daring to hope that she had a way out of this nightmare. Finn was in the grave, Ricky still had a gun, but if Casey could get the cuffs unlocked then she would at least have a fighting chance.

She glanced at Amanda curled up beside her. She was awake, but had barely reacted since arriving at this spot in the woods.

Ricky's duffle bag was in front of them, the one Casey knew contained his knives. She would try and uncuff her own wrists, then undo Amanda's. If they could get the weapons from Ricky's bag, they would at least have something to fight him with.

It took a few attempts, her hands were shaking so badly, but Casey managed to eventually get the key in the lock, and the relief she felt when the cuffs unlocked was immeasurable.

She was aware she wasn't safe yet though. Trying to be discreet when Ricky's back was turned, she reached across, managed to undo Amanda's cuffs.

She saw Ricky's head start to turn, quickly shoved her hands behind her back.

His face was shadowy in the darkness. 'It's nearly ready for you,' he told her, before barking at Finn. 'Keep going.'

Casey waited until his back was turned again before leaning forward and untying the rope around her ankles. She reached for the duffle bag, pretty certain that Finn was aware of what she was doing because for the first time he engaged Ricky in conversation.

'So what's your plan, Ricky? Where to from here?'

'I will go back under the radar. This was all just for Casey's benefit. Normally I am far more discreet. Once she's taken care of, I can go back to normal.'

'And how's that going to work, given that the police now know who you are?'

'I think you're bluffing about that.'

Finn was doing a good enough job of keeping him distracted and Casey used the opportunity to get the zip on the duffle bag undone, reaching inside and retrieving two knives.

She placed them behind her back as Ricky turned to check on her, pressing one into Amanda's hand as soon as his back was turned again.

What happened next almost played in slow motion in her head.

One moment Amanda was lying on the ground, the next she was sat up, and Casey took her eyes off Ricky long enough to see the glint of the blade as Amanda twisted it in her hands. Her focus was on the grave, her expression more determined than Casey had ever seen her, and her intent was clear. She planned to use the knife.

Casey tried to get her attention, knew she needed to stop Amanda before she went for Ricky. Yes, they wanted to overpower him, but their attack had to be co-ordinated.

But then Amanda was looking at the knife again, this time raising it. She made eye contact with Casey, her one good eye pained as she shook her head, and in that moment Casey understood exactly what she was going to do.

She intended to use the knife. But not on Ricky.

No, God, no.

Casey lurched towards her, but she wasn't quick enough as Amanda sliced the blade across her own throat, her eyes widening and strangled sounds coming from behind the tape covering her mouth.

Casey screamed into her own gag as Amanda slumped forward, the commotion enough to alert both Ricky and Finn. Ricky was wide-eyed in horror as he swung the torch in Amanda's direction, letting out a wretched cry as he realised what had happened.

He started to run towards Casey and Amanda as Finn climbed out of the grave, slamming the shovel across the back of Ricky's legs and causing him to stumble, and then Finn was on top of him, slamming his head against the ground, before Ricky, who had the advantage of not being exhausted from digging for the last twenty minutes, managed to fight back, and the pair of them were grappling as they rolled on the ground, the torch Ricky had dropped casting an eerie glow across the clearing.

Casey was on her feet, clawing at the tape Ricky had wrapped around her head. She managed to free her mouth, greedily gulping at the fresh air and screaming at Finn as she remembered the gun.

Finn had momentum again, Ricky pinned beneath him, but then there was

a loud shot and Casey's world went still, her heart in her mouth as both Finn and Ricky froze, then Finn was collapsing on top of Ricky, Casey was screaming as she saw the blood, and Ricky's attention was solely focused on her as he shoved Finn's body to one side.

No, please, not Finn.

Casey knew she had to run, staggering into the trees as she heard Ricky scrambling to his feet behind her. She heard shots fire past her, kept running, then the empty click of the gun. He was out of bullets.

She ran faster, or at least as fast as her ankle would allow, hot tears blinding her eyes as her shocked brain tried to process what she had just witnessed.

She tried to push the awful image from her mind, aware that the next few minutes were crucial if she was to survive. Her ankle was hurting with each step she was taking and it was slowing her down. There was no way she could outrun Ricky. She glanced behind her, saw he wasn't yet in sight, but she knew he would quickly catch up. Making a split decision, she veered off the path into a thicket of bushes, rolling onto the ground and curling up in a ball, the knife still gripped tightly in her hand.

She had darkness on her side, had to hope that he would think she had continued along the path.

As she lay there listening for his approach, trying to stay as quiet as possible, her mind replayed what had just happened, from the shock of watching Amanda kill herself to the horror of Ricky shooting Finn, and she pressed her hand over her mouth to prevent the sob from escaping.

Finn couldn't be dead. She couldn't lose him.

She tried to draw a steadying breath, knew she needed to stop herself shaking. It wasn't just from the fear and shock. Anger was building inside her at the awful things Ricky had done, how he had tortured and brutally murdered countless women, how he had inserted himself into her life with the sole goal of punishing her, and how he had just killed Finn.

He couldn't get away with this. He had to pay for what he had done.

She heard his footsteps first, crunching against the undergrowth, then saw the beam of the torch. His breathing was laboured and when he paused close to where she was hiding, she held her breath, flinching when he screamed out her name in anger.

Don't let him find me. Please don't let him find me.

Casey squeezed her eyes shut. Waited.

Eventually, she heard movement and as she snuck a peek, she saw the torch beam flicker ahead, as he slowly moved away from her.

Had she managed to lose him?

She didn't dare move yet for fear he might hear her and figured she would give it a couple of minutes before heading back to the clearing and trying to find her way out of the woods in a different direction.

Everything was silent and although she was still terrified, her heartbeat was gradually slowing. A noise came from slightly ahead of her and she glanced into the darkness, wondering if it was some kind of animal. It sounded bigger though.

She held her breath, waited longer.

Eventually figuring enough time had passed, she slowly rolled on to her side, starting to pull herself up onto her hands and knees, panic coursing through her when something, someone caught hold of her foot.

Casey screamed as she was dragged backwards, heard Ricky's laugh.

'You stupid cunt. Did you think I couldn't see you there?'

And then he was on top of her, trying to roll her over, and Casey, who still had a grip on the knife, was blindly driving it upwards, earning herself a yelp as it cut flesh.

Ricky tried to wrestle it from her grip, but caught hold of the blade, yowling in pain as it sliced through his hand. He screamed her name out loudly as Casey managed to push him off, crawling frantically out of the bushes.

She kept hold of the knife as she charged back down the forest path, could hear Ricky cursing and moaning, knew she had only temporarily delayed him. As she ran into the clearing, she tried to ignore the sharp stab of pain when she saw first Amanda's body, then Finn's. He was face down and motionless, and as she neared where he was sprawled on the ground, Casey could see the pool of blood oozing from beneath him. She choked down a sob, a wave of grief and anger hitting her, as the sound of heavy breathing and crunching footsteps told her that Ricky was getting closer.

The shovel was still on the ground and she knew it was her best hope, reluctantly dropping the knife as she reached for it.

As Ricky came charging up behind her, she swung the shovel, catching him hard in the stomach and knocking him off balance. He staggered backwards and she hit him again, this time smacking him right in the face, heard the satisfying crack as metal hit bone. This time he fell, landing on his

arse, expression shocked and face bloody.

Had she broken his nose? She hoped so.

He managed to clamber to his feet and she swung the shovel again, though this time missed, and he lunged at her. Casey managed to sidestep and Ricky landed on his knees on the edge of the grave. As he started to get up again, she thumped him on the back of the head.

‘That’s for Finn, you bastard.’

She hit him again. ‘And for Amanda.’ And again. ‘And for Saffron and Lucy.’

He managed to turn, the whites of his eyes stark against the blood soaking his face and he smiled tauntingly at her. ‘Fucking bitch,’ he managed, before she smacked him again. This time the blow sent him tumbling back into the grave.

‘And that one is for me.’

Casey gripped at the shovel, took a step towards the grave, peering down at him. He appeared unconscious, lying flat on his back, arms sprawled.

If she ran, she could probably get away, but even so, there was still a risk he could come after her. And even if he didn’t, he was still alive. If he disappeared, she would always be looking over her shoulder, plus how many more women would he hurt?

She glanced at the knife that was on the ground next to Finn’s body, bending down to pick it up, and knew she had to finish this.

As she tentatively climbed down into the grave, careful not to land on her hurt ankle, she was still shaking all over, though now it was as much with the adrenaline of knowing what she had to do.

A yell came from behind her, making her jump.

Dropping the knife, she let out a scream.

LATER

TEN MONTHS LATER

When she awoke she was alone and it took her a moment before she realised where she was, arms and legs frantically fighting against the restraints that held her prisoner on the table in the basement room, the cool damp air clinging to her naked skin.

She tried to scream for help, but the tape pulled tightly across her mouth stopped her from making much noise and the familiar bubble of panic took over, her heart thumping so loudly, the sound filling her ears as it threatened to explode out of her chest.

Calm down. Breathe.

She tried, drawing in fetid air through her nose that was tinged with the scent of her own blood, but it was so hard.

Where was he? She had to get away before he came back, before he took out his knives again.

Recalling how they felt as they sliced through her flesh, she whimpered and pulled uselessly at the cuffs, wincing in pain as they cut into the tender flesh of her wrists and ankles, a sob escaping at the futility of her situation.

Finn was dead.

Ricky had killed him and now he kept Casey a prisoner down here in the bunker basement. No one knew where she was. No one knew she was still alive. She was his plaything, he told her, and he intended to keep her here in this personal hell.

It was her punishment for what she had done to him, for how she had stabbed him repeatedly with the knife after she had knocked him unconscious into the grave. For how she had mutilated him and almost killed him. Death would be too easy for her and he wanted for her to suffer.

No, he had worse plans for her and he intended to keep her here forever.

Although she was in darkness she was aware of the layout of the room, of exactly where he kept each of the toys (his terminology, not hers) that he used to hurt her.

She just wanted it to be over. Knew, though, that he would never allow that. He wanted to see her fear his knives, wanted her to know that she was all alone, wanted her to learn to dread the sound of his footsteps on the stairs.

And as if by thinking about them conjured them up, she heard him now; the hatch door opening, then locking shut, the slow tormenting sound of his boots as they descended the stairs, and she twisted uselessly on the table, thunderous fear raging in her head as she trembled violently, so scared she lost control of her bladder.

He stepped into the room, flicked on the light, and she stared at his pulp of a face, at the gashing wounds in his chest and stomach. He approached the table, white teeth grinning menacingly against the dried blood crusting on his cheeks and chin, and she tried to pull away as he leant over her, giving that exaggerated sniff he was so fond of doing before he tortured her.

‘Your fear is one of my favourite smells,’ he told her, going to the cabinet for his knives.

She screamed in her head as she saw the blade, squeezing her eyes shut, trying to ready herself for the moment it made contact with her skin.

And then the screaming became louder and she was covering her ears, rolling into a ball as the sheets bunched around her.

On the floor beside the bed, Phoebe was whimpering as she always did when Casey awoke from the nightmare. As she came round, realised she was in her own bed, she heard the clipping of toenails on the hard wood floor, saw Bert poke his big furry head round the door, his stuffed bear in his mouth, as he came to check she was okay.

She instructed herself to breathe deeply, annoyed that all this time later a stupid dream could still affect her so badly, leaving her exhausted and terrified.

Roderick Noakes was dead. She had killed him in the woods out near Captain’s Pond. And Steve Noakes was in jail. Neither of them could hurt her.

Glancing at the alarm clock, and seeing that it had just gone 1am, she pulled her sweat-soaked sheets back and then padded from the bedroom, careful to avoid the piled-up boxes of her possessions as she went into the bathroom to pee and get a drink of water.

Tonight was her last night in the apartment and perhaps that was what had brought on the nightmare. She hadn't suffered with it for a few months, the one-on-one therapy sessions helping, and she had hoped she was finally moving on. Tomorrow was a fresh start away from Kimberley House, away from the memories, some good, others bad.

It was the place where she had reconnected with Finn, but had also encountered Rupert... or rather, Robert Brown as she now knew him.

The idea that the ex-caretaker had been breaking into her apartment and stealing her underwear was just wrong and very creepy. She had been relieved when he had been arrested, knew the locks on all of the apartments had since been changed.

Then, of course, there was that awful night when Ricky had phoned, calling himself Psycho Steven and giving her the ultimatum of driving out to Captain's Pond or he would kill Amanda Haines, as well as Finn and his family.

That hadn't worked out so well.

The police investigation had finally ended, concluding that Ricky had been acting alone. He hadn't had much contact with Steve Noakes over the years, though Steve had readily confirmed he was Roderick's real father, expressing shock at what he had done.

Steve's younger son, Ethan, had come forward after Ricky's death, confessing that he had watched Ricky – or Rod as his family knew him – push Dennis Clarke down the stairs, after a heated row over inheritance, and a picture slowly emerged of a scheming and hate-filled man, who had always enjoyed watching the suffering of others.

Casey recalled plunging the knife into him, knew she had killed a man, but he had hurt so many people and she couldn't bring herself to regret it.

Wide awake, but knowing she had to attempt sleep again, she crawled back between the sheets and tried to get comfortable. After about twenty minutes, her eyes started to drift shut. A clicking of a key twisting in the lock had her opening them again.



It was late when Finn finally let himself into the apartment, both dogs running to the door to greet him, and after making a fuss of them he crept down the hallway to the bedroom, trying to be careful not to wake Casey. He quietly undressed before slipping into bed beside her, certain she was still asleep, but as the mattress dipped, she rolled over to face him and he saw her

eyes were open.

‘Late job?’

Finn nodded, resting his head back against the pillow and staring up at the ceiling for a moment. ‘Yeah, it came in half an hour before I was due to finish.’ He rolled on to his side, facing her. ‘How come you’re still awake?’

Casey hesitated. ‘I had the nightmare again.’

She sounded frustrated and he reached out, smoothed her damp hair back off her face. She was still plagued by the dreams, but they were becoming less frequent, and at least she was honest with him now, admitting to what she considered to be her weaknesses and letting him help her where he could.

‘Do you want to talk about it?’

‘No... I... It was the same old. In the bunker and he was there.’ She huffed out a sigh. ‘I thought they had stopped.’

‘It’s not even been a year. You’re making progress, but you need to give it a little more time.’

Annoying as it was, that’s what they both needed.

The gunshot wound that could so easily have killed him had taken him ages to recover from and it was only in the last few months that he had been fit enough to return to work. Even now he could still feel it, knew it hampered his mobility. It would take time, the doctors told him, but if he was patient it would get easier.

Casey’s scars were mental, but perhaps more traumatic. She had been trapped inside the bunker where Roderick Noakes had tortured his victims, and Finn couldn’t begin to imagine how terrifying that must have been for her. Unfortunately there was no quick fix, but they had each other and they would get through this together.

He stretched his arm out so Casey could rest her head on it and she moved in closer, seeking comfort. He knew the dream bothered her and wished he could take that worry away.

‘He’s dead, Casey. You killed him.’

And hadn’t she just.

Finn remembered coming to on the forest floor, seeing her in the grave and assuming she was being attacked. He needed to help her, but he was so tired, too weak from the blood loss. He had called out, but it was all he could do. And initially he had scared the shit out of her, causing her to scream out in fright and drop the knife.

What had happened next had been his worst nightmare.

She had been so relieved he was alive, she had momentarily forgotten about Ricky, and Finn had watched as Ricky had regained consciousness, grabbing hold of Casey and pulling her down into the grave. For what felt like long agonising minutes, but was probably only seconds, he had been forced to wait, desperate to help her and almost delirious with relief when she had emerged, the blood-drenched knife in her hand.

She had been so strong, so brave and because of her, Roderick Noakes was dead. He could never hurt another woman.

For Finn, if anything else good had come from that night it was that Casey had finally opened up about her feelings for him. She had been his constant companion while he was in hospital, and he knew she had forged a bond with his parents and sister as they helped him to recover.

If only he had realised getting shot was the way to break her commitment phobia, he would have tried it sooner. He had told that to Casey, but she hadn't appreciated his joke.

He rubbed his hand up and down her arm now, tried to relax her enough to pull her into sleep. They had a busy day ahead as they were moving out of Kimberley House.

Casey had held on to her independence for as long as possible, refusing to give up her apartment and move in with him, despite the fact they rarely spent a night apart. Eventually Finn had tried a different approach, figuring out what they could afford on their joint income, then bombarding her with links to tempting properties.

She had eventually bitten (who didn't love a bit of house porn?) and they had bought a recently renovated property in another village location, slightly closer to Norwich. The area they were moving to was more populated and better connected, which was easier for Finn's work, and it made a more suitable base for Casey. She had quit her deejaying role at East Coast FM, the stress of going back on-air, of taking requests from listeners, outweighing the enjoyment of the job, and she was focusing on her freelance work.

The house came with plenty of space, which would be perfect for her, as well as for Bert and Phoebe, and there were three spare bedrooms too, so it would be ideal for accommodating any family members wanting to stay.

Finn had now met Casey's parents and brothers, understanding as soon as he got talking to her mother where that feisty independent streak came from, and he was fairly certain that he had passed the suitable boyfriend test.

With summer fast approaching, the large garden would be an ideal haven

for both relaxing and entertaining, and the perfect place to heal.



A new home and a fresh start. That was exactly what Casey was thinking as they parked the hire van on the brick-weave drive of the house after collecting the keys.

Set back slightly off the road behind a low hedgerow, the front lawn filled with borders of spring flowers and two pretty blossom trees, she had fallen in love with the place as soon as she had seen it, knew it was the perfect spot to properly start her life with Finn. Although she wasn't a gardener, she was determined to learn, especially now she didn't have the radio show taking up so much time, and she already had plans for the enclosed back garden, which was currently a blank canvas, having perused countless gardening websites, gathering ideas for colourful borders and a little vegetable patch. Finn had half listened to her, making all the right noises, though she knew his only sights were set on talking her into a hot tub.

They would negotiate.

Liam, Niamh and both sets of parents were en route with more of their things, but for a moment it was just Casey, Finn, Phoebe and Bert, and as they got out of the van, Casey stared at her new home, daring to hope that she might be able to finally put the nightmare of the last year behind her.

Hearing a vehicle slowing down and assuming it was one of the family, she glanced at the road, shielding her eyes against the bright spring sun. She didn't recognise the car or the man peering across the passenger seat as he stared at her, but she smiled anyway, assuming he was probably a neighbour, nosing at the newcomers.

Finn joined her by the passenger door, slipping his arm around her waist, pulling her close and distracting her with a kiss, as Phoebe and Bert bounded ahead, keen to check out this new space.

'This is going to be good for us. Making new memories. You and me, the kids.'

Kids?

He waggled his eyebrows at the dogs when her eyes widened in alarm and she relaxed into him. She wasn't anti-kids, but they hadn't even moved into the house yet.

'It will be good,' she agreed, seeing her brother's van pulling into the road. 'And I like the idea of new memories.'

Finn glanced past her at the van, before leaning in, his mouth grazing her

ear. 'We can start later then by christening all of the rooms.'

Casey fought her smile, playfully nudging him. She wasn't going to talk about sex as her brother had just shown up. 'We'll discuss that later.'

'We will.' Finn held out his hand. 'Are you ready?'

Her new home, the dogs, and the man she loved by her side. She slipped her hand in his, followed him up the path to the front door. 'I am.'

EPILOGUE

We had that moment, that connection. As I slowed down the car, made eye contact with her, she smiled. It was the first time I had seen her in years, but she didn't recognise me. That was good.

I have done much to alter my appearance since I disappeared fourteen years ago. I knew it was important I was never found.

It broke my mother's heart that I left her, but I couldn't stay living in the house with Dennis and his rules. I needed a fresh start and the chance to carve my own path, and letting her believe I was dead was the easiest way to achieve that. Watching my father go to jail was the hardest thing I have ever had to deal with. Casey Fallon's betrayal was a close second.

I suspect Dad always knew I was different, that I had that cruel streak, that I lacked empathy towards others. The first time he caught me, he had been beside himself, unsure what to do. I was his son and he loved me more than anything, but I had just tortured and killed a girl. He had raised a monster.

I think it was a close call that day whether he should help me or call the police. Part of him was disgusted with me, wanting to do the right thing, but he loved me, had promised he would do anything for me. I know it broke him inside when he helped me bury her body in the woods and he was never quite the same after that.

Of course, I promised that I would never kill again, but even while I was making that promise I knew it was one I wouldn't keep. Killing is in my blood. It is the only way I know how to survive. Once I had taken a life, I knew I would never be able to stop.

I thought I was unique, that this was a burden I would have to carry alone,

so learning that my cousin and half-brother, Rod, had the same cravings, was a revelation. Initially I was wary, but I gradually grew to trust him, taking him under my wing and helping to nurture his natural bloodlust.

How could I have known that the downfall to my perfect life would be my girlfriend.

I had been out when she had shown up at the house we were renovating, having gone to Halfords for some new wiper blades, and I took my time, even stopping for a MacDonald's on the way home, safe in the knowledge that my latest victim was tied up securely in the basement and wouldn't be going anywhere.

My dad had been sick and I had been working on the house alone for the last few days, which is why I had felt confident in taking Amanda Haines there, certain that no one would disturb me while I had my fun.

Looking back, it was an unavoidable collision course; Casey stumbling across Amanda first, then my dad feeling well enough to go to the house and also going to look in the basement for me.

By the time I knew what was happening, Dad had been arrested, Amanda had been rescued, and Casey was the one who had pointed the finger, wrongly assuming Dad was the monster. Amanda had never seen me (thank fuck for blindfolds), so she knew no different. The only person she had seen was my dad, who had been in a tailspin panic, not knowing what the hell to do. It had been easy for her to believe he was the one who had taken her.

I honestly thought I was going to be sick, convinced my dad would tell them the truth, certain I was going to be arrested. But it never happened. He took the hit for me.

I guess when your parent tells you they would do anything for you, sometimes they really mean it. Steve Noakes is one hell of a dad.

That almost broke me, knowing that he had covered for me, that he had sacrificed his own freedom so I could roam free, and for a long while I struggled to deal with it.

Casey Fallon had so much to answer for. She had destroyed my family.

I knew that one day I would have to take revenge. I also knew I had to plot it carefully.

That was why I left it a few years after faking my own death, before contacting Rod.

His initial shock that I was still alive was outweighed by his desire to punish Casey, and it didn't take much to convince him to go along with my

plan.

I waited on the sidelines, let him have his fun with Saffron and Lucy and Amanda, planning to meet him in the woods that night to give Casey the shock of her life.

How unfortunate that I was running late after my van broke down, and I watched in frustration as the police swarmed the location where she was supposed to die, knowing that she had killed Rod, that I had missed my opportunity.

I had no choice but to remain under the radar. The reason I have been so successful is because no one knows who I am, Gareth Noakes is dead. But soon I will have no choice but to step out of the shadows.

Casey Fallon still needs to pay for what she did to my dad, plus she has Rod's blood on her hands now. I can't let her go unpunished.

For now, though, I wait and I watch, and I plot my revenge.

When the time is finally right and I make my move, she's dead.

THE END

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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER



Thank you for reading this book. If you enjoyed it please do consider leaving a review on Amazon to help others find it too.

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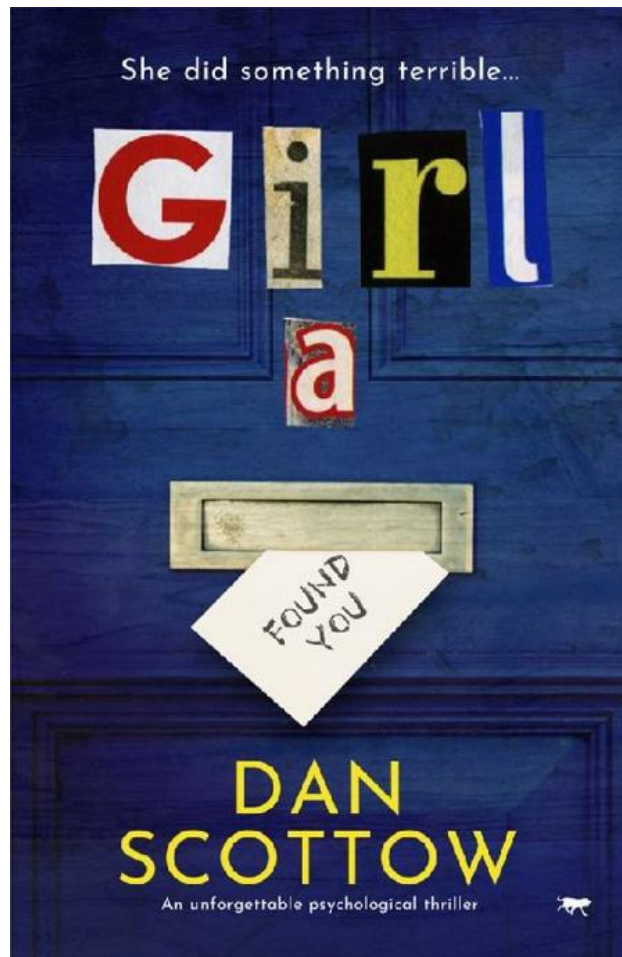
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