

**the  
woman  
in cabin  
10**

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*In my dream, the girl was drifting, far, far below the crashing waves and the cries of the gulls, in the cold, sun-less depths of the North Sea. Her laughing eyes were white and bloated with salt water, her pale skin was wrinkled, her clothes ripped by jagged rocks and disintegrating into rags.*

*Only her long, black hair remained, floating through the water like fronds of dark seaweed, tangling in shells and fishing nets, washing up on the shore in hanks like frayed rope, where it lay, limp, the roar of the crashing waves against the shingle filling my ears.*

*I woke, heavy with dread. It took me a while to remember where I was, and still longer to realise that the roar in my ears was not part of the dream, but real.*

*The room was dark, with the same damp mist I'd felt in my dream, and as I pulled myself to sitting I felt a cool breeze on my cheek. It sounded like the noise was coming from the bathroom.*

*I climbed off the bed, shivering slightly. The door was shut, but as I walked across to it I could hear the roar building, the pitch of my heart rising alongside. Taking my courage in both hands, I flung open the door. The noise of the shower filled the small room as I groped for the switch. Light flooded the bathroom – and that's when I saw it.*

*Written across the steamy mirror, in letters maybe six inches high, were the words 'STOP DIGGING'.*

PART ONE

Friday 18 September

# 1

The first inkling that something was wrong was waking in darkness to find the cat pawing at my face. I must have forgotten to shut the kitchen door last night. Punishment for coming home drunk.

‘Go away,’ I groaned. Delilah mewed and butted me with her head. I tried to bury my face in the pillow but she continued rubbing against my ear, and eventually I rolled over and heartlessly pushed her off the bed.

She thumped to the floor with an indignant little ‘meep’ and I pulled the duvet over my head. But even through the covers I could hear her scratching at the bottom of the door, rattling it in its frame.

The door was closed.

I sat up, my heart suddenly thumping, and Delilah leapt onto my bed with a glad little chirrup. I snatched her to my chest, stilling her movements, listening.

I might well have forgotten to shut the kitchen door, or I could even have knocked it to without closing it properly. But my bedroom door opened outward – a quirk of the weird layout of my flat. There was no way she could have shut herself inside. *Someone* must have closed it.

I sat, frozen, holding Delilah’s warm, panting body against my chest, and trying to listen.

Nothing.

And then, with a gush of relief, it occurred to me – she'd probably been hiding under my bed, and I'd shut her inside with me when I came home. I didn't remember closing my bedroom door, but I might have absent-mindedly swung it shut behind me when I came in. To be honest, everything from the Tube station onwards was a bit of a blur. The headache had started to set in on the journey home and now my panic was wearing off I could feel it starting up again in the base of my skull. I *really* needed to stop drinking mid-week. It had been OK in my twenties, but now I just couldn't shake off the hangovers like I used to.

Delilah began squirming uneasily in my arms, digging her claws into my forearm, and I let her go while I reached for my dressing gown and belted it around me. Then I scooped her up, ready to sling her out into the kitchen.

When I opened the bedroom door, there was a man standing there.

There's no point in wondering what he looked like, because believe me, I went over it about twenty-five times with the police. 'Not even a bit of skin around his wrists?' they kept asking. No, no, and no. He had a hoodie on, and a bandana around his nose and mouth, and everything else was in shadow. Except for his hands.

On these he was wearing latex gloves. It was that detail that scared the shit out of me. Those gloves said, I know what I'm doing. They said, I've come prepared. They said, I might be after more than your money.

We stood there for a long second, facing each other, his shining eyes locked onto mine.

A thousand thoughts raced through my mind: Where the hell was my phone? Why did I drink so much last night? I would have heard him come in if I'd been sober. Oh Christ, I wish Judah was here.

And most of all – those gloves. Oh my God, those gloves. They were so professional. So *clinical*.

I didn't speak. I didn't move. I just stood there, my ratty dressing gown gaping, and shook. Delilah wriggled out of my unresisting hands and shot away up the hallway to the kitchen.

Please, I thought. Please don't hurt me.

Oh God, where was my phone?

Then I saw something in the man's hands. My handbag – my new Burberry handbag, although that detail seemed monumentally unimportant. There was only one thing that mattered about that bag. My mobile was inside.

His eyes crinkled in a way that made me think he might be smiling beneath the bandana, and I felt the blood drain from my head and my fingers, pooling in the core of my body, ready to fight or flee, whichever it had to be.

He took a step forward.

'No . . .' I said. I wanted it to sound like a command, but it came out like a plea, my voice small and squeaky and quavering pathetically with fear: 'N—'

I didn't even get to finish. He slammed the bedroom door in my face, hitting my cheek.

For a long moment I stood, frozen, holding my hand to my face, speechless with the shock and pain. My fingers felt ice-cold, but there was something warm and wet on my face, and it took a moment for me to realise it was blood, that the moulding on the door had cut my cheek.

I wanted to run back to bed, to shove my head under the pillows and cry and cry. But a small ugly voice in my head kept saying, *He's still out there. What if he comes back? What if he comes back for you?*

There was a sound from out in the hall, something falling, and I felt a rush of fear that should have galvanised me, but instead paralysed me. *Don't come back. Don't come back.* I realised I was

holding my breath and I made myself exhale, long and shuddering, and then slowly, slowly I forced my hand out towards the door.

There was another crash in the hallway outside – breaking glass – and with a rush I grabbed the knob and braced myself, my bare toes dug into the old, gappy floorboards, ready to hold the door closed as long as I could. I crouched there, hunched over with my knees to my chest, trying to muffle sobs with my dressing gown, while I listened to him ransacking the flat and hoped to God that Delilah had run into the garden, out of harm's way.

At last, after a long, long time, I heard the front door open and shut. I sat there, crying into my knees, unable to believe he'd really gone. That he wasn't coming back to hurt me. My hands felt numb and painfully stiff, but I didn't dare let go of the handle.

I saw again those strong hands in the pale, latex gloves.

I don't know what would have happened next. Maybe I would have stayed there all night, unable to move. But I heard Delilah outside, mewling and scratching at the other side of the door.

'Delilah,' I said hoarsely. My voice was trembling so much I hardly sounded like myself. 'Oh, Delilah.'

Through the door I heard her purr, the familiar, deep, chainsaw rasp, and it was like a spell had been broken.

I let my cramped fingers loosen from the door knob, flexing them painfully, and then stood up, trying to steady my trembling legs, and turned the door handle.

It turned. In fact it turned too easily, twisting without resistance under my hand, without moving the latch an inch. He'd removed the spindle from the other side.

Fuck.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I was trapped.