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1

SATURDAY

Nicole

I'm so lucky, Nicole tells herself. If the first thirty-two years of her life were exceptionally ordinary, the last two have been anything but. It's almost impossible to believe. There are so many younger versions of herself she'd like to travel back in time and describe this new life to and not one of them would believe her.

The car's soft top is down and sun glints off the bonnet. Nicole's new Chanel sunglasses filter everything the prettiest blush pink, even the lovely sheep grazing in the fields. She doesn't think she's ever felt so hopeful or so happy before, not even on her wedding day or the day it was confirmed that she and Tom were lottery winners and were about to become filthy rich.

Even so, she drives carefully, hands at ten and two on the wheel. Maybe she's gripping it a little tighter than usual as her

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endorphins surge, but she doesn't consider putting her foot down. Nicole is risk averse; never in her life has she craved an adrenalin rush. Before they were rich, there was nothing impulsive about the tenacious way she sought promotion to the position of Administrative Manager at Carter, Carter & Dun, solicitors specialising in conveyancing, and persuaded Tom they should put aside every spare penny to save up for a deposit to buy their first home, a tiny house in Swindon's dormitory suburbs. She put in long hours, turned herself out well on a tight budget, and everything she did was for her and Tom, her childhood sweetheart, the love of her life.

Even now that their life has become a fairy tale, she's proud of what she achieved then and she's proud of how she's handled things since they won the money. When the people from the National Lottery arrived at their home to confirm the win and Tom was acting, well, as shocked and stupefied as someone who had won the lottery, she listened attentively to their advice, took notes on everything they told her, twice underlining the advisers' suggestion to think carefully and take their time before making any radical decisions. The only decision Nicole made swiftly was not to go public with the win. The thought of people knowing appalled her. She's instinctually private and Tom is incredibly laid-back, so he didn't welcome the idea of the fuss it would bring, either.

She also paid special attention to the financial adviser who opened new accounts for them to take receipt of the money and she took heed of the cautionary tales he told, about previous winners who behaved rashly and lost it all, and decided that would not, ever, be her and Tom. Over her dead body. Tom

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might have been happy working as a mechanic and going to the pub with his mates on Friday, but she always dreamed of having a bigger, better life and this was their chance.

She slows the car as she approaches a neglected wooden sign that points left, towards Lancaut Nature Reserve, and makes the turn onto the lane that leads to their home, which is also their biggest investment to date. She and Tom built the Glass Barn on the Lancaut Peninsula, an outcrop of land formed by a dramatic bend in the River Wye, on the border between England and Wales. Her father, a keen birder, brought her there as a child. He called it a lost, special place, and it hasn't changed.

Woodland envelops the car, throwing dappled shade across the lane. Trees cover the peninsula like lichen. She drives past the small lay-by where her dad used to park, from where they would walk along the lane and down the steep track to the nature reserve, binoculars swinging from their necks. The walk took them past the Manor House gates, which were, and still are, tall and imposing and offer a tantalising glimpse of the house behind them. As a girl, she marvelled at the place and wondered who lived there. She never dreamed that she might be a neighbour one day in the future.

She doesn't drive as far as the Manor House today. Within minutes, the view opens out to her right and the woodland shrinks back, forming the only large clearing on the peninsula. A patchwork of fields and meadows slopes down towards the river. Nicole's heart rate quickens. It's some months since they moved in but still, every time she arrives home, she feels as if she's reached the end of the rainbow and found a pot of gold.

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On a level piece of land in the middle of the area, the Glass Barn rises stark and proud from the remains of a cluster of eighteenth-century farm buildings. In Nicole's eyes, the contrast between the strong angles and uncompromising materials of the new building and the mellow stone ruins at its base is stunning. The sun's reflection flares hotly in the swathes of plate glass. The house is the dominant feature in the landscape, appearing to own not just its site, but the views around it and even the sky above it. Nicole loves it with her whole heart.

They've lived here for six months. She wants to raise a family – they've started trying for their first baby – and grow old here. She told Tom she won't leave until they carry her out in a coffin.

She makes a right turn onto her long, straight driveway. She has so much to tell Tom about the County Show. She saw the cutest farm animals. They need to talk again about getting some sheep, just a small ornamental flock, to graze the fields beside the Barn. Tom's not keen, but she hopes he's persuadable. She parks beside his Maserati in their capacious driveway and grabs her bag from the passenger seat. As she approaches the Barn's front door, she hears music playing from inside. Opera. She smiles. Tom must be in the living area, right behind the door. The Barn has smart systems installed. They track individuals through the house and are programmed so that if you play music, it follows you when you move from one room to another, coming from speakers hidden in the walls.

She looks directly into the camera that will scan her face and let her in. Usually, this is a smooth process and the door clicks open, but it doesn't always work first time. She gets closer to it, stretches her eyelids wider, stares into the lens intently

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and, after a pause when she thinks the system might have gone wrong, it opens.

The system glitches, sometimes. There are days when it acts like a cranky relative who needs pacifying before they'll do anything nice for you. If it had been up to Nicole, they'd have had a security system installed but none of the other features. She prefers things old school, but Tom got carried away with the tech. He wanted the Barn to be a state-of-the-art smart home.

'Thank you,' she says to the door and shuts it behind her. She's happy to escape the heat. The Barn is climate controlled, each room kept at an ideal temperature. She drops her sunglasses and keys on the console table in the atrium and walks into the living area. The music is playing at top volume but Tom's not there. 'Hello!' she shouts. 'I'm home!'

There's no answer. She sighs. She doesn't know how to turn the music down manually. 'Tom!' she yells. '*Nessun Dorma*' drowns out her voice. Tom recently decided to try to get into opera, one of a series of self-improvements he's embarked on since they won the money. He's had the Three Tenors playing on a loop for weeks.

'Music down!' she shouts. The volume is way too high. But the system still doesn't respond. Perhaps it needs her to do something on her phone, or Tom's. She's still foggy on the details where the music system is concerned. That's Tom's department. 'Tom!' she yells again. 'Turn the music down!'

The tenors answer her yell with a soaring crescendo, and she covers her ears with her hands. Tom could be anywhere in the house, or he could be outside on one of the decks. Ironically, the house probably knows where he is, but that doesn't help Nicole.

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The Glass Barn is enormous, a series of buildings linked via a quirky floor plan based on the original structures that were here. She messages him, I'm home where r u? and waits for a reply but the message remains undelivered. That's odd. She proceeds through the kitchen, pausing to wipe the frother on the coffee machine which is scaly with dried milk and to pick up a used cereal bowl from the central island and put it in the dishwasher.

When the architect told them that their starkly minimalist interiors had to be kept immaculate to look good, she listened to him, too. And she's determined not to hire a cleaner. Her mum worked two jobs and kept a tidy home and Nicole doesn't want anyone to think she's got above her station since winning the money.

She makes her way deeper into their home. The music is playing at full blast in every room, which it's not supposed to do, and it's giving her a tension headache. She checks their gym where the lights are all blazing, but there's no sign of Tom. 'Where is he?' she asks the house. He's not in the steam room, the sauna, or the shower.

Upstairs, she finds their bed unmade, and she sighs once more. Tom knows she likes it to look tidy once they're both up. He should have made it. She straightens it out with a few deft movements and notices that one of the doors to their balcony is ajar. She steps out, expecting to find Tom dozing on one of the recliners, iPad on his chest, but he's not there.

She shades her eyes and looks out over their grounds, down the meadow, through the fringe of woodland at its base, and towards the glinting river which shapes and encloses the

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peninsula. Tall limestone cliffs rear up steeply from its far bank and follow the river's curve.

Wow, you've got your own private natural amphitheatre, the architect said when he first saw it. *We need to make the most of that view.* And he did. They can see a version of it from many of the rooms in the Barn. It's spectacular. Nicole smiles as her eyes drink it in. She never tires of it; it reminds her of her childhood trips here with her dad and makes her heart feel full. I'm so lucky, she thinks to herself for the second time that day. But she doesn't want to linger outside. The heat is intense, there's no shade out here at this time of day, and the tenors are still singing at top volume.

She's about to step inside and resume her search for Tom when she sees him.

He's directly below her, in the swimming pool, floating, face down and motionless.

She screams and after a beat, in which all the light seems to be sucked out of her world, the cliffs echo the sound faintly back at her.

2

SATURDAY

Sasha

Sasha strides out of the Manor House and lays her yoga mat in a patch of shade beneath the oak tree on the front lawn. It's the middle of the day and it's hot, but the tree casts a deep shade, and the lawn is encircled with woodland. The greenery always makes her feel good, no matter how warm it is, maybe because the towering trees give the place a sort of spiritual feel, as if an ancient ritual might have taken place here.

The Manor House overlooks the lawn. Built from stone, the roof tiled in old Welsh slate, its façade is a mix of styles. The oldest, medieval part of the building is sandwiched between later additions, built over a period of five centuries. Some of the windows are gracious, generously sized; others are smaller, set deep into the stone and leaded. One part of the building retains its original arrow slits. Out here, you could easily feel like you were being watched from inside, but Sasha knows she's not.

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Olly is in his study, at the back of the house and Kitty, their housekeeper, is ironing in the laundry room that overlooks the walled vegetable garden to the side. Sasha can enjoy a rare moment of privacy and peace.

She moves into her first pose and holds it, focusing on taking and releasing measured inhalations and exhalations, which help her to let go of some of the tension she's been feeling. She wants to get out of her head and back in touch with her body.

It's been a long morning, a long night, and a long few weeks. She taught a private yoga class this morning and that's on top of running a full programme of classes lately, and two weekend retreats. It's taken a toll on her. She continues her practice, focusing hard as she transitions from pose to pose and imagining that she's inhaling the essence of the woodland surrounding her, its goodness and life force, and that it's feeding into her, strengthening her mind and the bones and tissues in her body, until she feels a part of the ecosystem, and at one with the natural world. It's a blissful feeling, delicious, bigger than her, and when she finishes, she feels sated and calm, almost post-coital. She doesn't get up but lies in Shavasana and opens her pellucid green eyes to gaze up at the oak tree's canopy, taking in with wonderment the spread of the branches, the glimpses of cobalt sky through the green.

She senses Olly before she sees him, his wound-tight creative energy, the gangly height of him, the short shadow that follows him across the parched lawn, and she smiles as he lies down beside her.

'Hey,' she says.

'Hey.'

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'Paradise, isn't it?' she says, stretching an arm up, as if it was possible to grab a piece of the beauty above.

'I know.' He reaches for her arm and pulls it towards him, taking her hand in his and laying it palm down on his chest. She feels the steady beat of his heart.

If she could, Sasha would lie here forever, leaving the rest of the world shut out, sensing the heat of their envy of her and Olly's connection. It terrifies her sometimes, how strongly she feels about him.

But their moment of tranquillity can't last; it never does. They raise their heads at the sound of footsteps, pounding the gravel drive. Olly looks up. 'It's Nicole,' he says, and Sasha hears possibility in his voice. She props herself up on her elbows.

Nicole is coming, but she doesn't look right. She's running, her large frame moving awkwardly, her head tilted back. She looks as if she might stumble. Sasha gets up to meet her and Nicole hits her like a freight train, collapsing into her arms with such momentum that Sasha's knees buckle.

'It's Tom,' Nicole sobs. 'Tom's dead.'

Sasha feels the words travel through her like an electric shock. 'What?' she says. Nicole's clothes are soaking wet and dripping.

'I found him in the pool. Dead!' Nicole shakes as she says the word. 'I couldn't drag him out. He's too h—' she stutters. The 'h' won't make itself into a word.

'Heavy,' Sasha says and Nicole stares at her and nods before her face crumples and collapses.

'I tried to take his pulse,' Nicole says. 'I couldn't feel anything. He's floating in the pool. Help me.' Her eyes are glassy with disbelief and horror. Sasha supports her as she sinks to the grass.

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'Oh my God,' Sasha says. She looks at Olly. He's staring at Nicole. She knows how he feels. Sasha feels strangely detached from the situation, as if it's happening to someone else. She tries to think what she *should* do. 'Did you call an ambulance?' she asks.

'They're coming,' Nicole says.

She wails, almost more beast than woman, and it occurs to Sasha that there's a chance that Tom might still be alive, that Nicole didn't check his pulse properly. It might be an infinitesimal chance, but they need to check. 'Go,' she tells Olly. 'Quick!'

He looks confused. 'To the pool!' she yells, and he jerks into action, sprinting off across the lawn and up the driveway. It should only take Olly a few minutes to run to the Glass Barn, but if Tom's floating in the water and has been since Nicole found him, there's surely no chance he's alive. That's got to be at least ten or fifteen minutes ago by now. She wants to ask if Tom was face up or face down, but it feels like a cruel question, the last thing Nicole needs. They'll know soon enough.

She crouches beside Nicole, puts her arms around her and thinks about how Tom is a big lug of a man, and while Olly might be six foot tall, he's slender and not very muscular. It could be a struggle for him to pull Tom out of the pool on his own.

'We need to help Olly,' she says. Nicole looks at her, but there's nothing behind her eyes. She's still lost in the horror of finding Tom. 'It's okay, I'll go,' Sasha says, standing up, but Nicole claws at her clothing and grabs her arm. 'Don't leave me,' she says. Her grip is painfully tight, and Sasha wrenches her arm away. She suppresses an urge to slap Nicole in return for the pain she's inflicted. This is so raw it's overwhelming, she thinks. It's animal.

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'I need to go with Olly to see if we can help Tom, but I'll fetch Kitty to sit with you. Okay? Do you remember Kitty? Our housekeeper?' She doesn't wait for an answer but turns her back on Nicole and races to the house.

She bursts through the Manor's heavy front door. Shards of coloured light pattern the wooden staircase and the floor, where sunlight filters through a stained-glass window. Her bare feet slap the flagstones as she runs down the long corridor that leads past the Yellow Room, the Music Room, Olly's study, the kitchen and into a warren of small utility rooms behind it.

'Kitty!' she shouts. 'I need you!'

She bursts in on Kitty who's in the laundry room, ironing, Radio 4 on low in the background competing with the hiss of steam. Kitty wears cropped cotton trousers and a vest top; a scarf ties her greying hair back from her face. The scene is a picture of domestic serenity and Sasha is conscious that she's about to shatter it. Kitty looks up as she comes in. 'What is it?' she asks before Sasha has said a word, and Sasha explains what just happened, and how distraught Nicole is. 'She needs some dry clothes. Can you bring her in and look after her while I go to the Barn?'

Kitty doesn't hesitate. She turns off the iron and rushes outside. Sasha knew she could rely on her. As Sasha hurriedly slips on some shoes in the front porch, she watches Kitty kneel beside Nicole and put an arm around her. Sasha runs right past them as Kitty is helping Nicole to her feet. She needs to get to the Barn as quickly as possible in case there's any possibility of Tom being alive.

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3

SATURDAY

Olly

Olly wades into the pool and swims towards the body, which is bobbing in the deep end, face down. The water drags at Olly's clothes. He's a poor swimmer.

It's a natural pool, beautifully landscaped, the edges planted with iris and reeds alive with iridescent dragonflies. If circumstances were different, it would be like wading into paradise, which is how Olly felt last week when he and Tom sat on the deck out here drinking beers and taking a dip whenever they got too hot, or just for the hell of it. They didn't have much in common, it turned out, but who needs to when a pink sunset and alcohol soften the edges of an evening? You just put your head back, close your eyes and life feels good, even if your companion is talking about the smart features of his swimming pool lighting and how the engine of his car was tuned based on

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data from motorsport races and all you want to discuss is Hemingway's prose.

Olly reaches Tom and tries to flip him onto his back, but it's too difficult while he's out of his depth, so he takes the sleeve of Tom's polo shirt and swims then walks, pulling the body towards the steps, where he drags Tom partially out of the water, twisting him so that he's face up, before collapsing exhausted. He reaches to feel for a pulse in Tom's neck, noticing how mushy and white Tom's skin looks, like toes that have been in bathwater too long; he looks closely at a wound on Tom's hairline, a small bump, the skin damaged but not broken enough to bleed. He isn't surprised to feel nothing. Tom has well and truly gone. There's no trace of the man left in this soggy lump of flesh and clothing.

Olly sits on the steps beside the body, feeling the sun beating down onto his head and warming his wet clothes. He pushes his dripping hair back off his face and thinks of Sartre's words about the death of Camus, the 'unbearable absurdity' of it. This feels like a perfect illustration of that. The luxury of this place, the beauty of the setting, and at the centre of it all, a pudgy corpse in overpriced, ugly designer clothing. It makes Olly feel strangely powerful to witness this and to think these thoughts. It's profound, he thinks. He wasn't expecting that.

Sasha arrives, panting. Standing at the edge of the pool she casts a shadow over him. 'He's dead,' he says, and notices Tom's body looks like it might drift back into the pool. 'Help me.'

They take a side each, put their hands under Tom's armpits and drag him to a more secure position. His head lolls and Sasha straightens it. As if he's a doll, Olly thinks.

'How did you find him?' she asks.

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'Over there.' He points to the deep end of the pool.

'What do we do?' Sasha is very solution focused, sometimes to a tiring extent. Olly prefers to have time to consider things, to muse.

'We wait,' he says. 'As if for Godot.'

'What?' she asks, and he says, 'We wait for the ambulance.'

She sits on the side of the pool, hugging her knees. Olly notices Tom's shoes lying beside the pool. He gets out and his clothes drip, forming a puddle around his feet. He wants to take his T-shirt off, but he's embarrassed by his scrawny figure and doesn't want to be judged by the paramedics when they arrive. He considers borrowing something of Tom's before realising that it's not a good idea to be wearing the dead man's clothes.

The sound of an approaching vehicle cuts through the bird-song and the drone of insects. Olly nods at Sasha and walks around the side of the house. A police car pulls in as he gets there, which surprises him. He understood that Nicole had called for an ambulance, but perhaps the emergency services operator sent both. He wonders what Nicole said, to trigger that. Perhaps it's just protocol.

The driver cuts the ignition, and Olly takes a breath. He's surprised to find he's a little nervous about answering their questions correctly. I guess, he thinks, this is where I find out if I'm a good witness, or not. A writer should be, he believes, because a writer observes.

A female and a male officer get out of the car. Both put on hats. They look as if they're going to overheat quickly in their uniforms.

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'I'm the neighbour,' Olly says before they've even spoken. 'Olly Palmer. I live in Lancout Manor, the house just up the lane. This is Sasha, my partner. Nicole, who called you, she's the wife of Tom, the guy in the pool, Tom Booth. She ran to our house when she discovered him, and we came here to see if we could help but he was already dead.'

They look at his wet trousers and T-shirt, which are clinging to his body. He might as well be naked. He feels acutely self-conscious and plucks his T-shirt away from his skin. 'I tried to pull him out of the pool,' he says. 'In case, you know, he wasn't dead. But he was.' Neither of them replies; they look up at the house. 'Yeah,' he says. 'It's amazing.' He laughs. They don't. Shut up, Olly tells himself. You sound like a jerk.

The female officer is about his own age, Olly reckons, average height, slim as a whippet, much like himself, and too young for her blonde hair to be thinning as much as it is. Her partner is a big lad, older, way older. Olly feels intimidated by male authority figures and this guy is no exception. 'Lead the way?' the man asks, nicely enough but his eyes look dead, and instead of feeling important, as he was beginning to, Olly feels small and put in his place.

He shows them around the side of the house. Sasha has moved away from the pool and is standing by a pot blooming with fuchsia, popping the flowers between finger and thumb. She looks stressed as she introduces herself and Olly feels for her. He thinks that he needs to remind himself sometimes that she's not as well read or educated as him, not as accustomed to considering the darker, more complex things in life like he is when he's writing. He should have sent her home and dealt with this alone.

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The police look at the body. The female officer pulls on a plastic glove and checks Tom's pulse. She shakes her head.

'The ambulance is coming,' Sasha says.

'Too late for that,' the male officer says. 'Did you find him like this?'

Olly explains what happened, how he pulled the body from the deep end to the steps. 'I wanted to get his head out of the water,' he adds because he'd like them to know he didn't move Tom thoughtlessly.

'Did you see any signs of life?'

'Zilch.' Zip, nada, niente, the words run on in his head. A quote from a film. What was it now? No, don't try to think of it. Focus.

The female officer strips off her glove with a snap. The male officer stares at the body dispassionately. Olly wonders how many corpses the officers have seen. The male officer steps away and mutters into his radio. Olly feels empowered to talk to the female. He approaches her beside the pool. She's staring intently at it. 'What happens now?' he asks.

'Step away, sir, please,' she says, pointing to a spot beside Sasha where she wants him to stand.

Olly resents being spoken to as if he's a child; he's trying to help, after all. The female police officer scrunches up her eyes and squints at him as if sensing his resistance. He nods and moves towards Sasha, but he's had enough of being patronised.

'Can we go home?'

'Home is next door?' the officer asks.

'Yes. The Manor House. It's just a bit further up the lane from here.'

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‘And that’s where the wife of the deceased is currently?’

‘Yes. She came to us for help when she found the body. As I said. She’s a wreck so we left her there in the care of our housekeeper.’ He feels it necessary to reiterate this, to show the officers that he and Sasha are good, helpful neighbours.

She consults with her colleague, and they agree that it’s fine for Olly and Sasha to go home. They will follow shortly, they say, to take statements and to interview the widow. CID will need to be called. Detectives, she adds, as if Olly didn’t know that already. We have to treat this as a crime scene now, her colleague says. In case it wasn’t an accident.

Olly and Sasha walk slowly until they’re out of sight of the Glass Barn. He stops beside a five-bar gate that’s almost swallowed by overgrowth, pulls her towards him and hugs her.

‘Stop,’ she says. ‘What are you doing? Someone might see us.’

The adrenalin has lifted him high as a kite. Every nerve in his body feels as if it’s jangling. But she’s right. It’s not the time or the place.

They walk on. Olly glances at her. He has so much admiration for Sasha. She is without a doubt the best liar he has ever known.

4

FIVE YEARS EARLIER

Anna's Journal

'It's time you moved on,' Kitty said. I was reading my book in Nick's study, minding my own business, when she just walked in and blurted it out as if she'd been thinking about it for ages.

I didn't know how to reply. 'That's none of your business,' is what I wanted to say but I don't like confrontation. Instead, I felt ashamed, as if I'd failed at being a widow.

'You've shut yourself up in this house for too long, Mrs Creed,' she said. 'It's not healthy. Mr Creed died six months ago.'

As if I didn't know that.

Kitty has worked for Nick and me as a housekeeper since we moved into the Manor House ten years ago, but she and I have never become close. Over the years, I've concluded that I'm not the kind of person that other people naturally like. There's something off-putting about me, though I'm not sure what. So

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far as I can tell I look like your average fifty-two-year-old woman, I keep myself to myself and I don't do or say anything to upset or offend, so I don't know what the problem is. Nick said it's just because I'm shy, which means I can sometimes come over as stand-offish, but that can't be helped. We have each other, he said, and a few friends. If you want to meet more people we can try, but I'm happy as we are, if you are. Why would we need more people?

I should have said, 'In case one of us dies.' Those friends dropped me like a hot potato after the funeral.

'Thank you, Kitty,' I said, hoping she'd go away, but she stood there for so long that I was forced to put my book down and talk to her.

'I'm grieving,' I said.

'And you should be. Mr Creed was a wonderful man, but there are other good men out there. You can't shut yourself away.'

'I don't want another man.'

'You need a friend, or a hobby.'

'There's a lot to do here.' The Manor House is one of those buildings that becomes your life. In the ten years since Nick and I moved in, I've dedicated myself to looking after it. We weren't able to start a family of our own and this place has become my passion, instead.

'Can I speak plainly?'

'I thought you were.'

'You need to change into some better clothes and go to town for a haircut and get your nails done. It'll make you feel better. Wouldn't you like that?'

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'I feel fine as I am, thank you,' I said, though I was a little bit insulted and thought that she'd crossed a line.

'I'm not saying this to make you feel bad. Mr Creed would hate to see you this unhappy and he'd hate to see the Manor House become your prison. Before he died, he asked me to look out for you.'

'He did?'

She nods. 'And if I don't say anything I won't be doing what I promised him. He said you might do this.'

I was shocked. I'd been keeping my memories of Nick to myself. The pain his death caused me felt intensely private, something I instinctively wanted to deal with alone. It hadn't occurred to me that he and Kitty might have talked about how his death could affect me. When he tried to talk to me about what I would do after he was gone, I would always tell him I'd be fine and change the subject because it was too painful. It was touching that he'd predicted my behaviour so accurately and taken steps to try to help me. But he was my soulmate, so it also made perfect sense.

She held out a note and I took it. It was one of those slivers of paper that you tear off an advertisement that's been pinned up. It said, 'Sasha. Yoga.' There was a phone number.

'What's this?' I asked.

'Yoga classes. Sasha's a good teacher, brilliant with beginners. Will you try it?'

I felt sceptical and tired by the thought of it. 'I've never done anything like this before.'

'It's only an hour a week and Sasha is very welcoming.'

'Do you go?'

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'I go to one of her evening classes, but you could go during the day. It would give you some structure and you might meet some people.'

I looked at the piece of paper, and back at Kitty. She seemed so solid standing there, and it can't have been easy for her to tell me these things, even if Nick made her promise to. It felt hard to say no.

'I'll try it,' I said.

'You won't regret it,' she said, 'I promise.'

I wasn't sure why she seemed so excited that I'd agreed to try yoga, but I supposed it must have been hard for her watching me withdraw into myself. I guess sometimes you don't realise how much you're affecting others.

'Thank you,' I said. 'It's very good of you to look out for me.'

She smiled awkwardly and, though I still felt surprised, I thought, if something good can come out of Nick's death, if Kitty and I can get closer, then it's something to be grateful for.

5

SATURDAY

Hal

'Steen,' the detective says. He answers his phone on the move, on his way to an interview room, walking fast, shouldering through doors, questions he wants to ask a suspect running around his head. The response he expects to get is 'No comment', but it hasn't stopped him preparing thoroughly and tenaciously.

If you look like Hal Steen, tenacity is a useful quality. He isn't blessed with smooth skin or even features. Nobody ever admired him for his looks.

'Hal,' his boss says. 'A body has been found in a swimming pool out at Lancaut, on the Wye.'

Hal stops and wedges himself against the side of the corridor as colleagues pass. He knows the Lancaut Peninsula a little. He's hiked a winding trail near there, high above the River Wye, and remembers its beauty, how peaceful and detached from its surroundings its geography made it feel and the sense he had of

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time ticking backwards, of his brain slowing down and repairing when it sorely needed to.

‘I want you to lead this,’ his boss says. ‘Okay?’

‘Yes. Absolutely.’ He speaks calmly, but he doesn’t feel it. Best to keep a lid on his excitement so he doesn’t say anything to make the boss change his mind. Hal’s been waiting a long time for an opportunity to investigate something that could be meaty. He’s watched colleagues who are slicker and more skilful office politicians, get opportunities that he hasn’t, though he’s as good as any of them. Better, often. ‘I’m interviewing now, but I can head out to Lancaut as soon as I’m finished.’

Hal sees his partner, Jen, walking down the corridor towards him. She’s three things he would like to be: tall, good-looking and tolerant of bucket-loads of caffeine. He holds up a finger to halt her.

‘Can someone else interview for you?’ the boss asks down the line. ‘You’re going to want Jen on this, yes?’

Hal pauses before answering, thinking about all the prep he’s put in, his doubts over who else could run the interview the way he wants. It’s hard to let go, but the suspect is a minor drug dealer who they’ve seen before and they’ll see again. He needs to let go if he wants this case. ‘Yes,’ he says. ‘On both.’

He ends the call and turns to Jen. He can feel that his face is flushed. ‘There’s a body in a swimming pool out at Lancaut. Boss wants me to lead. I want you on it with me.’

Her eyebrows rise. She’s as surprised as him. ‘Thank you. So, are we still interviewing?’

'No.'

'You agreed to let that go?' She knows him better than he thought.

'I'm going to have to.'

Jen waits by the office door, while he over-explains his interview notes to their colleague. 'Hal!' she says after a while. 'Let's go.'

They pick up a pool car and Jen drives, taking them through Chepstow, its town centre dominated by the ancient castle. It towers over the River Wye which snakes along one side of the town, forming a natural boundary. There are plans to close the Criminal Investigations Department here and move their team to a featureless office block beside the motorway. Hal will miss it if they do. He likes the history, and the border-town mentality. Chepstow is in England, but Wales is on the opposite bank of the River Wye.

A few minutes and a few sets of lights and they're free of the outskirts of town and heading into the countryside. Hal feels his allergies come to life. He blows his nose and gazes out of the window. Poppies flare red at the base of the hedgerows. They drive past stubbled, golden fields then scruffier, grassy meadows occupied by Holstein-Friesian cattle, standing in the shade of oak trees, dirt dried on their flanks, their ears and tails twitching in the heat. Soon they reach a village, houses and bungalows scattered alongside the road, a post office and small convenience store amongst them. They see a church set back behind its graveyard, where a mass of stones tilt and list, undermined by centuries of gentle subsidence.

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Jen takes a sharp left turn at a sign indicating Lancaut Nature Reserve and she slows the car, avoiding potholes. Within seconds they're enclosed by dense native forest. The tyres spit up small stones. Just as suddenly the landscape opens up to the right of the lane.

'We're here,' Jen says. She pulls into the gated entrance to a driveway, where a brand-new sign saying 'The Glass Barn' is mounted prominently. The gates stand open, and the driveway stretches out ahead of them, long, perfectly straight and newly made, its surface a fresh, tarry black. There's no planting to soften it. It seems to cleave the undulating landscape rather than sit within it.

'Wow,' Hal says. The Glass Barn is visible at the end of the drive, dominant and uncompromising. His first impression is that it's an uneasy mix of ultra-modern architecture and over-restored ruins. The glass structure grows out of what he assumes are the remains of old agricultural barns, but the juxtaposition makes them look as if they've been built in a Disney park. They've lost any charm they might have once had.

'That's a house,' Jen says.

'You like it?'

'Hell, yes.'

He shakes his head, says, 'No taste,' and she laughs, but reapplies her poker face before they get out of the car. A uniformed officer is standing in the shade at the front of the house. His shirt is damp under the armpits. He shows them around the side of the Barn to the pool.

The body is lying by the pool, the face covered with a blanket that the paramedics must have put there. The deck is damp

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beneath it, soaked by the wet clothing, though everything is drying out fast in the sun. He puts on a glove, squats beside the body and gently lifts the towel. The victim's eyes are shut. Hal notes a small bump on his hairline. It seems to be a recent injury. The expression on his still face is benign. He looks relaxed, like a nice guy.

'Poor man,' Jen says, and he knows she's thinking the same as him, even though experience has told them that a lot of people aren't nice, even when they look it.

'His wife spotted him face down in the pool from up there,' the uniformed officer says. He points to a balcony on the first floor of the house. 'It's the master bedroom.' Hal notes that the balcony is too far from the pool for the victim to have fallen directly from there into the water. He scans the rest of the scene. The poolside area is decked and the planting is lush. The pool has been made to look as if it's a natural feature. Beyond it, on one side there are tall grasses. On the other, the land slopes steeply down towards the river. Hal can't see it from here but he knows it's there, and he can see the far bank, where limestone cliffs overhang the water, rising tall and straight, pockmarked with birds' nests and clutches of foliage.

It's a beautiful spot to die in, he thinks, but he doesn't say it out loud.

The pool area is tidy. Six sunbeds are arranged in a neat row beside a couple of parasols, which haven't been opened. There's no sign of a towel or any other personal effects. It doesn't look as if the victim was intending to swim. But it's too early to say anything for sure. There's no obvious indicator as to whether

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this was an accident or the result of foul play. But he wasn't really expecting anything. That would be too easy.

'Where's his wife?' he asks. He's not looking forward to meeting her. Other people's sorrow weighs heavily on him. It creeps beneath his skin and burrows deep. He feels like he can never get rid of it. But it's why he does his job. It's the reason he's tenacious.

'She's still at the neighbours' house,' the uniformed officer says.

Hal stands up. The heat is intense, beating down. That body needs to be moved. Jen has stepped into the shade. She's looking at the scene, absorbing the detail. She'll take care of the widow, he thinks. She'll make an excellent Family Liaison Officer. He intends to ask her to assume that role.

They walk back to the car. Hal gets a text from the forensics lead. She's young, but meticulous. He respects her. Almost there, the text says. I need to speak to the wife now, he replies. She's with neighbours. Let's talk at the scene afterwards.

He looks around. There's no other property in sight. The sky is almost white, the sun burning a hole in it. He squints at Jen. 'Shall we drive next door?' She nods. They get into the car.

'Right.' Hal settles back in his seat. The heat in here is worse than outside. 'Let's see what the wife has to say.'

'The widow,' Jen corrects him as she turns on the ignition.

He consults his notes to remind himself of her name. 'Nicole Booth,' he says.

Of course, the widow might not need looking after. She might be delighted her husband is dead. At this stage she's undoubtedly their prime suspect. Jen isn't just the right person to comfort her,

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but also to observe Nicole Booth closely, to see whether there are any fractures in her widow's mask.

Jen rolls down the window. 'Where's the neighbours' house?' she asks the uniformed officer.

'Turn right out of the driveway and it's almost immediately on your left. You can't miss it. The Manor House.'

6

SATURDAY

Kitty

Deftly and unobtrusively, she clears up the used tissues from around Nicole Booth and puts a fresh box in front of her. They're waiting for the detectives. Everyone is sweltering. In spite of its thick walls, which usually keep the place cool in summer, heat has crept into the Manor House. The almost constant low-level smell of damp has disappeared, and the air has become stuffy with new smells of old materials gradually, reluctantly warming and shifting.

It feels like change. Everything in her life does, right now.

Last week, she saw something that turned her world upside down and she can't tell anyone about it. She wants to see it again, to be sure she believes it, but she hasn't had a chance yet. She needs Olly and Sasha to leave the Manor at the same time, which they hardly ever do.

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The windows in the Yellow Room are wide open, trying to catch a breeze, but nothing in the room stirs. She feels enveloped by the muggy warmth, by Nicole's grief, by the emotional whiplash of her discovery and of what they're all going through right now. What's happening has the potential to shatter the status quo and to affect her home, her identity, her memories, her future.

When Sasha burst into the laundry room so violently this morning, disturbing her ironing, for one terrible moment she thought that Sasha somehow knew what she'd discovered, that there was going to be a confrontation. But no. Horrifyingly, it was the news of Tom's death that Sasha brought, spreading even more seismic tremors through their little world.

She says, 'Would anyone like anything else? More water? A cup of tea?'

She looks at Nicole, who shakes her head. Since she arrived here a couple of hours ago, Nicole's either been crying or staring into space. Clearly, she's in shock. Earlier, she was shaking so much that it was hard to help her out of her wet clothes and into dry ones. Her eyes are red, swollen and glassy, her cheeks wet with tears, her expression pallid from horror and desolation.

She feels strongly drawn to Nicole, desperate to offer her whatever solace is possible at a time like this. She liked what she saw of Tom. She's never chatted to him in any meaningful way, but he was friendly and polite to her when he and Nicole came for drinks here after they moved in or when they saw each other on the lane. She liked that neither Tom nor Nicole had any airs or graces in spite of their obvious wealth. She's enjoyed watching

them build their new life. Seeing the Glass Barn rise out of those old ruins has been amazing. Olly and Sasha complained bitterly about the noise and disruption, even though a good deal of money was made from the sale of the land to Tom and Nicole, but she enjoyed watching the progress of the build.

She sits down beside Nicole and takes one of her hands in her own. Sasha, on the sofa opposite, watches, and nods. Olly sits in the wingback chair beside a window. He stares down the driveway, his profile still and serious. She wonders about the detail of what Olly and Sasha saw at the Glass Barn this morning and tries not to imagine what the body must have looked like. They haven't said much about it. She hears a car engine. 'The police are here,' Olly says.

'I'll let them in.' She stands and smooths down her housecoat.

At the door, the detectives introduce themselves to her. They make an odd couple. The woman, Jen, has pretty, curly hair, the physique of an athlete and a courteous smile. The man, Hal, has the face of a criminal. She supposes that might work in his favour professionally, but it's a little intimidating. She hopes he'll be gentle with poor Nicole.

'Who are you?' he asks.

She hesitates, nervous. 'I'm Kitty. I take care of things around here.'

There is something about seeing them here, law enforcement in the Manor House, that reminds her that a wider world exists out there, and that she might have some agency, if she can find the courage.

'Is Mrs Booth here?'

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‘She’s in the Yellow Room. She’s very upset. It’s this way.’ She indicates that they should walk ahead of her, but he pauses. He has small eyes. It’s difficult to read anything into them in the gloom of the hallway. The heavy staircase, dark wooden panelling and densely patterned wallpaper suck light from the space, and the stained glass in the window on the half landing steals brightness from any daylight that gets through it. The chandelier is lit, but its ornate design – all brass and antlers – directs light upwards and casts shadow beneath.

‘We’d like to talk to you after we’ve spoken to Mrs Booth.’

‘Yes,’ she says. She feels excited and scared. Words start to run from her mouth. She spends so much time being silent or subservient around others that this happens sometimes. She feels a need to tell. ‘It was such a shock. We were just having a normal morning. Sasha gave a yoga lesson and Olly was working on his novel. I was doing the ironing. It was a regular Saturday until Nicole appeared. She ran here after she discovered her husband’s body in the pool at her house. She was soaking wet. I stayed with her while Olly and Sasha went to the Barn to see if they could save him. But—’ She chokes up a little thinking about the awfulness of the moment when Olly and Sasha returned to the Manor and quietly confirmed that Tom was dead. *I knew he was*, Nicole responded. *I wouldn’t have stayed here if I thought there was any hope.* ‘But—’ she repeats and finds she can’t finish her sentence.

‘Have you already given a statement?’ the detective asks.

She nods. ‘To one of your officers.’

‘We’d still like to talk to you again later if that’s okay. Can you take me to see Mrs Booth now?’

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She indicates that they should walk down the hallway ahead of her. They look around as they go, taking in the dark oak staircase and the oil paintings that line the hall, layers of them, almost reaching the tall ceilings; some are large portraits, others are landscapes and hunting scenes. Usually, she tells first-time visitors all about the house if they look interested, pointing out its most significant features and informing them about the centuries of history. Everyone likes to see the ornate Tudor fireplace in the Great Hall and the medieval graffiti carved into the stonework, especially the witches' marks.

She's the perfect guide because she's made it her business to know everything about this place, every quirk and snippet of history. Whenever she moves through its corridors, she's aware of all the people who have trodden here before her and who will come after her. She's always felt privileged to be a custodian of the Manor.

But today is not the time. She only says, 'It's the second door on the right.'

She lingers in the doorway as the detectives enter the room. Olly and Sasha are sitting where she left them.

'We'd like to speak to Mrs Booth alone, if you don't mind,' the detective says. 'Is there somewhere you can wait?'

She steps aside as Olly and Sasha leave the room. The female detective closes the door, and they're shut out. She faces Olly and Sasha in the gloom. 'We're going to wait in Olly's study,' Sasha says.

'I should clear up the kitchen,' she says, though she knows it's immaculate.

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Olly and Sasha disappear into his study and shut the door behind them.

Voices are audible from behind the Yellow Room door, but not what's being said. But there's something she can do about that. There are secret spaces in this house that only she knows about.

She walks down the hall and into the Music Room, which shares a wall with the Yellow Room. A grand piano fills most of the space. She walks around it to the corner of the room and releases a mechanism hidden in the panelled wall. Two of the panels move and she slips behind them, into a narrow space between the walls, closing, but not locking, the panels softly behind her. She can hear the detectives and Nicole perfectly from there.

She knows she shouldn't be snooping, and it's not that she wants to learn Nicole's secrets; she just wants to make sure that the police treat her right, and it's extremely hard to resist because there are places in the Manor House that were built for hiding in and for spying from. There's a priest hole here, and other hidden passages like this one, dating from the sixteenth century. She can only imagine how terrifying it must have been to hide in these walls while you were being hunted, back then.

But she also knows how it's possible to use these secret places to your advantage, and it's time she stopped being passive.

She kneels, her ear to the back of the panelling that lines the Yellow Room. The female detective gently asks question after question, but Nicole's so distraught that she can barely answer. She manages to give them permission to review the Barn's security cameras and to search the Barn and take any of Tom's

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devices they can find. She writes down passwords for them, but she never stops crying. It feels like a mercy when they stop the interview after a short while.

As she climbs out of the wall and secures the panel back in place, she finds herself wiping tears from her face.

Poor, poor Nicole, she thinks. She didn't deserve any of this, and nor did I.

7

SUNDAY

Nicole

Nicole feels cold to her bones in spite of the early-morning warmth and the shaft of sunlight penetrating the leaded windows in the Manor House kitchen. She spent last night here. The police asked her to keep away from the Barn while they investigate. Olly and Sasha have been incredibly generous letting her stay, and it's just as well, because she had nowhere else to go.

'The detectives are back,' Sasha says. Nicole nods. She heard them arrive. Yesterday's interview was hopeless because she couldn't stop crying. Today she wants to get through it as quickly as possible, to get it over and done with so they leave her to grieve. Tom's death was surely an accident. It's impossible to think of it being anything else.

She stands as Sasha ushers them into the room because she's not sure what else to do. 'I'm sorry about yesterday,' she says.

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