

JUST BETWEEN US

ADELE PARKS

THE *SUNDAY TIMES* NUMBER ONE BESTSELLER



ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES

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For Diana Stewart and Jonathan Douglas,
who work tirelessly to nurture the next generation of readers.

And for Annabel Spooner
who is simply the most wonderful fun.

MARCH 2020

DC Clements

There is no body. A fact DC Clements finds both a problem and a tremulous, tantalising possibility. She's not a woman inclined to irrational hope, or even excessive hope. Any damned hope, really. At least, not usually.

Kylie Gillingham is probably dead.

Statistically speaking, it's not looking good for her. The forty-three-year-old woman has been missing nearly two weeks. Ninety-seven per cent of the 180,000 people a year who are reported missing are found within a week, dead or alive. She hasn't been spotted by members of the public, or picked up on CCTV; her bank, phone and email accounts haven't been touched. She has social media registered under her married name, Kai Janssen; they've lain dormant. No perky pictures of carefully arranged books, lattes, Negronis or peonies. Kylie Gillingham hasn't returned to either of her homes. Statistically, it's looking very bad.

Experience would also suggest this sort of situation has to end terribly. When a wife disappears, all eyes turn on the husband. In this case, there is not one but two raging husbands

left behind. Both men once loved the missing woman very much. Love is just a shiver away from hate.

The evidence does not conclusively indicate murder. There is no body. But a violent abduction is a reasonable proposition – police-speak, disciplined by protocol. Kidnap and abuse, possible torture is likely – woman-speak, fired by indignation. They know Kylie Gillingham was kept in a room in an uninhabited apartment just floors below the one she lived in with husband number two, Daan Janssen. That’s not a coincidence. There is a hole in the wall of that room; most likely Kylie punched or kicked it through. The debris created was flung through a window into the street, probably in order to attract attention. Her efforts failed. Fingerprints place her in the room; it’s unlikely she was simply hanging out or even hiding out, as there is evidence to suggest she was chained to the radiator.

Yet despite all this, the usually clear, logical, reasonable Clements wants to ignore statistics, experience and even evidence that suggests the abduction ended in fatal violence. She wants to hope.

There just might be some way, somehow, that Kylie – enigma, bigamist – escaped from that sordid room and is alive. She might be in hiding. She is technically a criminal, after all; she might be hiding from the law. She can hardly go home. She will know by now that her life of duplicity is exposed. She will know her husbands are incensed. Baying for blood. She has three largely uninterested half-brothers on her father’s side, and a mother who lives in Australia. None of them give Clements a sense that they are helping or protecting Kylie. She will know who abducted her. If alive, she must be terrified.

Clements’ junior partner, Constable Tanner, burly and blunt

as usual, scoffs at the idea that she escaped. He's waiting for a body; he'd settle for a confession. It's been four days now since Daan Janssen left the country. 'Skipped justice', as Tanner insists on saying. But the constable is wet behind the ears. He still thinks murder is glamorous and career-enhancing. Clements tries to remember: did she ever think that way? She's been a police officer for nearly fifteen years; she joined the force straight out of uni, a few years younger than Tanner is now, but no, she can't remember a time when she thought murder was glamorous.

'He hasn't skipped justice. We're talking to him and his lawyers,' she points out with what feels like the last bit of her taut patience.

'You're being pedantic.'

'I'm being accurate.'

'But you're talking to him through bloody Microsoft Teams,' says Tanner dismissively. 'What the hell is that?'

'The future.' Clements sighs. She ought to be offended by the uppity tone of the junior police officer. It's disrespectful. She's the detective constable. She would be offended if she had the energy, but she doesn't have any to spare. It's all focused on the case. On Kylie Gillingham. She needs to remain clear-sighted, analytical. They need to examine the facts, the evidence, over and over again. To be fair, Constable Tanner is focused too, but his focus manifests in frenetic frustration. She tries to keep him on track. 'Look, lockdown means Daan Janssen isn't coming back to the UK for questioning any time soon. Even if there wasn't a strange new world to negotiate, we couldn't force him to come to us, not without arresting him, and I can't do that yet.'

Tanner knocks his knuckles against her desk as though he is rapping on a door, asking to be let in, demanding attention. ‘But all the evidence—’

‘Is circumstantial.’ Tanner knows this; he just can’t quite accept it. He feels the finish line is in sight, but he can’t cross it, and it frustrates him. Disappoints him. He wants the world to be clear-cut. He wants crimes to be punished, bad men behind bars, a safer realm. He doesn’t want some posh twat flashing his passport and wallet, hopping on a plane to his family mansion in the Netherlands and getting away with it. Daan Janssen’s good looks and air of entitlement offend Tanner. Clements understands all that. She understands it but has never allowed personal bias and preferences to cloud her investigating procedures.

‘We found her phones in his flat!’ Tanner insists.

‘Kylie could have put them there herself,’ counters Clements. ‘She did live there with him as his wife.’

‘And we found the receipt for the cable ties and the bucket from the room she was held in.’

‘We found *a* receipt. The annual number of cable ties produced is about a hundred billion. A lot of people buy cable ties. Very few of them to bind their wives to radiators. Janssen might have wanted to neaten up his computer and charger cords. He lives in a minimalist house. That’s what any lawyer worth their salt will argue.’ Clements rolls her head from left to right; her neck clicks like castanets.

‘His fingerprints are on the food packets.’

‘Which means he touched those protein bars. That’s all they prove. Not that he took them into the room. Not that he was ever in the room.’

Exasperated, Tanner demands, ‘Well how else did they get there? They didn’t fly in through the bloody window, did they?’ Clements understands he’s not just excitable, he cares. He wants this resolved. She likes him for it, even if he’s clumsy in his declarations. It makes her want to soothe him; offer him guarantees and reassurances that she doesn’t even believe in. She doesn’t soothe or reassure, because she has to stay professional, focused. The devil is in the detail. She just has to stay sharp, be smarter than the criminal. That’s what she believes. ‘She might have brought them in from their home. He might have touched them in their flat. That’s what a lawyer will argue.’

‘He did it all right, no doubt about it,’ asserts Tanner with a steely certainty.

Clements knows that there is always doubt. A flicker, like a wick almost lit, then instantly snuffed. Nothing is certain in this world. That’s why people like her are so important; people who know about ambiguity yet carry on regardless, carry on asking questions, finding answers. Dig, push, probe. That is her job. For a conviction to be secured in a court of law, things must be proven beyond reasonable doubt. It isn’t easy to do. Barristers are brilliant, wily. Jurors can be insecure, overwhelmed. Defendants might lie, cheat. The evidence so far is essentially fragile and hypothetical.

‘I said, didn’t I. Right at the beginning, I said it’s always the husband that’s done it,’ Tanner continues excitedly. He did say as much, yes. However, he was talking about Husband Number 1, Mark Fletcher, at that point, if Clements’ memory serves her correctly, which it always does. And even if her memory one day fails to be the reliable machine that it currently is,

she takes notes – meticulous notes – so she always has those to rely on. Yes, Tanner said it was the husband, but this case has been about *which* husband. Daan Janssen, married to Kai: dedicated daughter to a sick mother, classy dresser and sexy wife. Or Mark Fletcher, husband to Leigh: devoted stepmother, conscientious management consultant and happy wife? Kai. Leigh. Kylie. Kylie Gillingham, the bigamist, had been hiding in plain sight. But now she is gone. Vanished.

‘The case against Janssen is gathering momentum,’ says Clements, carefully.

‘Because Kylie was held captive in his apartment block.’

‘Yes.’

‘Which is right on the river, easy way to lose a body.’

She winces at this thought but stays on track. ‘Obviously Mark Fletcher has motive too. A good lawyer trying to cast doubt on Janssen’s guilt might argue that Fletcher knew about the other husband and followed his wife to her second home.’

Tanner is bright, fast; he chases her line of thought. He knows the way defence lawyers create murky waters. ‘Fletcher could have confronted Kylie somewhere in the apartment block.’

‘A row. A violent moment of fury,’ adds Clements. ‘He knocks her out cold. Then finds an uninhabited apartment and impetuously stashes her there.’

Tanner is determined to stick to his theory that Janssen is the guilty man. ‘Sounds far-fetched. How did he break in? This thing seems more planned.’

‘I agree, but the point is, either husband could have discovered the infidelity, then, furious, humiliated and ruthless, imprisoned her. They’d have wanted to scare and punish, reassert control, show her who was boss.’ They know this much,

but they do not know what happened next. Was she killed in that room? If so, where is the body hidden? ‘And you know we can’t limit this investigation to just the two husbands. There are other suspects,’ she adds.

Tanner flops into his chair, holds up a hand and starts to count off the suspects on his fingers. ‘Oli, Kylie’s teen stepson. He has the body and strength of a man . . .’

Clements finishes his thought. ‘But the emotions and irrationality of a child. He didn’t know his stepmum was a bigamist, but he did know she was having an affair. It’s possible he did something rash. Something extreme that is hard to come back from.’

‘Then there’s the creepy concierge in the swanky apartment block.’

‘Alfonzo.’

‘Yeah, he might be our culprit.’

Clements considers it. ‘He has access to all the flats, the back stairs, the CCTV.’

‘He’s already admitted that he deleted the CCTV from the day Kylie was abducted. He said that footage isn’t kept more than twenty-four hours unless an incident of some kind is reported. Apparently the residents insist on this for privacy. It might be true. It might be just convenient.’

Clements nods. ‘And then there’s Fiona Phillipson. The best friend.’

‘Bloody hell. We have more suspects than an Agatha Christie novel,’ says Tanner with a laugh that is designed to hide how overwhelmed and irritated he feels. His nose squashed up against shadowy injustice, cruel violence and deception.

‘Right.’

‘I still think the husband did it.’

‘Which one?’

‘Crap. Round and round in circles we go.’ He scratches his head aggressively. ‘Do you want me to order in pizza? It’s going to be a long night.’

‘Is anyone still doing deliveries? I don’t think they are,’ points out Clements. ‘You know, lockdown.’

‘Crap,’ he says again, and then rallies. ‘Crisps and chocolate from the vending machine then. We’ll need something to sustain us while we work out where Kylie is.’

Clements smiles to herself. It’s the first time in a long time that Tanner has referred to Kylie by name, not as ‘her’ or ‘the bigamist’ or, worse, ‘the body’. It feels like an acceptance of a possibility that she might be somewhere. Somewhere other than dead and gone.

Did she somehow, against the odds, escape? Is Kylie Gillingham – the woman who dared to defy convention, the woman who would not accept limits and laughed in the face of conformity – still out there, somehow just being?

God, Clements hopes so.

Daan

Daan Janssen is volunteering to cooperate. He is not under arrest. A fact his lawyers tell him repeatedly (in calm, confident tones that maybe makes them think they are justifying their exorbitant fees), and a fact that the police officers inform him of at the beginning of each meeting (spat out by rote in a bored manner that somehow suggests the word ‘yet’ is floating across the video call). It is *the* fact he reminds himself of with increasing regularity as he tries to go about his day. When he dresses in the morning. When he is eating. Cleaning his teeth, listening to music. Whatever.

Outwardly, he’s striving to appear unconcerned. Unruffled. It matters. He dresses in suits when he has to speak with the British police, combined with an impeccably ironed shirt. On more casual days he wears chinos and a polo shirt, never just a T. He wants to look crisp despite the pressure of police interviews, the stress of the global pandemic and the issue of his wife vanishing.

Not his wife at all. The woman he thought was his wife but who is a bigamist. His four-year marriage to her – a stylish

ceremony in the Chelsea register office, followed by an oyster and champagne reception at the original West Street Ivy – isn't worth the paper the certificate was issued on. Apparently. He plays it over and over. She was another man's wife. She lied to him, betrayed him, repeatedly. And now she is dead but is still going to ruin what is left of his life if he is sent to prison for her murder. He can't exactly blame her for that, but he can't exactly forgive her for it either.

It is important he keeps up appearances, retains standards. He will not slump, sag, admit defeat like most of the world's population. He's better than the vast majority. Although when the fact comes into his head that he is not under arrest *yet*, it puts him off the carefully prepared, nutritionally balanced meals made by his private chef. It blasts into his head when he's playing a round of golf with his father. It puts him off his game.

The tone of his internal monologue continually shifts. Sometimes he is brash, dismissive; other times the fear and dread leak in. Insidious. Threatening. He didn't kill his wife. He didn't do it. But Daan is aware that innocent men are sent to prison from time to time. Miscarriages of justice do occur. He is white, privileged, extraordinarily wealthy. People like him are very unpopular right now. It's a pity; any other time in history he would have been practically worshipped, often above the law. Look, he's not saying that's right, you know. Just that for him, personally, it would have been convenient. But now people vilify men like him, which is inconvenient. They want him to be guilty.

But he is not.

He can see that the evidence is stacking up against him. There is motive, opportunity and circumstantial data. Each

meeting with the police reveals that there are more and more things to be concerned about.

‘I just want to share the screen for a moment, if that’s OK. I want to show you some photos,’ says the senior policewoman, DC Clements. He thinks of her as senior because she’s a higher rank than the cocky youth who is also in the interview room, but she is still younger than Daan himself. It’s a cliché, but the police are getting younger. He is turning forty this year. It sounds old. He doesn’t want to turn forty in a prison. He doesn’t want to lose years and years of his life. He is too vital for that to happen. He has too much to do, to see, to be.

The police officers are staring at him through a computer screen. Daan is glad he’s on his home turf, back in Holland, where his influential family are known and know everyone. He wouldn’t want to be in that depressing interview room where criminals have sat and sweated. ‘This is the room your wife was kept in,’ says Clements.

The photos turn his stomach. The room is pocked with debris: food packages, empty water bottles, papers, plasterboard; it radiates chaos. They show him close-ups of a radiator that has a chain attached to it. She was chained like a maltreated dog. There is a photo of a plasterboard wall that has a hole in it. ‘We’re assuming she kicked through this wall here. Probably while she was still attached to the radiator. She couldn’t crawl through the hole, but she created debris and then she threw the debris out of the open window in the other room, so that it would land on the street below. Some of it did, some of it didn’t.’ They show him photos of the second room, the open window, the debris that had missed its target.

‘Working theory, she was trying to attract attention,’ says

Constable Tanner, laconically. 'I guess she must have been pretty desperate. This sort of thing comes long after banging on the door and asking for help, I'd say,' he adds with a sniff. His tone and the sniff irritate Daan. It seems disrespectful, casual. People ought to carry handkerchiefs.

'Where were you residing between Monday 16th March and Tuesday 24th March this year?' asks the DC.

'You know where I was, you visited me there, in my apartment.'

'Can you state the address?'

'St Marina Riverview Apartments.' He rattles off the full address and postcode. He can't resist adding, 'The penthouse.'

'These photos were taken in apartment 1403 St Marina Riverview,' says the police officer.

Daan gasps. 'She was held captive in my apartment building?'

'Yes. Fourteenth floor. Just a few below you.'

'Six.'

'Sorry?'

'Six floors below me; you said a few.'

'I stand corrected.'

Daan blinks. He can't understand what they are saying. This is bad. Very bad. The thought of her so close for all that time, and yet completely out of his grasp. He picks up a glass of water, takes a gulp.

'And during those dates we mentioned, did you go about your usual business?'

'I was looking for my wife.'

'Of course, and what did that entail? Did you put up posters to alert the public to her disappearance?'

‘No.’

‘Did you walk the streets looking for her?’

‘No.’

‘Did you visit her friends, ask if they had seen her?’

‘I didn’t visit her friends, no.’

The DC obviously knows the power of silence; she lets his last negative echo. It’s a technique Daan himself sometimes uses in business meetings. He’s made a lot of money by judiciously saying nothing, doing nothing. Today, he counters assertively. ‘I called *you*. I called the police. You were looking for her.’

‘Did you leave your apartment building at any point from Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd March?’

Daan thinks. Where is this going? What trap is he walking into? He answers honestly, because of course they already know the answer. ‘Yes, I went to the local deli that is just next door. A few times. To buy food and drink.’

‘Alcohol?’

He sighs. ‘Yes, alcohol. I’m over eighteen, it’s not a crime.’ His lawyer coughs quietly. A subtle sign to remind Daan to be careful what he says. No one likes a smart-arse.

‘And when you were popping in and out the deli for your organic vegetables and single malt, did you notice the debris in the street?’ asks Tanner. No one coughs to indicate that *he* should lay off the sarcasm.

Daan shakes his head. It’s an automatic response. *Did* he see the debris? He’ll think about it more later.

‘Not even as you left for the airport?’ Daan shakes his head again. ‘Because we noticed it straight away, didn’t we, DC Clements? Awful mess. Practically tripped over it, I did. And we arrived at St Marina Riverview Apartments just a short time

after you left there.’ The constable frowns to indicate that he’s mystified as to how that could be.

Daan remains silent. The DC picks up the baton. ‘And when you were up and down the stairs, in and out the elevator and the building, you never saw or heard anything unusual?’

‘No.’

‘And you will have been especially vigilant, I expect.’

‘What do you mean by that?’

The DC pulls her face into an expression of surprised innocence, ‘Well, only that as your wife had vanished, you’d have been keeping your eyes wide open. You’d be alert.’

They show him another photo, of a filthy bucket of shit. He blanches.

‘It’s not pretty, is it, Daan?’

‘No, it’s not pretty,’ he repeats. His lawyer clears his throat again. Taken out of context, that comment might sound dismissive, sarcastic, cruel. He’s been warned to avoid elaboration, explanations and theorising. The thought of Kai being demeaned so – his beautiful, elegant woman – makes his heart beat faster. His heart that is aching, imagining her chained to a radiator. She was a bitch for marrying him when she was married to another man, while mothering another man’s children, certainly that. But he doesn’t want to think of her this way.

‘Thank you for giving us permission to search your flat, Daan.’ As if he could have refused. His lawyers had told him they’d easily secure a warrant; it looked better if he appeared helpful. The lawyers might be regretting that decision. On their previous video call, the police revealed that they’d found both of Kai’s phones hidden at his apartment, the ones she used to facilitate her double life. They also focused on

a receipt from Homebase for zip ties and a plastic bucket. Daan told them he had no idea where the receipt had come from. He realises now that they are revealing evidence to him in a particular order. They are trying to trap him. Frame him. He did not buy a bucket. He was rushing to the airport; he possibly stepped over the debris as he jumped into his taxi. He was in a hurry.

‘There was some banging. I recall it now.’ He lights up. Pleased to show that he isn’t careless, negligent. ‘One night. The Saturday night. I thought it was something to do with water pipes. Or at least that’s what she—’ He stops abruptly.

‘She?’

Oh fuck. He has to tell them. It will come out. Someone might have seen her arrive or leave. ‘I had a friend stay over on Saturday night. I slept through the noise, but she said there was clanking, that I should get the concierge to call a plumber. She thought maybe it was trapped air in the pipes. I didn’t think anything of it at the time. I had bigger things on my mind.’

‘Your missing wife?’

‘Of course.’

‘And who was this friend?’

Daan turns to his lead lawyer. ‘Do I have to say?’

‘Is there a reason you’d rather not?’ asks Clements, overriding his lawyer’s assurances that he’s not obligated to say anything at all.

‘Her name is Fiona Phillipson.’

‘And how friendly are you exactly?’ asks Tanner with a smirk.

‘Not very,’ Daan asserts.

Clements puts up a picture of Fiona on the screen. It’s a good

one. Her profile pic that she used on the dating app, which was how she first reached out to him. She must have used filters; in real life she looks her age, and her eyes are smaller. ‘Is this Fiona Phillipson?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, we’ve talked to Fiona, and she says you two are more than friends.’

He doesn’t know why they are talking to Fiona Phillipson. Nor how they might have found her. Is there CCTV in the corridors and hallways of his building? He thought that was limited to the gym and the pool. Perhaps she came forward in response to an appeal for witnesses after Kai went missing. He knows it’s not good news that they’ve spoken to her. Fiona Phillipson is a woman he’s had sex with a few times, a casual hook-up. A way to pass the time when Kai was away. And you know what, he’s glad he did so, considering how things had turned out. When he thought Kai was in the north of England tending to her sick mother, she was in fact living around the corner with *another husband*. Un-fucking-believable.

He still can’t accept it. All he did in terms of infidelity was bend a few women over his kitchen table from time to time and bang them hard from behind. He never promised them anything. Most of them understood what they were getting. A glamorous night, a fun anecdote, a satisfying orgasm. This Fiona woman was a mistake. The timing of their latest hook-up makes him look bad. He last had her a few days after Kai went missing. He wasn’t thinking straight. He was confused, a total mess. He’d just heard that his wife was a bigamist, for God’s sake. Fiona didn’t mean anything to him, but he let her stay over. Again a mistake. She woke up clingy. She

asked him if he was married. He got the feeling she left in a bit of a huff. Hurt. But Christ, is that his problem? He's got far bigger ones.

'Have you ever visited Fiona Phillipson's home in London?'

'What? No.' Daan has no idea where the woman lives. It might be Highgate, it might be Brixton, north, south, east, west. How would he know? He never asked. He has no interest. Why would he visit her house?

'What about her holiday home in Dorset?'

'No. No.' He shakes his head. He briefly wonders if this woman has gone missing too. Is there some sort of serial killer on the loose? Did she disappear after she left his? No, that's not right; they said they were talking to her. He's not thinking clearly, he's panicking. Unless she's vanished since. God, might she have? It's insane. But is that thought any more or less insane than his bigamist wife vanishing? He feels heat pulse across his body. 'I hardly knew the woman.'

'You hardly knew her?'

'Know her. I hardly know her.' Fuck, what's the proper grammar? He's normally careful on this sort of stuff. He's tripping up. His words are sounding shaky, imprecise. He doesn't want to think about serial killers. He doesn't want to think about Kai crapping in a bucket. He takes a deep breath. 'It wasn't that sort of relationship. It wasn't *any* sort of relationship.'

'Is that right,' says the DC. She looks triumphant, which worries Daan.

'I don't want to say anything else.' He looks to his lawyers, but before they can respond, he hits the button that says *LEAVE MEETING* and the screen turns black.

DC Clements

The lockdown measures, which were just a whisper, a recommendation when Kylie Gillingham disappeared, have bloomed and bypassed the stage of being a threat and are now a fact. Immovable law. Shops, restaurants, cafés and libraries are closed. People are locking themselves behind doors, behaving like convicts serving time, grateful for a permissible hour of exercise. They've been instructed to work from home if they can. Something that, for decades, harassed mothers have begged for. Something they've argued they need to ease the burden of childcare. The concept of working from home has always been dismissed, seen as a scam for skivers. Now there is no alternative. Bosses everywhere are crossing their fingers, hoping their employees will play fair. Although nothing can ease the burden of childcare at the moment, as schools are closed and teachers are beaming lessons through laptops and smartphones. Parents are going mental.

Clements doesn't have any of that to worry about. Childcare. She can't imagine what it must be like. Trying to do your job, trying to get your kids to pick up a pen and tackle some

maths. Unlike some of her colleagues, she is not interested in working from home, alone. Maybe she would be safer from the virus, locked in her tiny flat, stuck at the little table under the window, but she couldn't stand it. She's always done her best thinking in the field.

She could call Fiona Phillipson, but she decides she needs to see her face. It's a matter of catching her unawares. People reveal more than they want to in their faces, and the DC has a feeling there is a lot more to be revealed yet. She and Tanner visit Fiona's house together. A well-kept terrace in Clapham. Victorian black and white tiles, a dark blue gloss door, succulents in oversized stone pots in the tiny front garden; smart, standard for a certain sort.

'This will be worth a fortune,' mutters Tanner. A slight hint of resentment in his voice. People in their twenties and thirties unilaterally resent those in their forties and fifties, because a generation ago it was possible to clamber onto the property ladder, even in London. Tanner rents in Woking. It's a long commute, boring and expensive, but as close to his workplace as he can afford. Clements has arranged for him to have a car at his disposal as they investigate this case; that way he can get backwards and forwards without being held hostage to the reduced train timetable. 'Very nice,' he adds, nodding towards the house, but there's no hint that he's paying a compliment. He rings the doorbell for a second time. They listen to it echo around the silent building.

Clements peers in through the window. 'No sign of her.'

'Taking a walk?' suggests Tanner.

'I have a hunch. Let's call in on Mark Fletcher.'

She only has to ring the bell once at the Fletchers'. As she

expected, Fiona Phillipson opens the door. She's flustered. Her first words are: 'Mark suggested I move in with him and the boys during lockdown. Probably only going to be a couple of weeks, right? After all, I've known him and the boys for ages. I was there the day Kylie met them.'

Clements nods. 'Nothing illegal about that, Fiona, relax.' The woman is clearly nervous, maybe even apologetic. People are just getting their heads around the new laws and rules; they don't want to put a foot out of line. Most of them.

'Do you want to come in?' Fiona opens the door a little wider.

'No, sorry, best if we stay outside. Social distancing and all that.' Behind Fiona, Clements can see the younger Fletcher boy, Seb, lingering in the corridor. Her stomach contracts slightly in sympathy. He looks exhausted, blue bags hanging under his eyes. His limbs seem angular, awkward. He's holding himself in such a way as to suggest he is bracing for more sorrow. Clements has been up close and personal with tragedy before; she knows it's very possible that he will never regain the carelessness and ease that is associated with being young. He's only twelve years old, but his childhood has been brought to an abrupt halt by the actions of his stepmother and someone else. An unknown other. Adults are bastards to kids. They should take better care. He has been wrenched into a tawdry, brutal, grown-up world, and he's frightened. He should be. Clever boy.

'Have you found my mum?' he asks.

Fiona looks startled. 'Have you?'

'No.' Thinking of Seb, stretched taut, desperate for news, Clements adds, 'Not yet, but we're following a lead. Fiona, you can help with that.'

‘Of course, anything.’

‘You mentioned a holiday home in Dorset. We’d like to take a look around there if it’s OK with you.’

‘Do you think she might be hiding there?’ asks Seb, light flooding into his eyes.

Oli, his elder brother by three years, emerges into the hallway. From previous visits – when Leigh Fletcher aka Kai Janssen aka Kylie Gillingham was first reported missing – Clements knows that’s the doorway to the living room. She guesses Oli has been listening to the exchange with just as much keenness as his younger brother but less willingness to show his interest.

He pushes Seb in the chest. ‘Don’t be an idiot.’ The words, the shove, appear violent, angry, and they are. How violent? How angry? Or, Clements wonders, are the words standard bro-speak? Is the shove innocent? An immature, unprocessed excuse to make physical contact from someone who won’t show his vulnerability and simply hug it out. She isn’t sure. She’d like to rule him out of her inquiry. No one wants a fifteen-year-old to be responsible for this mess, but she might be being too compassionate because of his age. She has to be alert to that. Careful of it. Kids can be monsters too. Does he know more than anyone? Does he *know* it’s idiotic to hope? His next comment does nothing to help her decide. ‘She’s probably dead, bro, get used to it,’ he mutters, as he pushes his way past his brother and heads up the stairs; feet slamming down heavily, each step a protest.

Fiona grimaces apologetically. ‘They’re dealing with a lot. That’s why I moved in for a while, to help out. Keep things calm. Shall I get you the keys to my Dorset place? I can give you directions.’

Clements and Tanner drive through the deserted streets,

feeling privileged to be getting out of the city. ‘Tumbleweed,’ Tanner mutters, shaking his head. He’s disconcerted, a bit moody, because he hasn’t been able to pop into his usual coffee shop, and while there is the occasional place selling takeaways, the queues are too long to waste time in. He’s suffering from caffeine withdrawal, constantly jiggling his knee; Clements wishes he wouldn’t, it’s distracting. She needs to think. Piece it all together.

Somehow the empty roads and pavements are more insidious now than when they teemed with disorder. Clements isn’t used to civil obedience on this sort of scale, she can’t quite trust it. Take Fiona, for example, so compliant and cooperative, readily giving them permission to search her house without a warrant, handing over her key at speed. Normally members of the public, no matter how innocent, are uppity about this sort of thing. They say stuff like ‘I know my rights’ and start quoting from TV scripts, suggesting they don’t know their rights or much at all, actually. She just happened to have the keys to her country home to hand. Is that odd? Or is she, like most Londoners who can afford to, simply keeping her options open? Planning on bolting to her second home to see out lockdown despite entreaties to stay put.

‘Did you see her face?’ Clements asks Tanner.

‘Fiona’s?’

‘Yeah.’

‘When the kid asked if we had any news.’

‘Right. It should have been her first question, shouldn’t it?’ She takes her eyes off the road for a nanosecond and turns to Tanner. ‘As it was Seb’s. But instead she was justifying why she’s moved in with them.’

‘She’s fast getting her feet under the table at her dead friend’s house, isn’t she?’

‘Her *missing* friend,’ Clements corrects, but without much enthusiasm or certainty.

‘People in the states have started to call it “forming bubbles”. For Christ’s sake. I hope that doesn’t catch on in the UK. Bubbles.’ Tanner shakes his head in derision. ‘As if the middle classes need to be taken any further from reality. They’ve always lived in bubbles, with their sourdough bread bake-offs, their quinoa and kale juicing and what have you.’ His disgust is palpable.

‘It’s not just the middle classes that are forming bubbles,’ Clements points out. ‘And I’d say Mark Fletcher and his boys have had quite the dose of reality these past couple of weeks. What with Kylie going missing, then discovering she’s been living a double life.’

‘So you reckon it’s a good thing the best friend is keeping an eye on them?’

‘Maybe,’ Clements murmurs.

‘Just saying it’s very cosy,’ Tanner says, cocking his eyebrow, as he does to suggest suspicion. Clements wishes he wouldn’t. He looks like a little boy pretending to be a detective. It makes it hard to take him seriously, surely the opposite effect to the one he’s hoping for. However, the point he makes is valid.

‘It is,’ she admits.

‘She’s everywhere, though, isn’t she? Living with Husband Number One, casually shagging Husband Number Two.’

The same thought has entered the DC’s head, but she’s trying to stay open-minded. Look at the facts. Gather the evidence. Resist jumping to conclusions. The feminist in her

wants to believe in the friendship between Kylie and Fiona. Twenty-three years they stretch back. ‘She wasn’t aware that Daan was married to Kylie when she was shagging him. Or at least she says she wasn’t.’ Feminist or not, Clements is careful about how much trust she lends anyone. True to say Fiona has had her fair share of shocks recently too. Shocks can make people vulnerable. It’s possible she just wants to be around other people who love and miss Kylie; that she simply wants to be helpful and provide comfort. But shocks also make people angry, unpredictable. Dangerous. Clements recaps the facts. ‘She hooked up with Daan Janssen through a dating app, one that identified potential matches in close vicinity.’

‘She bumped into him in his apartment block, right?’ chips in Tanner, pleasing his boss by keeping up.

‘Correct.’

‘Remind me, why was she there in the first place?’

‘She says she was there for work. She’s an interior decorator and was pitching to redesign Mr and Mrs Federova’s apartment.’

‘Which just happens to be the apartment Kylie Gillingham was held captive in.’

‘Yes.’ The two officers share a look. Coincidences do happen. More often than people think. Some people believe in fate and destiny, Clements thinks both things can be explained away through coincidence. Even good and bad luck can be attributed to something akin. But she doubts a cluster of coincidences *is* a coincidence. A cluster of them is usually a crime. So she continues to count them up. ‘Fiona’s timeline, as she has presented it to us in her statement, is as follows. One, she finds out her boyfriend – Daan Janssen – is married. Two, she finishes the

relationship. Three, her best friend goes missing. Four, she finds out her best friend is a bigamist. Five, she discovers her best friend's second husband is the very man she's been shagging.' She shakes her head slowly. Maybe letting the information settle, maybe doubting it. 'Of course it may not have happened in that order,' she adds darkly.

'You mean . . .'

'One, she finds out her meaningless shag – Daan Janssen – is married to her best friend. Two, her best friend vanishes. She did admit to shagging him at least once after she knew he was married to her bestie. Said she was emotional and drunk. That she made a mistake.' The accusation lingers in the air. Jealousy, fury, revenge, all create a toxicity that leads to desperate acts. 'Crimes of passion have been a thing since time began.'

'She had access to that apartment,' Tanner says excitedly.

'Probably. She certainly knew it was standing empty, but there's nothing at all to place her there, and Daan Janssen might have known it was empty too.' Clements sighs. 'Let's see what we find in Dorset.'

Tanner sniffs and gazes out of the window, attention once again drawn towards the relentless emptiness. Then, to fill the silence and the void, he flicks on the radio.

They are still talking about the exhausted nurse who cried in a supermarket car park and begged people not to panic-buy because after her double shift in the critical care ward, she'd gone shopping and found the shelves empty. They are also reporting that someone has suggested that people stand outside their houses and clap to show their support and gratitude for our NHS heroes. Clements wonders how it can be that people are clapping for the carers and simultaneously starving them.

The world is bloody mad. A journalist describes how walkers heading to beauty spots in the Peak District are being watched by a fleet of drones and reminded that rambling sixty miles from home does not constitute an 'essential journey'. Clements wonders what this all means for Kylie. Is it easier or harder to hide in a lockdown?

Is it easier or harder to hide a body in a lockdown?