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# **The Missing Husband**

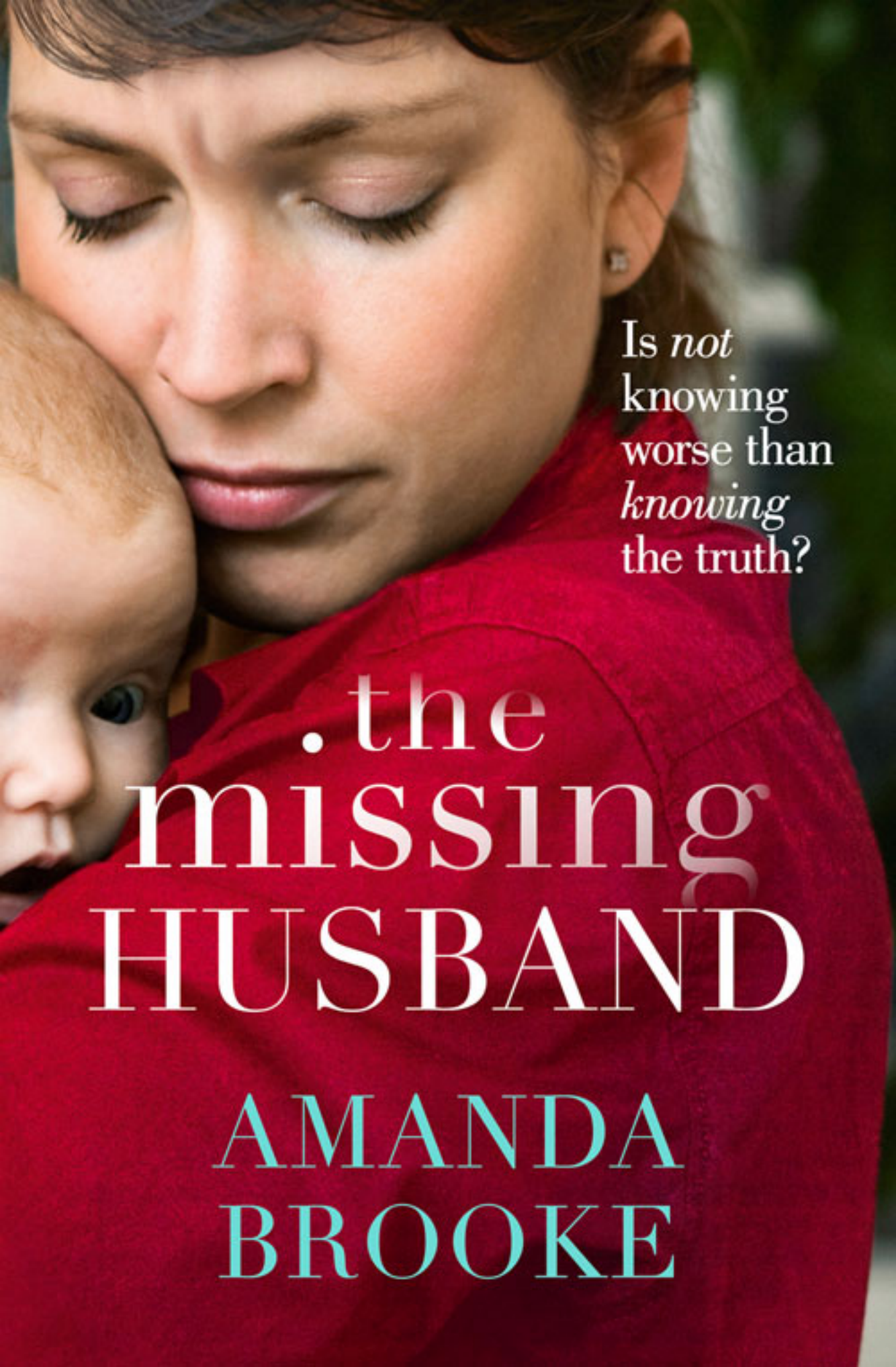
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Is *not*  
knowing  
worse than  
*knowing*  
the truth?

.the  
MISSING  
HUSBAND

AMANDA  
BROOKE

.the  
MISSING  
HUSBAND

AMANDA  
BROOKE

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# 1

It wasn't the bright flash of light or the soft hum of the extractor fan that raised Jo Taylor from her slumber but the darkness that returned to the bedroom after David slipped into the en suite and closed the door behind him. Keeping her eyes firmly closed, Jo listened to the shower lurch into life. The gentle drizzle of water was replaced a moment later by a thunderous downpour as her husband stepped beneath it. He began to hum softly but then stopped himself, continuing the rest of his ablutions in silence.

Jo wriggled her fingers and toes but resisted the urge to stretch her stiffened limbs. She didn't want to alter her position and let David know she was awake. Carefully, she lifted her head an inch off the pillow and checked the alarm clock. It wasn't yet five. Through the gloom she could see light and steam leaching out from beneath the bathroom door. A shadow flickered as the shower switched off, making her start, and she dropped her head back down. As she listened to him brushing his teeth, she snuck her hand up to her face and raked her fingers through her fringe until it fell perfectly straight across her brow. If she was going

to pretend to be asleep, she wanted to look good, angelic even. She settled back into her pose and didn't move again.

She could still hear water falling, but this time it was the sound of rain ricocheting off the window in a vicious spray of bullets. Jo squeezed her eyes shut and savoured the warm hug of her duvet. Unlike David, she wasn't prepared to go out into gale force winds at such an ungodly hour – but he already knew that.

Yes, she felt guilty, of course she did. David's fifteen-minute walk to catch a train at West Allerton station on this cold and miserable October morning wasn't going to be a pleasant one, especially when it was only the first leg of a long and tedious journey from Liverpool to Leeds for an equally long and tedious day's training, after which he would face the same epic journey home again. She had made the trip herself and didn't envy him. But when he had asked her for a lift to the city centre so he could catch the Leeds train direct from Lime Street Station she had refused. She wasn't going to change her mind and she didn't really need to feign sleep; it was just easier that way.

Remnants of their argument trickled into her thoughts and she tensed her statue-still body. It hadn't been a blazing row but rather a slow burning battle of wills. That was how their marriage worked, and for the most part, it worked well. They both had strong opinions and Jo didn't like backing down or admitting it when she did, but David was exactly the same. It was a game they usually enjoyed, but not this time. This was one that had been rumbling on since Jo's thirtieth birthday over eighteen months ago, although the latest argument had begun only the night before when she and David had arrived home. He had

pulled into the drive and switched off the engine before leaning in to nuzzle her neck. Remembering the warm touch of his lips, Jo's skin tingled now as it had then.

'What are you after?' she had asked.

David cupped her face in his hand and guided her lips towards his. He kissed her before replying. 'Who said I was after anything? I was simply overpowered by a desire to kiss my wife.'

He let his thumb trail across her mouth. She bit it. 'No, David. What are you after?'

The beginnings of a smile made David's face twitch. He wasn't expecting her to resist when he asked for a lift to the station, or as he put it, 'one tiny favour'.

Before answering, Jo took his hand from her face, kissed his palm and then pushed it away. She was trying not to let her disappointment sour the mood. The way she was feeling lately, she had wanted him to look after her, not work her. 'There's nothing to stop you taking a taxi,' she said, her clenched jaw pinching her words.

'But you could drive to Lime Street and back in thirty minutes,' he had said, trying to coax her. 'You wouldn't even have to get dressed.'

'Or I could stay in bed and get some much needed beauty sleep.'

'You couldn't *get* any more beautiful.'

Jo refused the bait. 'If it's the cost you're worried about then I'll pay for the taxi myself.'

'It's not the cost. I just thought it would be nice to snatch a few extra minutes with my *beautiful* wife rather than some grizzly old taxi driver.'

'I can assure you I would be just as grizzly at five o'clock

in the morning.’ Jo shifted in her seat and tried to pull her coat around her but it didn’t quite reach across her expanding girth. She was trying to make a point but it was far too subtle and completely lost on her husband.

‘You mean even more grizzly than you are at five o’clock at night?’ he asked looking at his watch to make the point.

‘It’s six o’clock, David and the answer is still no.’

The little spat could have ended there and would have if David hadn’t made the mistake of stepping on to dangerous territory. ‘It’s not like I’m off for a weekend with the boys,’ he said. ‘I’m going on this training course so I can provide a secure future for my *family*. I thought that was what you wanted, Jo.’

She narrowed her eyes as she analysed each and every word. ‘Ah, yes, of course; this is all about what *I* want.’

‘You, me, us – it’s the same thing, isn’t it?’ he demanded, his words choking the breath out of him.

‘Is it?’ she asked, wanting his reassurance, but her plea sounded more like a challenge and that was exactly how David reacted to it.

‘You tell me, Jo. Isn’t that how you justified it to yourself when you took all those life-changing decisions on *our* behalf?’

The question had hung in the air and the argument had stalled, leaving an uneasy silence between them that had stretched towards the dawn of the new day.

Beyond her closed lids light flooded the room, followed quickly by a cloud of warm, soap-scented steam. The light dimmed as David closed the door, leaving just enough illumination to pick out a shirt and suit from the wardrobe. Jo listened to him dressing but it was only when he slid



his tie beneath the collar of his shirt that she felt his eyes on her. She hadn't moved and had kept her breathing slow and steady, unlike the stampede of emotions rushing through her mind. Guilt was edging to the front.

Jo didn't want to let the argument drag on. She wanted David's arms around her so she could feel loved and protected, now more than ever. He was the love of her life and even though she sometimes wondered why on earth he put up with her, she knew he loved her too.

They had met ten years ago when Jo had been taken on as a graduate at Nelson's Engineering, a large-scale construction company where David was working as a trainee project manager. Jo outwardly cringed whenever he told people how Nelson's had *cemented* their relationship, but the pun was delivered with a twinkle in his eye and, as always, she could forgive him anything. And she was the first to admit that Nelson's had given them a good foundation for their life together. They both had flourishing careers in the company, Jo in human resources, David in project management and they had progressed up the career ladder in perfect symmetry, one spurring on the other to face the next challenge. At thirty-one Jo was now a HR Manager and David a Project Team Leader. The seminar he was attending in Leeds was part of the next goal he had set himself with Jo's encouragement: he was training to be the trainer.

But in the last couple of years their seemingly perfectly parallel lives had started to diverge. Jo had an absolute conviction that they still wanted the same things; it was just the timing that had gone awry. Aware that petulant silences would do nothing to help them get back on track,

Jo's pulse quickened and her muscles tightened as she willed herself to move – but she was too stubborn to give in.

Jo kept her eyes closed as the weak gloom from the ensuite was snuffed out with the flick of a switch. She heard David's socked footfalls reach the bedroom door. He was leaving and she was consumed by an irrational sense of panic: she didn't want him to go.

David paused at the door as if he had heard the silent plea that had sliced through the shadows deepening between them. He crept towards the bed and, without saying a word, leant over and kissed the top of her head, his fingers gently sweeping across her fringe.

'Bye, Jo,' he whispered and then, before straightening up, he placed a hand on the duvet over the unseen swell of her stomach and the baby she was carrying. 'Goodbye, little FB.'

She willed herself to peel back her eyelids and look at the man who was her soul mate, the man she loved with all her heart and for a fraction of a second she thought she might. But she kept her eyes closed, her breathing steady and when at last she allowed herself to speak, David was long gone.

'I love you,' she whispered, the words falling into the empty room.

## 2

By the time Jo was ready to leave for work, the sun had begun its sluggish ascent and grey light bled through the stained glass panels of the front door leaving multicoloured trails across the timbered floor. The only item of furniture in the hallway was a shabby chic dresser and Jo checked her reflection in its large oval mirror. She pulled her ponytail tight at the base of her skull and smoothed the poker-straight fringe that cut a sharp line just above her eyebrows. Her glossy auburn hair shone despite the dim light which was making the rest of her features look distinctly ghoulish and she had to resist the urge to switch the hallway light back on to chase away the shadows.

Adjusting an aquamarine silk scarf around her neck, Jo tried to reassure herself that she looked perfectly presentable. The grey cashmere coat had already seen her through a couple of winters but it was as immaculate as ever and would have seen her through this one – if it still fitted. But at five and a half months pregnant it was now snug around her chest and gaped open at her midriff.

She had once imagined that she would be wearing

maternity wear within moments of that sacred blue line appearing on the pregnancy test, but then she had also thought that when she did take the test, David would be looking over her shoulder with eager anticipation. As things turned out, he hadn't even been there. Jo had taken her time revealing her pregnancy – and when she had told her husband, he had been stunned and angry. She had reluctantly accepted that it would take time for him to come around to the idea, so hadn't rushed out to buy maternity clothes to flaunt her delicate condition. But every time she thought he had taken a step forward he somehow managed to take two steps back. She placed a hand protectively over her stomach.

'How are you doing down there, FB?' she asked softly, using the nickname David had come up with for her bump only recently. It had been a tantalising glimmer of hope that he was ready to accept that they were going to be parents – one that he had snuffed out again last night. 'I bet you're glad you didn't have to go out into the storm this morning, aren't you?' she went on. 'I can't believe your dad even thought to ask.'

Jo suspected that David still preferred living in denial. That was why it was taking him forever to get around to clearing the second bedroom in preparation for a nursery and why he expected his pregnant wife to get up in the middle of the night to drive him to the station. It was ironic, really, because it had been David who had first devised their family plan.

'How many children do you want?' he had asked her.

Jo was lying on a sun lounger at the time, listening to the waves crashing on to the shore of a tiny Grecian island as David rubbed suntan lotion over her body in slow

sweeping caresses. ‘Where did that come from?’ she had asked with a laugh that made her perfectly flat stomach wobble beneath his wandering hand.

‘After two years, it’s a bit late for a honeymoon baby but still . . . that biological clock of yours is ticking away. I can hear it.’

‘That’s probably just my arthritic knees clicking now I’ve reached the advanced age of twenty-six.’

David had continued to rub the lotion into her skin, his fingers moving in sensuous arcs. ‘This has nothing to do with getting old and everything to do with the way you go all gooey-eyed when you see a baby.’

‘And what about you?’

‘Oh, you go gooey-eyed over me too.’ He had waited for the smile on Jo’s face to broaden then said, ‘We were watching you at breakfast. You couldn’t take your eyes off that little boy sitting with his mum at the next table.’

‘We?’

‘There was a little old dear sitting behind us. She collared me later and patted my hand. “Give that woman her babies,” she said.’

Jo had giggled. ‘Are you sure she wasn’t the one who wanted your babies?’ She had paused then as she met his eyes. He was serious. ‘Two. I want two babies, David. A mini me and a mini you, but only when the time’s right.’

David had leaned back and nodded slowly, his fingers hooked under his chin and his thumb resting on the prominent groove in the middle of it while he remained deep in thought. He had then proceeded to explain the plan he was hatching in a way that only a project manager could, with timelines and milestones and of course, deliverables. He had

started off by listing all the other goals they had set themselves. There were qualifications to excel at and promotions to secure for both of them. ‘I’d say we’ll be ready in four years’ time,’ he had concluded.

‘Ah, when I reach the big three-oh.’

‘Which still gives us plenty of time to practise.’

David had resumed massaging her sun-kissed skin, and Jo had to put her hand over his before his roaming fingers breached public decency laws. ‘Let’s go back to our room,’ she had said with a contented smile, no doubt in her mind that the future laid out before them had been set in stone.

That long-forgotten smile made a brief appearance as Jo picked up her handbag and slung it over her shoulder, but the pull of material across her chest was tight enough to constrict her breathing and she sighed in frustration as she was reminded how easily David had discarded their plans. She had been the one to pick up the pieces and glue back together the life they had planned, the one she was convinced would make them happy – if only David could remember it was something he had wanted too.

The rain was torrential as she drove the twenty miles to a building site north of Southport for her first meeting of the day. The foul weather had snarled up the traffic and as soon as she realized she was going to be late, Jo telephoned Kelly. She didn’t want her over-eager assistant starting the meeting without her. Kelly was in her early twenties and had worked as Jo’s assistant for three years but while she had acquired an unrivalled knowledge of policy and procedures, she still had a lot to learn.

‘What have I missed?’ Jo panted as she shook the worst

of the rain from her umbrella before leaving it propped up next to the Portakabin door. She had to strain her ears to hear Kelly's reply above the cacophony created by the rain hammering against the metal roof and a radio blasting out from the room next door.

'Only the offer of a cuppa.'

Kelly was sitting at a table with her notepad at the ready. Even from this distance, Jo knew that the neat script on the open page was a list of the key points for the meeting. The air of professionalism Kelly was trying to project was lost slightly by the mounds of coffee-stained paperwork scattered across the table in front of her, which from recollection had a Formica top.

To say Jo liked order and cleanliness was an understatement and she tried not to notice the mess as she slipped off her coat and pulled self-consciously at her navy blue Jasper Conran dress. It had a bias cut that was meant to be forgiving but not enough to cope with her ever-growing bump.

'I think I've doubled in size overnight,' she said.

'That dress must be two sizes too small now,' Kelly said helpfully as she absentmindedly ran a finger down the row of buttons on her cream satin blouse, which fitted her trim figure perfectly.

'Thanks, Kelly, you certainly know how to make a girl feel better.'

'You're pregnant, for goodness' sake; you're allowed to be fat.'

Fortunately, Jo knew Kelly well enough to know that her bluntness wasn't ill-intended but the comment still stung. 'Like I said, you know how to make a girl feel better.'

Kelly mumbled an apology and a frown creased her brow as she returned her attention to her notepad while Jo pulled her ponytail tight and tried to flatten her damp fringe, which had surrendered sleekness to frizz thanks to the atrocious weather, unlike Kelly's short-cropped hair, which had been gelled to within an inch of its life.

As Jo approached the table, Kelly crossed and uncrossed her legs. The hem on one of her trouser legs was unravelling and her colleague's imperfections should have made Jo feel a little less shambolic, but the mud-spattered flap of material only served to irritate her. Hesitating before she took a seat, Jo glanced towards the door that led to the kitchen. 'I could do with a coffee right now to warm me up.'

Her words were drowned out by a loud burst of music and laughter as the internal door opened. Jim's arrival was accompanied by the smell of bacon and toast.

'I'm already one step ahead,' he said, holding up three mugs that slopped about as he moved. 'Coffee, milk, no sugar.'

Jo was only drinking decaf these days but didn't want to appear rude. Besides, she could do with just a little caffeine to liven her up so she took the proffered cup and wrapped her hands eagerly around it. She tried not to notice the brown staining on the inside of the cup above (and undoubtedly below) the steaming liquid. 'You're a mind reader,' she said.

'I caught a glimpse of someone running across the yard under a frilly umbrella and guessed it wasn't one of my lot.'

'There are women working here too,' Kelly reminded him evenly.



‘None that need umbrellas on a building site,’ he said, matching her tone. ‘And if you and Jo fancied getting your hands dirty and wanted to go beyond this cosy little office, you’d be kitted out with hard hats and hi-viz jackets too.’

Jo met the foreman’s gaze and gave him a silent apology. Jim was in his late fifties and had worked all over the world for construction companies, big and small. But where Jo recognized his wealth of experience, her assistant was more preoccupied by his occasional lapses in political correctness. Kelly’s years of study had given her strong principles as well as making her something of a bureaucrat. She looked on managers like Jim as dinosaurs and it was a view that Jim wasn’t afraid to reinforce, if only to wind her up.

‘Shall we get started?’ Jo asked.

Kelly’s response was to look at her watch and then over to the internal door where the sounds of muffled music and laughter could still be heard. She opened her mouth to say something but Jim beat her to it.

‘Some of us were here at half six,’ he said. ‘Some of us need a bit of drying off and a hearty breakfast before resuming our labours.’

‘I wasn’t going to say anything.’

‘Then I apologize.’

Jim sat down next to Jo. Rather than find a clear space he balanced his mug on a relatively level pile of paper.

‘Simon Harrison,’ Jo began, as if the uncomfortable exchange hadn’t happened, ‘has been on sick leave since 24 June. He’s been declared fit to return to work next week so we need to decide what adjustments if any can be made.’ She then went on to discuss possible options, and while

Kelly chipped in with the occasional suggestions and cited precedents, Jim was more than happy to make it as easy as possible for one of his most experienced bricklayers to resume his duties.

‘We’ve six brickies on site so it shouldn’t be a problem offering him a phased return; the lads have been sharing the load for the last four months anyway, so a few more weeks won’t make that much difference.’

‘But what about Simon’s duties?’ Jo added. ‘Mental health issues don’t disappear overnight and even if it isn’t the same site where the accident happened, it’s still going to be tough for him.’

The accident in question had occurred the year before and for one of Simon’s workmates it had been a fatal one. A cable snapped, equipment dropped on to scaffolding and a man had fallen to his death. The subsequent investigation had found no evidence of negligence or human error, which had made it all the more difficult for Simon to accept. Freak accidents couldn’t be predicted or avoided and thereafter he had seen danger around every corner.

‘I was thinking about that,’ Jim said. ‘We’re at a pretty high level in the construction right now but I could start off a ground-level job ahead of schedule.’

‘That’s bound to make things easier for him,’ Jo agreed with a satisfied smile. In her experience, meetings like this didn’t usually go so well. Too many of the managers she dealt with would prefer to ignore the problem or, worse still, look for a quick fix. They expected their staff to get on with the job or leave; it was as simple as that. Jo’s role was to find a way forward, one that satisfied the company’s needs as well as the employee’s and Simon Harrison was a

competent and experienced worker so it made good business sense to retain those skills. These were all the arguments that, for once, she didn't have to use and she was glad for it. Her mind wasn't as focused on the job in hand as it should be.

'Will Mr Harrison's colleagues be supportive?' Kelly asked. 'Mental health still carries a stigma.'

'My team are like family, they take care of each other and they'll look out for Simon.' There was the merest hint of a smile when he said, 'I can't promise there won't be some mickey-taking, though.' As if on cue, there was one final burst of laughter as Jim's 'family' left to start work again. A distant door slammed and the only sound to be heard now was the incessant drum of rain on the Portakabin roof.

'We have procedures to deal with that kind of thing,' Kelly said.

'I know, but Simon wouldn't expect or want to be treated differently and if anyone does overstep the mark then I'll be the first to let them know. And if by some miracle that doesn't work then you have my permission to use your "procedures".'

Jim and Kelly locked eyes and Jo was about to intervene when her phone began to ring. She scrambled around in her bag as she apologized for the interruption. It was David.

She had told him she had a site meeting that morning; it was, after all, the reason she had needed the car. She wondered if he had forgotten or, more likely, he hadn't been listening at all. Trying not to let her annoyance get to her, she took some satisfaction in knowing that at least he had made the first move to break the stalemate. She

wasn't sure if she would have answered the call even if she had been on her own, but she wasn't so she didn't hesitate in diverting the call to voicemail. She would talk to him later after he had stewed in his own juices a little longer.

When Jo looked up from her phone, Jim winked at her; Kelly had her head down and was skimming through her notepad. The confrontation had unsettled her assistant far more than the veteran. But despite her frustrations with Kelly's attitude at times, Jo was responsible for her and felt obliged to come to her rescue.

'Sorry, where were we? Look, Jim, we appreciate that you're more than capable of handling discipline informally but as you well know, even the informal stages are in our procedures.'

'Of course,' he said then waited for Kelly to raise her head. 'Procedures are there to protect managers – isn't that what you lot keep telling us?'

There were tentative smiles and the remainder of the meeting continued to a swift conclusion. Jo didn't even have time to drain her coffee for which she was grateful. She hadn't been looking forward to uncovering the murky stains lurking at the very bottom of her mug.

The sound of rain hitting the roof had stopped but if Jo imagined she could dispense with her umbrella then she was sorely disappointed. The drizzle fell in rolling waves that were as wet as the ocean.

'You need a new coat,' Kelly said as they stood beside their cars, which were parked next to each other on the mud patch that served as a car park. She was staring at the gaping hole through which Jo's stomach protruded.

'I know, I'll get round to it.'

‘There are a couple of spare waterproof jackets in the office if you don’t mind the Nelson’s logo. I’m sure one’s a large size. It’ll do for now if you want.’

‘Maybe,’ Jo said with a note of irritation that had nothing to do with Kelly reminding her again that she was as big as a house. ‘Or maybe David will finally notice and take me on a shopping spree.’ Her umbrella was doing little to protect her from the vaporous drizzle that defied gravity and swirled around her. As she dipped her head against the worst of it she caught sight of Kelly’s trailing hem, which was now caught in a stiletto heel.

‘Shall I see you back at the office then?’ Kelly asked.

‘I was going to suggest we have lunch on the way back but then I wasn’t expecting the meeting to end so quickly or be so easy. I should have known Jim wouldn’t need convincing.’

‘I hope it’s all worth it in the end. I still think there’s a chance this Mr Harrison is only setting us up for a claim somewhere down the line. It’s too easy these days to convince your GP that you’re having a breakdown so you can get signed off work and then wait for a big payoff when your employer loses patience.’

Jo winced and she wasn’t sure if it was the sight of Kelly’s hem being buried in the mud or her assistant’s cynicism. ‘I don’t think Simon has anything else in mind except putting the past behind him and getting back to a normal life as soon as he can,’ she said, thinking back to the handful of welfare visits she had made. She knew Simon quite well but had barely recognized him. He was haunted by memories of the accident and his misery had been excruciating to watch. ‘If it turns out he isn’t genuine

then I think it would pretty much destroy my faith in humanity.'

Kelly shifted from one foot to the other, digging her heels deeper into the mire. 'It's not like you to be so defeatist. Are you all right?' she asked.

Jo put a hand against her back as she stretched her spine and pushed her bump out even further. 'Oh, just tired I suppose. David was up at five this morning and I didn't get back to sleep. And for the record, I'm not being defeatist because I know Simon Harrison will not let me down,' she said purposefully. 'Now, let's get out of this rain and back to the office. We can always do lunch later.'

Kelly was the first to leave the car park and although Jo started up the engine, she didn't drive off straight away. She placed her mobile into its hands-free cradle and dialled into her voicemail. As she waited for David's message to kick in, she flipped open the mirror on her sun visor and concentrated on flattening her fringe, which was all frizz and damp curls. She stopped what she was doing when she heard the tone of David's voice: it was as foul as the weather.

'So you're still not speaking to me then?' he asked before releasing a long sigh of surrender. 'You're so damn stubborn.' There was another pause as he considered what to say next. 'You want things your way and you want them now. Well, you may not believe me but I have been thinking about the future. In fact, I haven't been able to think about anything else, and you're in for one hell of a shock Jo, because I've been making plans.'

Jo raised an eyebrow. 'Oh, really?' she answered as if he was sitting next to her.

‘And before you say it: yes, really,’ David added. There was another pause and another sigh. ‘I’d better go into the seminar now but I’ll see you later. Assuming you want me to come home, that is.’

Jo’s response was as petulant as her husband’s. She stuck her tongue out at the phone, which had fallen silent. It didn’t make her feel any better and she frowned at her reflection in the mirror, not liking what she saw. David had accused her of being stubborn and in fairness she could offer no defence because it was her obstinacy that prevented her from phoning him straight back. She was always too quick to put up defences and impossibly slow to pull them down again, a replica of her mother, some said. In contrast, her dad was warm and compromising, traits that he had passed on to her sister. Not that Steph considered herself lucky; she complained that she had also inherited his sluggish metabolism.

Jo snapped shut the mirror and returned the sun visor to the upright position then tried to find a comfortable position behind the steering wheel which was getting perilously close to her expanding girth. She found the lever on the stem and adjusted the wheel a fraction to give her baby more room.

‘There you go, FB. Is that better?’

There was a strong flutter that could have been either a kick or a punch and she rubbed her stomach contentedly as she wondered what David had meant about making plans. His comment was meant to keep her guessing – he was intent on playing with her as much as she was playing with him – and it was working. Had he been working up ideas for decorating the nursery? Did he have a long list

of baby names? Or maybe he was thinking further ahead, about what school their child would go to or how long they should wait before baby number two? Basically, she thought wryly, any acknowledgement *at all* that they were having a baby would be a good start. David's stubborn refusal to discuss any of these things so far had gone way beyond playing mind games.

'Don't worry,' she said to her baby as if he or she were wondering the same things too. 'We'll get through this. We just have to hold our nerve and get your dad so riled up that he'll be desperate to do anything not just for me but for you too. So he's making plans, is he? Well, I've heard that before and I'm not taking the bait. It's time he stopped planning and started *doing*.' That was, after all, what Jo had done by getting pregnant in the first place.

When she looked up, the windscreen had completely misted over and she found herself settling her vision on a spot just beyond the grey shroud, casting her mind towards the future. A shudder ran down her spine when she couldn't quite place David there but the premonition was countered by another baby kick and she pushed the unwelcome thought to the back of her mind.

Switching the fan heater on to full blast, Jo waited for the grey veil to lift. She wished her obstinacy could be vanquished as easily but she had spent months being understanding and patient. David needed to know that the time had come for him to step up to the mark, so she refused to phone him back and instead drove off, secure in the knowledge that they had all the time in the world to make amends.

\* \* \*