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The Girl Who Came Back

Written by Susan Lewis

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Susan Lewis

The Girl
Who Came
Back



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It wasn't right to feel this way.

Not about her own daughter.

The child was only nine, for God's sake. She was an innocent, a tender young soul still trying to find her way in the world. Except that wasn't how she seemed, innocent and tender, or how she behaved.

She wasn't like other children. She didn't run or skip or play childish games. She didn't sing or tease or sleep like an angel.

She didn't look at people, she stared; she didn't laugh, or when she did the sound was false, jarring, sadly humourless. Olivia had never heard girlish giggles erupting from bubbles of happiness or excitement inside Amelia. Little seemed to amuse her, or even please her, although she was often fascinated by things: insects, small animals, dolls; tools, gadgets, other children's toys. She always wanted what wasn't hers, which perhaps didn't make her so very different from other children; Olivia had come across plenty of kids like that.

Amelia didn't speak very much either, at least not to her mother.

She chatted away with her father when he made time for her.

She was the apple of his eye, when he remembered she was there.

As far as he was concerned, nothing was too much for his girl, provided it didn't get in the way of his other commitments.

Olivia felt sure that Amelia was the only human being her husband had ever come close to loving, although she'd thought he loved her once.

That seemed a very long time ago.

She wondered how she'd ended up in this marriage, how she'd allowed herself to become the victim of such an egotistical man with such a dismissive air towards those he considered of little use.

Olivia was never entirely sure how useful she was to him.

In a material sense she wanted for nothing. They lived in a large, imposing house a stone's throw from Chelsea Bridge. She had her own suite of rooms, a fancy car, a generous allowance and all the freedoms she could wish for.

She also had a daughter who was healthy and intelligent, meticulously clean and tidy, but never seemed joyful or carefree. Amelia was sullen and sly.

Yes, really – sullen and sly.

Olivia had never voiced her feelings about Amelia to anyone, least of all to her husband, Anton. Of course he would say the problem, if there was one and he probably wouldn't admit that there was, lay entirely with her. She was Amelia's mother, therefore she was the person Amelia spent the most time with

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(when she wasn't away at school), so it stood to reason that she was the biggest influence on Amelia's life.

Amelia was on her third school now, fifth if Olivia counted the two kindergartens she'd attended.

Amelia couldn't settle. Other children didn't warm to her, or were afraid of her, or ruthlessly tormented her. Olivia felt sorry for her when she was bullied and tried to soothe her, but Amelia hated being babied.

What was to become of her?

Would she change as she got older, and start to understand that she needed to be more like others if she wanted to be accepted by them? It was pointless trying to have the conversation with her; she simply got up and walked away. Or she'd tell her mother to shut up, or to leave her alone, she was busy.

Anton's parents were bewildered by the girl, although most things bewildered them these days.

As for Olivia's parents, they'd separated many years ago and she hadn't seen either of them in a very long while. She didn't even know where they were living now, though she guessed she could find out easily enough if she tried.

She'd felt so painfully alone since marrying Anton, which wasn't how she'd felt when she was still single. She'd had lots of friends then, a career as a legal secretary, a great social life and she'd always been up for something new. Anton had been like that too, dashing and daring, successful, romantic and always attentive.

So what had changed him?

Maybe his irresistible charm had been an act that

he'd simply dropped once he'd made her his wife, seeing no need to go on pleasing her as he had when they first met.

She had no idea if he ever had affairs, but she hoped he did, they would provide her with a solid excuse to leave when the time was right.

Wasn't the time right now?

Not while Amelia was still so young.

So you see, I'm not such a bad person. I really do care about my daughter, I want what's best for her, I'll never turn my back on her, I'm determined to find a way through to her heart.

In the meantime Anton could ridicule and humiliate, neglect and even beat her, but only until Amelia was able to make her own way in the world. That was when Olivia would go and never come back.

Looking around for Amelia now, she found her staring at her from an upper deck of their cruiser. The breeze was ruffling her mousy hair; the sun was burning her freckled cheeks.

'Have you used sunblock?' she called out.

Amelia held up a tube, presumably to show that she had.

'Are you going to swim?' Olivia asked.

'Only if you do.'

Olivia's heart twisted around her conscience. 'You know I can't.'

'Why not?'

'Because I've never learned.'

'That's just stupid.'

'Yes, it is.' Olivia didn't admit that she was afraid of the water; if she did Amelia would ask why and

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Olivia could never find a good enough answer to that. Or not one that would satisfy Amelia.

'Where's Daddy?' Amelia demanded.

'Inside, sleeping. Or working.'

Amelia turned away and a few minutes later she was on the deck beside her mother. 'I want you to swim,' she told her bluntly.

'One of these days I'll learn,' Olivia promised.

'I want you to do it now.'

'It doesn't happen just like that. I need someone to teach me.'

'I can teach you.'

'OK, but not here. We're too far from the shore and I'll need to be able to touch the bottom in case I panic.' She smiled, hoping that Amelia might too, but she didn't.

'Are you afraid of drowning?' Amelia asked.

'Of course. It would be a horrible way to die.'

Amelia seemed to think about that, then suddenly pulling back her arms she gave her mother an almighty shove, sending her over the rail into the sea.

Olivia was too startled to scream. Her hands and legs flailed desperately in the water. 'Amelia,' she tried to gulp. 'Throw . . . throw me . . . the lifebelt.'

Amelia only watched her.

'Amelia! Please!'

Amelia turned away and went to sit at the table where she'd left the book she was reading.

Fifteen or so minutes later her father appeared from below.

'Hello sweetie,' he yawned, ruffling her hair. 'Are you OK?'

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Amelia nodded.

He looked around, taking in the fresh sea air, calm waters and distant shore. 'Where's your mother?' he asked.

Amelia shrugged and carried on reading.

Sixteen Years Later

Chapter One

'Hello Jules? How are you?'

Jules Bright didn't answer. These days she wasn't used to unexpected visitors ringing the doorbell; if they did it was usually someone to read one of the meters, or young hopefuls collecting for a worthy cause. She was always polite to the former and gave generously to the latter, but friendly though she was, she never invited anyone in if she could help it. In truth, she didn't think anyone wanted to come, not because they were scared of her, or any nonsense like that, she was sure they just didn't want to get caught in conversation with her. No one ever knew what to say. She had to admit that she didn't either.

There had been a time when every day was filled with people seeking her out for one reason or another. Sometimes simply for a good laugh, or maybe sympathy for some troubles, the sharing of secrets, breaking of confidences, gleeful horror over the latest scandal . . . Her door had always been open, not this one, she'd lived somewhere else back then where her world had been full of people, music, rowdy applause, the clinking of glasses and cheers

for whichever team they were supporting that day.

So who was this woman at the door of the home she had now, tall, dark-haired with aqua-green eyes that tilted at the corners towards a subtle, but quite arresting, beauty? Her smile was making Jules want to smile, although there was something hesitant about it, as though she was worried about intruding, or perhaps she didn't really have anything to smile about.

Jules knew she should recognise her, the certainty of it was climbing all over her memory trying to find the right images to rouse from the shadows, but so far unsuccessfully.

Then out of nowhere it came to her that this woman used to wear black-rimmed glasses and her hair was usually severely scraped back, as though she'd been trying to hide her beauty, or at least downplay it. No glasses today, and a glossy abundance of curls tumbled around her collar and slender face.

Suddenly the mental Googling hit the right link and Jules's heartbeat slowed as her smile both formed and drained.

She liked this woman a lot; there was a time when she'd felt she was the only person she could trust. She just hadn't imagined, once it was all over, that she'd ever see her again. Or not here, knocking on this door.

'It's Andee,' the woman told her. 'Andee Lawrence.'

Jules nodded. The name had come back in the instant it was being said. Detective Constable Andrea Lawrence, but please call me Andee. Hadn't she been promoted since Jules had known her? Jules was sure she had, and was now stationed locally, in Kesterly.

Why was she here?

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'How are you?' Jules asked quietly.

'I'm fine. And you?'

Jules shrugged. No one expected her to be fine, so she often didn't bother to pretend.

'May I come in?' Andee asked gently.

Jules stood aside to let her pass, not quite able to summon a stronger voice yet, if she was even looking for one. She was too stunned – and anxious, and curious; she might even be slightly afraid.

There was nothing to be afraid of, she reminded herself as she led the way into a spacious open-plan kitchen area at the back of the house she now called home. It was a modern three-bed detached, on a street named the Risings, which was shaped like a banjo with two rows of semis lining the neck and fingerboard of the road in, and five individual properties forming the head around a central green. Her house was at twelve o'clock on the green. To continue with the banjo simile, overhead BT and power cables formed some random strings, though there was nothing musical about them. Where the instrument's tailpiece would have been, however, was a quaint iron footbridge nestling amongst trees and crossing the stream that ran its tuneful way through Jules's back garden.

She caught Andee Lawrence casting a subtle look around the room and wondered what she might be making of this modest new abode with its shiny black and white kitchen, natural pine dining table for six, and faux-marble fireplace with gas fire and lava logs. It was a fraction of the size of Jules's previous home, had none of the period features, and could boast nothing more than a postage stamp of a garden.

However, Jules was comfortable here; it was an easy home to take care of, bits didn't randomly fall off the ceiling the way they had in the previous place, pipes didn't burst, jackdaw nests didn't clog up the chimneys and there was no whimsical ghost floating about in the wee small hours.

How she missed that ghost, and sometimes wondered if the ghost missed her too, mischievous little minx that she'd been. She had other people to tease now, although Jules didn't think she bothered.

Had she ever told Andee about the ghost?

She doubted it; they'd had other things to talk about at the time.

'Can I get you some tea?' she offered, going to the kettle. 'I have all sorts.'

'How about peppermint?' Andee suggested, unfastening the smart cream leather jacket that had clearly cost her quite a bit, and draping it over the back of a dining chair.

Jules owned classy, expensive clothes too, but she hardly ever wore them now. She had no place to go that called for them. Not that she'd let herself go, she really didn't want to do that, though there were times when she felt so drained, so lacking in purpose, even life, that it surely could only have been habit that drove her to make herself up in the morning, and do the necessary to keep the grey from her hair. Despite what she felt, others would describe her as an attractive woman, tall, a little too slim, with the kind of boyish frame that meant clothes usually looked good on her. Her fine, straight hair was raven dark, and sometimes fell loosely around her shoulders, or was

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scrunched up in a knot at the back of her head. Not so long ago she'd had the liveliest brown eyes, with spiky dark lashes and such a readiness for compassion or humour that she almost always seemed to be empathising or laughing or simply taking an interest in whatever was happening in that moment. Her eyes were different now – the same colour, just a sadder, more cautious version of what they used to be. As for her age, since she'd been blessed with the kind of complexion that made her seem much younger than her years, she still looked under forty in spite of all she'd been through.

Once, her spirit, her *joie de vivre* had seemed as inextinguishable as a joke candle, an inner flame that just wouldn't stop burning . . .

Until one day it did.

'You're looking well,' Andee commented, perching on a barstool.

'Thank you,' Jules replied, in her faint but unmistakable West Country burr. 'Out of interest, how did you find me?'

'I went to the pub.'

Of course, it would have been the easiest way. 'Are you still with the police? You didn't use your rank just now.'

'I quit, about a year ago.'

The answer surprised Jules, although she wasn't quite sure why.

'I never really felt cut out for it,' Andee admitted. 'I mean, I always took it seriously, and gave it my best, but I . . . Let's just say I reached a point where I felt I needed a change.'

‘You mean you needed to get away from the ugly side of life?’

Andee didn’t deny it. Why would she when, in Jules’s opinion, no one in their right minds would want to spend their days confronting the hatred, violence and evil which seemed so large a part of today’s world. Not that this town had an especially high crime rate, in fact it was one of the reasons people moved here, to get away from unwholesome inner cities. Although it had to be said that Kesterly-on-Sea could boast some terrible stories of its own. Now Jules came to think of it, the last time she’d heard news of Andee was about a year ago when a teenage girl had gone missing from a caravan park over at Paradise Cove. Detective *Sergeant* Andee Lawrence had led the search, so she *had* been promoted since the time Jules had known her, and apparently she had moved to Kesterly.

Though the missing girl had been found, the circumstances would have been hard for Andee, Jules realised, for Andee’s sister had vanished when she was in her teens and had never been traced.

Imagine that, never knowing what had happened to someone you loved.

Could it be worse than knowing? That clearly depended on what there was to know.

So it was over two years since Jules and Andee had last met, though Jules couldn’t quite remember where they’d been on that occasion, how they’d ended up saying goodbye. However, she had a clear recollection of their first meeting, at the Crown Court in the centre of Kesterly.

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'Are you working these days?' Andee asked as Jules passed her a mug of peppermint tea.

Yes, Jules was working, but at a very different kind of job to the one she'd had before. 'I'm an administrator for the Greensleeves Care Home, down near the seafront,' she replied.

Andee's eyebrows rose in surprise.

Managing one of her old ironic twinkles, Jules said, 'My mother's there, and it's only part-time. I usually end up doing most of the work from here. How about you? What are you up to now you've left the force?'

Andee looked faintly sheepish as she took a sip of her tea. 'Well, I tried being a full-time mum for a while, but my kids soon got fed up with that. They're eighteen and sixteen now, so you can probably imagine, I was just in the way. Actually, their father and I finally got married a few months ago, they seemed to enjoy that, and of course they had to come on honeymoon with us, as did both our mothers, although we did manage a few days in Paris on our own.'

Jules felt dizzied by the image of three generations enjoying one another so much that they'd willingly travel together even for a honeymoon. Her own family had been just like that, doing everything and going everywhere together.

'... so I'm now toying with the idea of studying for the Bar,' Andee was saying.

Though Jules immediately saw beer taps and optics, she quickly realised Andee was talking about the law. Actually, she could see her as a barrister. She'd be good. Scrupulous, thorough, ruthless where necessary,

sensitive, sharp, effective, but above all honest and incorruptible.

There were lawyers like that, Jules was in no doubt of it, it was just that she and her family hadn't come across them.

'What about the women's refuge?' Andee asked. 'Are you still involved with that?'

Jules both nodded and shook her head.

It seemed such a long time ago that she'd set up the refuge for battered women, probably because it was. It had happened in another lifetime, when she'd been as fearless of consequences as she had of raising money; she'd thought nothing of taking on the council for permissions, getting the social care they'd needed, financial support and even protection for the women and children to keep them safe from their tormentors. Memories of the fund-raisers they'd staged for the place and shows they'd put on for the children began flickering as though trying to find a focus, but she quickly shut them down again. 'They still have lots of volunteers doing their bit,' she told Andee. 'It's lovely how supportive some people can be, especially when there's nothing in it for them.'

'Apart from the satisfaction of knowing you've done something good for someone else. That's always rewarding.'

Jules didn't disagree, although she couldn't remember ever thinking much about how she felt when helping others. It was just something she'd done, because she could, and what sort of person turned their backs on someone when it was in their power to make a positive,

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even life-changing difference to a wretchedly unfortunate soul?

She wondered if they were now getting round to what this visit was actually about. Perhaps Andee had come to solicit her help in setting up some new kind of social project? She'd happily work with Andee on anything, since she had no doubt it would be a worthy cause. In fact she felt a stir of excitement, as much at the thought of getting involved in something new, as at the idea of becoming friends with Andee. It seemed such an age since she'd had someone to chat to, confide in, share a goal with, apart from Em, but with Em being so far away now she couldn't count on her in the same way as if she were still in Kesterly.

Andee was here, and they'd got along very well the last time they'd known one another, in spite of her not really being Andee's type. Actually, they probably were quite similar in some ways; it was just that they were from very different backgrounds. She, Jules, had started out life on the notorious Temple Fields estate, across the other side of town, whereas Andee was from the right side of London, where her father had been high up in the police force before his retirement. Not that she could imagine anything like disparity in social backgrounds being a problem for Andee; during the time Jules had known her she'd never shown any signs of considering herself superior to anyone, which made her pretty unique for someone doing her job. No, as connected and cultured as Andee might be, she'd been every bit as appalled as Jules had when the wheels of justice had turned the way they had almost three years ago.

It was time, the therapist had told Jules only last week, to start making efforts to move on. Though Jules had known it, hearing it had made her want to bury herself even deeper in her grief and anger, to tell the wretched woman that she had no idea what she was talking about, that if she were in her shoes she'd know what a ridiculous, insensitive and impossible suggestion that was. However, when she'd got home she'd found herself collecting up photographs and other treasured mementos and putting them away. That was all she'd done. It had felt huge at the time, exhausting, debilitating, but now, like some guardian angel, Andee had arrived, maybe to help her on the next stage of the journey?

She could do it. Whatever Andee was about to ask of her, she was going to say yes.

'I have some news,' Andee said, and her lovely blue-green eyes seemed to search Jules's in a way that made Jules start to tense.

She'd read this wrong. Andee wasn't here for a worthy cause, or to make friends, she was here for only one reason, and now Jules wanted her to leave before she confirmed her worst fears.

'I had a call from an old colleague,' Andee continued. 'He thought I should . . . He asked me if I would break it to you.'

Though Jules's heart was starting to thud, the beats were all wrong, fast, slow, harsh, so faint it might have stopped with dread. She knew what was coming, and yet she couldn't allow herself to think it, much less believe it.

'Amelia Quentin is being released,' Andee said quietly.

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Jules's insides turned so hard they might crack. The hand she pressed to her head, to her cheek was stiff like a claw, yet shaking. She knew she shouldn't feel shocked, if anything she should have been expecting it, but so soon . . . It was as though no time had passed; considering what the girl had done, no time had.

'Come and sit down,' Andee said gently, pulling out a chair at the table.

Doing as she was told, Jules said, 'When?'

'I don't have an actual date,' Andee replied, 'but it's imminent.'

'And where will she go?'

Andee swallowed and her eyes moved briefly away before she said, 'I believe she's returning to Crofton Park.'

The reply was like a slap. Crofton Park, one of the Quentins' several country homes, was less than four miles from this part of Kesterly, out on the moors, close to the medieval village of Dunster. The old folks, Amelia's grandparents, the judge and his wife, had spent their final years at Crofton Park and no one locally had liked them. Good riddance, they'd all said when the ill-tempered, tight-fisted old beak had followed his snobbish, petty-minded, unpleasantly outspoken wife to the grave. Since their passing the place had become little more than a weekend retreat for their only son, Anton Quentin QC, and his despicable toff friends from London. They hardly ever mixed with the locals, unless it suited them for some trifling reason, otherwise they were far too exclusive to entertain even the idea of becoming involved in the local community. Theirs was an overprivileged, overmoneyed, overtitled, rarefied

existence that the rest of the world – the every day pleb world – only read about in expensive glossy magazines and society columns. They were also, Jules had come to learn the hard way, a section of the upper-class British Establishment that stuck together no matter what, and even believed they were entitled to play by rules of their own.

‘Doesn’t she have to go to a halfway house first?’ Jules murmured, still trying to take it in. ‘That’s what usually happens when someone’s released, isn’t it?’

‘Often, yes,’ Andee confirmed.

Jules looked at her briefly. Of course the rules were different for the likes of Amelia. How stupid of her to have forgotten that.

Amelia Quentin was to be released; she was returning to Crofton Park . . . How could the girl even think about setting foot in that place again, never mind actually want to? ‘It shouldn’t be happening,’ she said hoarsely. ‘It’s just not right.’

‘I know,’ Andee responded.

‘Her sentence was a farce! An outrage!’

Andee didn’t disagree.

‘There are other places she could go,’ Jules cried angrily. ‘Why does it have to be there?’

Andee had no answer to that.

‘She should *never* be allowed out,’ Jules declared fiercely. ‘If we hadn’t been cheated of a proper trial . . . What about Dean Foggarty? Is he being released too?’

‘I haven’t had any news about him.’

Thinking of Dean caused Jules to see red again. ‘It was one massive injustice from start to finish,’ she growled. ‘We were treated like the little people, cretins

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who don't matter . . . Dean shouldn't be where he is, everyone knows that. *She's* the one who should be paying.'

Andee's eyes showed her sympathy; the words she'd spoken at the time of the trial had expressed how disgusted she too had felt at the way things had turned out.

'If I see her, if she comes anywhere near me . . .'
Jules raged. What would she do? She knew what she'd like to do.

'She won't, I'm sure.'

Jules's breathing was still ragged as she struggled with a tangle of fury, frustration, helplessness and the deepest, bitterest resentment. Just as she was finding the heart to start moving forward . . .

She couldn't cope with this . . .

'Where's Kian?' Andee asked softly.

Jules looked at her, her eyes feeling as wide as the jagged holes in her heart. From the kindness and concern of Andee's expression it was clear that she had no idea about Kian.

Andee Lawrence had gone now, leaving Jules alone with the stark reality of a nightmare with no end. She knew that if Andee had been able in any way to soften her news, or to change it to what everyone wanted to hear – that Amelia Quentin was never coming out of prison – she would have done so. But it hadn't been in her power. All she'd been able to do was come here in an act of selfless consideration that went above and beyond what was called for, given that she was no longer with the police. She had her own life to lead

now, there was no need to concern herself with anything that had happened during the time she was a detective. And it wasn't even as if she'd been assigned to the Bright family case back then; what she'd done had been out of genuine kindness, something Jules would never forget.

Jules suspected Andee was driving home now worrying about leaving when she had. In a way it was reassuring for Jules to know that she had someone on her side. On the other hand, maybe she didn't want to connect too strongly with Andee when the thoughts in her mind were so chaotic and dark.

Glancing at the clock, she calculated the time in Chicago where her best friend Em was a first-grade teacher, and Em's American husband, Don, was the Director of Alumni Relations at one of the city's exclusive private schools. They'd met, by chance, in London, over two decades ago, at which point in time Em would have been the last person to envisage herself leaving Kesterly, never mind Britain, and going to live in the States. However, that was what had happened, she'd even married in the States at Don's family's lakeside villa in Indiana, where Jules and Kian had spent just about every summer vacation since.

'You're kidding me,' Em cried when Jules broke the news about Amelia Quentin, sounding every bit as sickened as Jules had expected. 'How the hell can that happen?'

'It's called parole. Apparently she's eligible – or someone's seen to it that she is. I'll need to look it up, because I don't know how these things work, but she hasn't even served three years.'

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'What about Dean? Are they releasing him too?'

Jules winced, as she often did when Dean's name was mentioned. There were so many emotions attached to him, guilt, confusion, anger, love, despair . . . One day, when she could think straight again, she might work it all out. 'She didn't know about him,' she replied, 'only about Amelia.'

With a sigh Em said, 'Oh hell, Jules. What are you going to do? Is it absolutely certain she's coming back to Kesterly?'

'To Crofton Park, is what Andee said. So close enough.'

'Then why don't you just pack up and come here? I could help you . . .'

'You know why,' Jules interrupted. 'Apart from everything else, I can't just abandon my mother, even though she hardly knows who I am. I like to think we're still connecting on some level. I have to tell myself we are, or there wouldn't be a point to anything.'

'Poor Marsha. No better, huh?'

'That's never going to happen, and I have to be honest, I sometimes feel glad of it. At least she didn't have to go through what the rest of us did. It would probably have killed her if she had.'

'I get what you're saying,' Em assured her, 'but listen, I've just noticed the time and I have to be in class in half an hour. I'll call again at noon, OK? Just tell me, do you think you're going to be safe with that girl on the loose?'

Jules's insides clenched with a sour blend of hatred and unease. 'She's got more to fear from me than I have from her,' she declared tightly.

'Mm, you, and the rest of Kian's family. When's it supposed to happen?'

'I don't have an exact date, but apparently it's imminent.'

'Is Stephie around?'

'No, she's in Thailand.'

'How about Joe? Are you going to be in touch with him?'

'I had an email from him a couple of weeks ago. He's coming here at the end of next month to kick off a tour of Europe.'

'That's cool. It's great that he's kept in touch. And it was real kind of Andee to come and tell you about the release. I always liked her.'

'Me too. She didn't know about Kian.'

'That surprises me. Did you tell her?'

'Yes. I think it came as quite a shock. Anyway, I should let you go. Call me back as soon as you can.'

After ringing off Jules sat down in front of her laptop not quite sure what to do next, apart from check her emails and maybe catch up on some work. She knew she should email Stephie and Joe, and call Kian's family, but all she did was walk to the window and stare out at the rain. Lucky she hadn't put any washing out; she'd been about to when Andee had arrived. Now all she could think about was what she was going to do if, when, she ran into Amelia Quentin. She could see, almost feel the girl creeping up on her as she draped sheets on the line, or walked out to her car, grabbing her, forcing her to the ground and stabbing her, over and over . . .

Her vision blurred as the past loomed up in all its frantic and bloody glory.

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She was aware of her hand tightening around the handle of a knife; there were spasms in her arm as if it were trying to make a frenzied attack; there was sickness and murder in her heart that was blackening all the natural goodness and love . . .

Wrenching herself free of the chaos, she ran upstairs to the spare room and dragged out the box she'd stored there so recently. With trembling hands she took out the photo of Kian that she used to keep next to her bed. Why had she removed it? There had been no need to. He was her husband, it was only right that she should look at him every day.

Hello my love, she whispered, her slender fingers tracing the easy line of his jaw and the fair, tousled curls that made him look so fun-loving and rakish. He was laughing straight into the lens, carefree, happy, as though nothing could touch him, no one could be as lucky as him.

It was what he used to say, 'Being married to you makes me the luckiest man alive.'

Jules could hear the words so clearly he might be saying them now. They were falling around her as softly as petals, and felt as refreshing as spring rain. He was pouring his love into her heart, driving out the darkness, filling it with light and laughter, the way he always had when she was afraid, or sad, or angry, or starting to lose hope. She'd never doubted him or his love, the way she knew he'd sometimes doubted hers.

'I didn't mean to shut you out,' she whispered, tears shining in her eyes. 'Is that what I did?'

He'd never accused her of it, but she'd sensed a loneliness in him at times that she knew she could

have done something about, but she hadn't. It broke her heart all over again to think of it now.

'I should have made the time,' she said hoarsely. 'If only I'd made the time. Maybe none of it would have happened if I had.'

She didn't really think that was the truth, or not all of it, anyway, but sometimes there was comfort to be found in punishing herself with guilt. If she was responsible then it meant she was in control, and if she was in control she could have stopped it . . .

Her therapist was having none of that. 'You know that doesn't make any sense,' she'd tell her, and Jules never argued. She understood why the therapist always steered her away from the self-destructive thoughts. It was her job, what she was trained to do – in her shoes Jules would do exactly the same.

'Hey, you,' she said tenderly as she stroked Kian's face again.

He was still smiling at her, so she smiled too and did nothing to stop her mind drifting back over the years to a time when just about everyone they knew had smiled with them . . .