

You loved your last book...but what  
are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Lov**ereading** will help you find new  
books to keep you inspired and entertained.

---

**Opening Extract from...**

# **Beneath the Surface**

Written by Heidi Perks

Published by RedDoor

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Lov**ereading**.  
Please print off and read at your leisure.

---

# Beneath the Surface

Heidi Perks



RedDoor

Published by RedDoor  
[www.reddoorpublishing.com](http://www.reddoorpublishing.com)

© 2015 Heidi Perks

The right of Heidi Perks to be identified as author of this Work has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

ISBN 978-1-910453-18-6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, copied in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise transmitted without written permission from the author

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Cover designer: Anna Morrisson  
[www.annamorrison.com](http://www.annamorrison.com)

Typesetting: [www.typesetter.org.uk](http://www.typesetter.org.uk)  
Printed in the UK by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

For my beautiful family: John, Bethany and Joseph.

And for my mum, who is thankfully nothing  
like the mothers in this book!

April 2001

## – One –

Abigail didn't know how she should answer the policeman's question. It was a simple one, and he had asked it with his head hung to one side, pen poised on his notebook as if expecting a quick response. But the fact was she didn't know if anything had been wrong in the last few weeks. Because she couldn't actually remember a time when anything was right.

When Abigail didn't say anything he rubbed a thumb over his stubbly chin and glanced at the policewoman sat beside him, eyebrows slightly raised as if to ask, *Where do I go from here?* The policewoman's face remained impassive and she didn't take her eyes off Abigail. She was the one asking most of the questions, the one who seemed to be in charge, just as she had the first time they'd met, two weeks earlier. Abigail had recognised them both as soon as she'd opened the door, and she suspected they did her, although no one had said as much.

'OK,' the policewoman said evenly, leaning towards Abigail. 'Let's go over it again. When you came home from school, tell us what happened. Was there anything you noticed that was different? Anything at all?'

Abigail shrugged. 'I don't know. I guess something didn't feel right.'

'How do you mean, not right?' she asked calmly.

'Well, they weren't here,' Abigail explained. 'They're always here. My mother is always in the kitchen and the girls are

usually playing with their toys or watching TV when I get back from school. So I guess the fact that no one was in was odd.'

The woman nodded. 'And so what did you do when you realised they weren't at home?'

'Nothing much.'

The policeman sucked in his breath. Louder than he had intended, Abigail guessed, as she noticed his cheeks flush.

'OK, Abigail,' the woman said, shooting him a look. 'Take us through what you did, from the moment you came in from school and no one was here. Tell me everything that happened from that point.'

\*\*\*\*\*

Abigail didn't like going home from school. The thought of it made her mouth dry and her stomach churn. That afternoon she had put her name down to help the younger kids in the school play simply because it meant three days a week when she wouldn't be back until later. There was only one thing she enjoyed about getting home and that was seeing the girls, because they were always excited to see her.

Every night was the same. Abigail would turn her key in the lock and she would hear the girls shriek, *Ab-gail coming, Ab-gail home!*, and they would rush to the door, battling for hugs. She would pick each of them up and squeeze them, planting kisses on their soft heads and then they would rush off and play, or go back to sit watching the TV. Then her mother would call through from the kitchen in her cold, lifeless tone, 'Is that you?' and Abigail would think, *You know it's me, you've just heard them calling my name*, but instead

would say, 'Yes, it's me.' That would usually be the extent of their conversation until teatime when she might still be ignored, but on the other hand could be fired questions that were usually badly hidden accusations. It was hard to tell what mood her mother was in until teatime and so Abigail made a point of keeping out of her way.

The last few weeks she had spoken to Abigail less and less and looked constantly distracted. She was always dropping something, often a plate of food that had slipped out of her hands, crashing to the floor and making her jump back to life. On one occasion Abigail noticed her mother staring into tomato soup bubbling away on the hob, one hand resting against the side of the pan. She had been about to point it out when suddenly her mother screamed, pulled her hand away and gaped at the burning red marks appearing on her palm. 'Aren't you going to put that in cold water?' Abigail had asked. 'Oh, yes,' her mother replied vaguely, as if the idea hadn't occurred to her.

Abigail shook her head at the thought. It summed her mum up: always away with the fairies.

But that afternoon there were no shrieks of *Ab-gail home!*, no TV blaring and no crashing of plates in the kitchen. The house was silent. With a sigh of relief, Abigail dropped her school bag to the floor and leaned back against the door, clicking it shut behind her. She couldn't remember a single time when she had come home to this – to nothing.

'Mum?' she called out as she walked towards the kitchen, glancing into the living room as she passed. 'Peter?' she shouted, though she knew her stepfather was unlikely to be there. 'Anyone?' Abigail called out louder.

Initially she had felt a little bubble of excitement that she



had the house to herself and, grabbing a can of Coke from the fridge, Abigail went into the living room, flicked through the TV channels and settled on MTV. She put her feet up on the highly polished coffee table, which was an absolute no-no, and placed her can on the shelf beside her without even bothering to find a coaster. Yes, she had thought, *this is as good as it gets.*

But after a while of mindlessly watching TV, Abigail was restless. It was so unusual for there to be no one at home that she couldn't get comfortable. The room felt too quiet without the girls and suddenly she had an overwhelming need to have them back, snuggled up on the sofa with her. What if something had happened? She glanced at her watch. Had her mother told her where they were going but she just hadn't listened?

To pass the time Abigail pulled a notebook out from her school bag and started thumbing through its pages. There was so much coursework that term but she couldn't be bothered with it. Finding a bright pink pen, she started making a list of all the things she should be doing. But there was no point starting any of it because the girls would be back soon and then she could play with them before tea.

Although, of course, that meant her mother would be back, too.

Abigail stopped writing her list and clicked the lid back onto the pen because now she was thinking of her mother again, she couldn't concentrate on the list.

Her mother should have got her report card by now and it wasn't any better than the one she'd received at the start of the year. That one led to a row. 'Look at these ridiculous subjects you've chosen,' her mother had said, throwing the

card on to the table. 'And you can't even be bothered to apply yourself to those anyway.' Abigail had planned what she was going to say to her mother this time – that she didn't stand a chance of doing well when every shred of confidence was ripped out of her. Cara had given her that line and she quite liked the idea of using it.

And yet she wasn't entirely sure her mother would even bother to read the latest report. And if she did, whether there would be a reaction to it. She could almost picture her mum's glazed eyes sweeping over the card before carefully putting it back on the table and turning back to whatever she was heating in the oven. Sometimes Abigail wanted to tap her on the head and ask if there was anyone at home. When she had sworn at dinner last week her mother had barely raised an eyebrow, and it was Peter who had slammed his fist on the table and told her to watch her mouth. Then, on the night Abigail had said she was going out at ten-thirty, her mother hadn't even lifted her head from the saucepan she was earnestly scrubbing. There was no more warmth than there had ever been, no more love than she was used to, but the comments were scarcer, the questioning less, the fights almost non-existent. In fact, the more Abigail thought about it, the more she realised she probably could answer the policeman's question because things had actually been very different over the last few weeks.

'Maybe now you're seventeen she knows you're old enough to do what you want,' Cara had said earlier that day. 'You know, it's like she's backing off 'cos we're adults,' she added, nodding her head wisely.

But Abigail didn't agree. She knew it was more likely her mother had given up. Lately she must have been so absorbed

with the girls, or something else, that Abigail had dropped even further down her list of priorities.

'Aren't you pleased she's leaving you alone?' Cara had asked.

'Yeah, course I am,' Abigail had laughed. But she wasn't really – she preferred being shouted at to being ignored because at least then she didn't feel invisible.

Turning to the back of her notebook she pulled out a crumpled photograph of her dad and pressed it out, running her fingers across the creases distorting his face. It was the only photo she had of her beloved father. Things would be so different if he were still alive. Mum would never have married Peter, for a start. Her stepfather had never had time for Abigail. It was obvious he saw her as nothing more than an encumbrance. And she was sure her dark brown hair and olive skin, so obviously inherited from her dad, were just constant reminders to him that she wasn't his own flesh and blood.

\*\*\*\*\*

The girls' teatime passed. It was something they never missed, and the girls never ate anywhere but home in the week. There was a small chance they might have gone out, or even to a friend's house, but it was unlikely. Her mother didn't have many friends, and even fewer who were likely to invite them for tea.

The TV channels flashed in front of Abigail as she stabbed away at the remote control again, but she couldn't concentrate. The minutes ticked by loudly on the clock on the mantelpiece. There was still no sign of them coming up the path.

At six o'clock Abigail switched the television off and moved to the seat in the bay window. It was still light outside. She considered walking around the block, just to see if she could spot them coming back, because six o'clock was the girls' bath time and they never missed it.

She pulled aside her mother's unfashionable net curtains for a better look. The wire holding them up sprang against her touch. It would only take a sharp tug and she could have the whole lot down, she thought.

Her eyes scanned the line of semis on the other side of the road but she could only see as far as number 24. After that the road bent to the right and the oak tree that stood tall in their neighbour's front garden obscured the rest of the street. Her mother's bedroom window had a much better view. Abigail decided to check from that one, just quickly though in case they returned. Despite the uneasy feeling settling in the pit of her stomach, she still hated it that her mother would know she was worrying about her.

'Mum?' she called automatically as she reached Kathryn's bedroom door. As expected, there was no response and so Abigail tentatively pushed the door open, peering round it before stepping in. Something wasn't right, but for a moment she couldn't tell what.

Abigail stood by her mother's bed, running her fingers across the pale blue duvet cover when she noticed the throw wasn't there, the one her granny had crocheted as a wedding present for her mother's marriage to her real dad. Her paternal grandmother, of course – her mum's mum would never lift a finger to crochet.

Did its absence mean anything? Somehow it seemed to do so. Abigail backed out of the room and on to the landing,

where she could see into her own bedroom and the bathroom. Both doors were open and she didn't need to go into the rooms to see everything looked normal.

'You're being stupid, Abigail,' she said aloud over the sound of her thumping chest.

*'So how come you feel so nervous?'* the voice inside her head whispered back.

The girls' bedroom door was closed. Not just pushed to, but someone had gone to the trouble of shutting it properly. Abigail's hands were clammy as she rested one against the door, where wooden letters spelt out the names Lauren and Hannah. She prayed she was overreacting; she was certain she had to be. But still she held her breath as slowly she pushed open the door.

Whatever Abigail expected it hadn't been what she saw. Throwing one hand to her mouth, the other clutched tightly onto the doorframe, her body grew numb; her legs felt like they would give way. Every hair on her arms stood on edge as she stared at the little girls' bedroom.