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**Opening Extract from...**

# **The Mountain in My Shoe**

Written by Louise Beech

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# The Mountain in My Shoe

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BOOKS**

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This book is dedicated to my son Conor. Though the character in the story is not you – and not supposed to be you – aspects of you did inspire him, especially you as a child. So I love him the way I do you, and named him after you.

Also to Suzanne, the young girl I befriended while she went through the care system. She came out a survivor, and has a permanent place in my life and heart.

For the late Muhammad Ali.

And Baby P.

*'It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear  
you out; it's the pebble in your shoe.'*

*Muhammad Ali*



1

## **The Book**

*10th December 2001*

This book is a gift. That's what it is. A gift because it will one day be your memory. It will soon contain your history. Your pictures. Your life. You. Isn't it a lovely colour? Softest yellow. Neutral some might say, but I like to think of it as the colour of hope. And I'm hopeful, gosh I am. I hope this book is short because that's the best kind.

But now – where to begin?



## 2

### Bernadette

The book is missing.

A black gap parts the row of paperbacks, like a breath between thoughts. Bernadette puts two fingers in the space, just to make sure. Only emptiness; no book, and no understanding how it can have vanished when it was there the last time she looked.

The book is a secret. Long ago Bernadette realised that the only way to keep it that way was to put it on a bookshelf. Just as a child tries to blend in with the crowd to escape a school bully, a book spine with no distinct marks will disappear when placed with more colourful ones.

So Bernadette knows absolutely that she put the book in its spot between *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* three days ago, as she has done for the last five years. She peers into the black space and whispers, 'Not there', as though the words will make it reappear.

She was waiting by the window when she realised she'd forgotten to pack it; when it occurred to her that the first thing she should have remembered was the last. Bernadette viewed the community of moisture-loving ferns and mosses in the garden below – as she does most nights – and the evergreen leaves had whispered, *the book, the book*. At the front of the garden, the trees appear to protect the house from the world – or do they protect the world from the house? Bernadette is never sure. She often thinks how sad it is that they must die to become the paperbacks she prefers over electronic reading, and vows then to change her reading habits; but she never does.

She waits in the window every night for her husband, Richard, to return from work. He always arrives at six. He is never late or early; she



never needs to reheat his meal or change the time she prepares it. She never has to cover cooling vegetables with an upturned plate or call and ask where he is.

*Where on earth is the book?*

The thought pulls Bernadette back into the moment. Books don't get up and jump off shelves; they don't go into the sunset seeking adventure, with a holdall and passport. It has to be somewhere. It *has* to be. If she doesn't find it she can't leave.

*Push away the anxiety and think calm solutions;* this is what Bernadette's mum always says.

Maybe she left it somewhere else. Perhaps the panic of preparing to pack for the first time in ten years had her putting things in the wrong place – a toothbrush in the fridge, milk in the fireplace, her book in the laundry bin. So, just to make sure she hasn't misplaced it, Bernadette decides to explore the flat.

She starts at the main door. The room closest to it has a fireplace dominating the right wall and this is where she and Richard sleep side by side, him facing the door, her facing the wall his back becomes. Often the distant foghorn sounds on the River Humber, warning of danger in the night. It's never been replaced by an electronic system and it has Bernadette imagining she's slipped into some long-gone time when people used candles to walk up the house's wide stairs. Then she's happy Richard is at her side; the anxiety his presence often brings is cancelled by her gladness at sharing the vast space of the flat with another person.

Their bedroom enjoys late light from its west-facing window. Richard let Bernadette decorate how she wanted when they moved in and she painted the walls burnt orange to enhance the invading rays.

If she left the book in here it can only be on the bed. Sometimes, when she's absolutely sure Richard won't be home, she lies there and reads it. But never has she *left* it there – and she hasn't now. It isn't by the bed or under it or in the bedside table. Searching for it is like when you pretend to show a child there aren't any monsters in the wardrobe – Bernadette half knows the book won't be there but she checks anyway.





She goes into the wide corridor of their purpose-built flat. It starts at the main door, ends at the kitchen and tiny bathroom, and looks into three high-ceilinged rooms that their things and her constant attention don't fill or warm. Last winter's coldness drove the remaining residents away. Being on a river means the air is damp and the rooms difficult to heat. Low rent attracts people initially. It appealed to Richard. He hates wasting money on unnecessary luxury. It had a roof and walls and doors; it was enough.

Now – with everyone gone – the Victorian mansion called Tower Rise is just theirs. The four other flats are vacant. Their apartment beneath the left tower, with rotting bathroom floorboards and sash windows that rattle when it rains, gives the only light in the building. Cut off from the city and choked dual carriageway by trees and a sloped lawn, soon it will just be Richard's home.

Tonight Bernadette is leaving.

If she closes her eyes she can picture him parking the car perfectly parallel to the grass and walking without haste into the house. She can see his fine hair bouncing at the slightest movement. Physically Richard is the opposite to his personality; it's as if he's wearing the wrong coat. All softness and slowness, pale skin and grey irises and silky hair. With her eyes still shut Bernadette sees him enter the lounge and fold his jacket and put it on the sofa and kiss her cheek without touching it. She imagines her planned words, her bold, foolish, definite words – *I'm leaving*.

But not without the book.

Bernadette has always been fearful of Richard discovering the one thing she has carefully kept from him for five years. When she got it she knew she would have to hide it from him. Coming home with it that first time on the bus, she wondered how. With its weight numbing her lap, she had noticed a young girl across the aisle; a teen with a brash, don't-mess-with-me air. A girl in a yellow vest with clear plastic straps designed to support invisibly and make the top look strapless, her breasts pert without help.

It occurred to Bernadette that when you half hide something you



draw more attention to it. The straps stood out more than the girl's pearly eye shadow. *The book must go where all books go*, Bernadette thought. And so when she got home, that was where it went.

Now she continues her game of prove-the-monster-isn't-there and looks for it in the second room. She hasn't been in here for perhaps a month, so what's the point? It's empty. The book has never been here. This room she had once hoped would be a nursery and had painted an optimistic daffodil yellow. But children never came. Richard said they had each other. He said that was all they needed.

Bernadette closes the door.

Richard decided the third room should be the lounge. A fraction smaller than the others, it's easier to heat and the two alcoves are home to his computer desk and Bernadette's bookshelf. She put their table and chairs by the window so she could look out when they ate. It overlooks the weed-clogged lawn and the gravel drive that leads through arched trees to the river. Over the years, during their evening meal, she has often stared down at the stone cherub collecting water in its grey, cupped hands. A wing broke off years ago and a crack cuts its face in two. Birds gather to drink, their marks staining the grey.

'We'll tear that down,' Richard said when they moved in.

But they never did.

Instead Bernadette filled the lounge with plants in brick-coloured pots, gold candles, dried flowers, homemade cushions, and books. In the window she has read *Anna Karenina*, and true accounts of survival at sea and travelogues that took her to Brazil and India and Russia.

Still it feels somehow like Richard's flat. Her choices of wall colour and curtain fabric make little difference because even when he's not here his presence surrounds her, like when wind rushes down the chimneys sending black dust into rooms and the trees sway together like an army united against some invisible enemy.

Bernadette looks in the desk and under the sofa and through Richard's magazines. She searches behind the bin and through the cabinet drawers and on the wall shelves. There's a damp patch near them that no amount of scrubbing will erase. She once said it looked like a streak



of blood at a murder scene. Richard shook his head; he always tells her she sees too much in things. She wonders if he will say it tonight when he gets home and finds out she's leaving. The thought chills her. She's not brave or brash and doesn't have a don't-mess-with-me air. She would never wear see-through straps or pearly eye shadow.

It has taken everything for her to bring herself to leave.

What if Richard doesn't let her? What if he shuts the door and won't let her out? What if he talks about locking her away in the dark again? Puts a finger on her lips to shush her? Will he cry when she says she's going? Will he be sorry? Will he just be angry she ruined his evening?

Bernadette goes back to the bookshelf. She spent a long time this afternoon deciding whether she could carry her many beloved hard-backs and paperbacks out of the door, concluding sadly they were too heavy. She is surprised she didn't remember to pack the one book that matters most. She can leave the others with Richard, wordy reminders that she once existed – but not the yellow one.

Perhaps if she closes her eyes and opens them again it will appear by magic, like a Christmas gift sneaked into a child's room while she sleeps. But no, the gap between *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* seems bigger now. She puts fingers between them to check again.

How long has it been gone?

When did she last definitely see it there?

Is it possible she didn't slide it into its usual spot at all?



### 3

## **The Book**

Begin at the start is what they say. Begin at the birth is what we're supposed to do. And I will. But first, welcome to your book.

I'm trying to write as neatly as I can because I'm the first, and also so you'll be able to read my handwriting – it's just terrible. Everyone tells me I should have been a doctor (they're renowned for their bad writing, you see), but I'm not clever enough to cure people and I'd rather help them in other ways.

I've only written in one or two of these books so forgive me if I get it wrong. I believe the idea for them started in the USA. Whoever thought it up was just great. I've seen adults read the words in pages like these, lost for hours, smiling and crying and finally somehow changed. That's what these books do – give a chronological account; although I'm already meandering, aren't I? They're supposed to help you understand the why and the where and the how and the who – that's how I like to put it.

Gosh, I should introduce myself, shouldn't I?



## 4

### Bernadette

Outside, the late-September sun drops behind the trees. The clock reaches six-fifteen. Richard is late. Bernadette frowns at the clock like it might have rushed ahead. He has never been late, not in ten years. No, that's wrong. There *was* one time – but she won't think about it now.

He's so predictable in his punctuality that she can prepare a meal so he walks through the door and is greeted with the aroma of his favourite beef and herb stew at just the right temperature. She can abandon what she's doing at five-thirty, cover the table with a white cloth and place on top a napkin folded twice, polished silver knife and fork, and glass of chilled water.

Tonight there is no food. Instead of peeling potatoes and pre-heating the oven, she packed clothes, toiletries and money into two suitcases she has never used. She cleaned the kitchen and bathroom, and changed the bedding, feeling it wasn't fair to leave the place dirty. Really she was trying to keep busy. Block the thoughts. The *why don't you just stay?* The *it would be much easier.* The *he isn't going to just say, yes, fine, off you go, Bernadette.*

Sometimes – mid chopping onions or polishing the mantelpiece – Bernadette stops and pauses to wonder what she feels exactly. Sad? Happy? Tired? Scared? Angry? Have her emotions run off like a bored husband?

When she and Richard first wed she could list every single emotion. There was pride that this strong, sweetly succinct man wanted to be with her. Excitement when he came home after work. Confidence that



giving up a career to be a wife and eventual mother would reward Bernadette as much as it had *her* mother.

Six-nineteen now. Should she call Richard's work phone? No, she'll have to pretend everything is normal and isn't sure she can. Anyway, the rare times she has called it she got his answering service, an accent-less woman who says he's busy. All she needs to know now is that he's coming home; it doesn't matter what the delay is, what has messed up his schedule.

Bernadette doesn't have a mobile phone. What would be the point? Who would call it? She's rarely anywhere but Tower Rise and there aren't many friends who might call to arrange a coffee, no colleagues to discuss work. So Richard can't leave a message explaining his curious lateness.

*Just find the book, she thinks, and you're ready to leave when he turns up.*

Maybe she *did* pack it after all. Maybe she did it without thinking, just took it from the shelf and walked in a daze to the case. Of course – that's where it is. She goes to the luggage by the door and rummages, imagining she'll see the buttery cover, neutral like a blanket for a baby not yet born. But it's not there. Now an emotion: confusion. And another: fear.

The telephone rings. As though startled, birds flee the treetops in a flap of wings and a shrill of squawks. If it's Richard with his reasons then she doesn't want to talk. Let the machine answer, though this will infuriate him. At least she'll know he's on his way.

Bernadette's own soft voice fills the room – *We're sorry we can't take your call but if you leave a message we'll ring as soon as we return.* We. She always speaks in we; not me or I.

It isn't Richard – it's Anne. Anne knows not to call when Richard is there because he doesn't know about their situation, so for her to ring after six means it must be urgent. Bernadette picks up the receiver.

'He didn't come home,' says Anne, tearful.

For a moment Bernadette wonders how she knows. It isn't possible. Anne has never met Richard. The women have become close recently and despite not being the most forthcoming person, Bernadette



opened up once about her marriage worries. She didn't share any specifics but admitted she felt isolated at Tower Rise. It was good to share with someone – a someone completely separate.

'Is he there with you?' asks Anne.

And now Bernadette realises she doesn't mean Richard.

She's talking about Conor.

Conor is missing too? Everything is missing. How is it possible? Perhaps they are all in the most obvious place, like books in a library. But where would that be? If everyone were where they're supposed to be, Richard would be eating his beef and reading the paper, Conor would be with Anne, Anne wouldn't be on the end of the telephone, and Bernadette would be measuring out Richard's ice cream so it has a few minutes to melt slightly.

And the book would be in its designated two-inch slot on the shelf.

'You're the first one I've called,' says Anne.

Bernadette takes the phone to the bookshelf and pulls everything off to make sure the no-distinctive-markings book isn't there, just off centre. Perhaps *she* is off centre. Perhaps this is a dream, one of those she often has where she's trying to do a jigsaw and every time she adds a piece the picture changes. What was it Conor said last time, about the centre of the universe being everywhere?

The book isn't there and Bernadette sinks to the floor. She touches the titles she has read over the years to avoid thinking about her own, about the name she once had, the name Richard then gave her, one she might soon discard. She loved signing her new marital name, once upon a time; the S and W permitted her to swirl and curl the pen with flourish. Richard had smiled at the pages and pages of practice signatures, asking, was she expecting to be famous?

'Is he there with you?' repeats Anne, more urgently.

'No,' says Bernadette, and Anne's sobs confirm that she knew this would be the case. 'What do you mean he didn't come home?'

Conor is part of the reason Bernadette has finally decided to leave a marriage she has done everything to nourish for a decade. Now he's missing too. Richard and the book barely matter anymore.



'You're stronger than you think,' Anne said, the time Bernadette opened up. They were in Anne's kitchen; it was a few months ago but it feels like a lifetime now. They drank tea and waited for Conor, and Bernadette admitted she didn't know if she loved her husband anymore. Said she wasn't even sure what love was, but that the thought of anything or anyone else was alien.

*I'm not strong*, Bernadette thinks now.

That she's planning to leave her marriage after ten years might make her so. Memoirs about men surviving months adrift at sea define them as strong. People who cope with losing children are definitely strong. But she is just a woman walking away from a man who isn't what she hoped for. A year ago if anyone had said she'd do it, she'd have said never. A year ago during a phone call home, Bernadette's mother had asked how things were and she paused a moment, didn't answer with her customary, 'Yes, everything's good.'

Instead she asked her mum, 'What if everything *isn't* good?'

Silence on the other end of the line, and then her mum said, 'Well, you make the best of it, don't you? No marriage is perfect and too many people give up these days. My friend Jean from aqua aerobics just left her husband Jim after twenty-five years. She was bored and he'd had a fling. But you work at it, you talk, you do what it takes.'

A year ago Bernadette would have done what it took. Now her belongings are packed in two bags and the flat is as clean as a show home. But without the book or Richard and with Conor now gone, she's trapped in the house where no one else lives. She can't play her game of prove-the-monster-isn't-there anymore.

'He didn't turn up,' says Anne now. 'And you know that isn't like him.'

Bernadette pictures Conor last Saturday, closing the door as she departed, the autumn sun bouncing off the glass as though to cut them in two. She had grit in her shoes from the foreshore and he said that when she took them off at home she'd make a mess 'all over the joint' and remember him. He said other words she can't think of now or she'll cry; ones about mountains and pebbles and Muhammad Ali.





No, Bernadette is not strong. *But he is.*

'Can you come?' asks Anne. 'If anyone knows Conor, you do.'

The words come out despite Bernadette's fears. 'Yes, of course.'

She is afraid that if she opens the front door to leave, all the monsters will jump out.

But she's going to have to.



## 5

### **The Book**

So my name is Jim Rogers and I'm your social worker. You might have other social workers through your life. (It all depends how things turn out.) No one can know what will happen when a baby is born in circumstances like yours. By the time you read this you'll probably know what a social worker is, but I'll write it in here anyway.

Very simply, social work is about people. Social workers help children and families who are having difficulties. It can be any kind of difficulty – illness, death, emotional problems, circumstances, or other people. We try to do what's best for all concerned. (Sadly this doesn't always work.) Occasionally families have to be split up. Usually it's for a short time but sometimes it can be for much longer. And sadly there are times when it is for always.

I helped decide what was best for you. You were made what is called the subject of a care order, where the local authority has responsibility for you. (I have printed out some information about that and will stick it in your book after this.) We had to decide quickly what would happen and where you would go.

Your mum, Frances, was ill when you were born. She had been ill for a long time. She has an illness that is hard to explain because it's her head that is poorly not her body. It's much harder to fix heads. (Sometimes it's impossible – even for the best doctors.)

Your mum agreed to let you go – not because she doesn't love you but because she does. That's what I think, anyway. It often makes it easier for us to help if this happens. She had to let your older brother Sam go too last year. A lovely family took him in and he's still living there.

We felt you would also be better off living with another family until your



mum is well. She couldn't hold or dress you when you were born because she was too sad. She couldn't even take you home, even for a short while, so she let someone else take you.

We usually try and put a child with a relative or family friend if we can but in your case it wasn't possible. You have an Uncle Andrew who wanted to have you, but he has some complicated problems that meant he wasn't able to.

The next option was short-term care while your mum got help.

Gosh, I must tell you, while I think of it, that she chose your name. I thought you'd like to know that, because names are important aren't they? Your name means dog lover. It's nice because your mum said she named you after someone special. I don't know who it is but I doubt there can be any better name than that.

I can't tell you anything about your father, sadly. I don't even know his name. For whatever reason, your mum hasn't told us who he is. (Maybe she'll share it with you one day herself. Or maybe later in this book we'll be able to tell you.) I realise it is hard having only half of the picture, and I'm sorry about that.

So for now you're staying with a lovely couple called Maureen and Michael. They have looked after lots of babies, sometimes more than one at a time. They have a bedroom where there are four cots, just in case. At the moment two are being used. You sleep in one and a baby called Cheryl Rae sleeps in another.

Maureen and Michael keep pictures of every baby they've looked after in a scrapbook. You are the newest. I gave them the first picture of you after you were born. (I've also stuck a copy of it at the bottom of this page.)

I was supposed to start with your birth, wasn't I? Oh well, here goes now. There were no blue or pink blankets on the ward the day you were born so you're wrapped in lemon in this photo. You were the only splash of yellow next to rows of pink and blue. So we knew who you were right away.

I imagine you want to know what kind of baby you were, don't you?

Well, the nurse said you were born last thing at night and it had been stormy but then it got very quiet when you arrived. You took so long to cry that the staff thought you were very happy to arrive in the world but then



you screamed so loudly they thought you had changed your mind. You were actually due on Bonfire Night but came five days late. But there were still a few reworks going on somewhere far away.

There's a copy of your birth certificate over the page so you can see your birthdate, which of course you'll already know when you read this. But also on there is the name of the hospital you were born in, when and where you were registered, and your mum's full name.

Your hair was dark and spiky (I stuck some of it in here too, at the top) and your eyes were blue. Most babies have blue eyes at the start. Then, after about six weeks, they can change to brown or green, and the baby's hair can fall out too. So we will see how you look in a few more months.

Maureen and Michael say you're always hungry and you sleep well. You like it best when they put your pram under the trees at the end of the garden. The wind in the leaves seems to soothe you.

You're a good baby, they say. No bother, they say.

They write a small three-page Baby Book for each baby they have. They're going to photocopy some of yours and I will stick it on another page. So everyone is writing about you.

I'll be checking on you a lot in these first few months. I'll visit every week and write all sorts of dull but necessary reports. We have to constantly monitor your life and investigate anything that needs checking and then present whatever we find to the courts. This could last until you're eighteen, or it might end when your mum is well and you're living with her again. (We'll visit her too.)

But this entry in your book is the most important thing I'll have written this week – much more interesting and special than my other reports.

So, gosh, I suppose it doesn't really matter what the handwriting is like (as long as you can read it!) or if any of us spell things wrong. It just matters that you have a little piece of your history. When other kids have forgotten their childhoods or been told by their parents that they can't quite recall those early days you will have it here in black and white, in this book.

And I'm proud to be the first to write in it.



## 6

### Bernadette

Bernadette opens the apartment door to leave Tower Rise. Despite repaints, its wood peels as though sunburnt. Fingers on the handle, she realises how similar this feels to when she first entered the place with Richard ten years ago. Her right hand forces the knob roughly anticlockwise – the only way to free the latch – and the other hand dangles by her thigh with two fingers crossed.

What is Bernadette hoping for?

What did she hope for back then?

Richard didn't follow the tradition of lifting her over the threshold; he carried their luggage instead, letting her be the first to enter their new home. They arrived even before the furniture and Bernadette opened the doors to every room, her icy breath the only thing that filled them. She sniffed the air the way she used to when she was a child and she went somewhere new.

Richard dumped the bags in the corridor, grumbled about the lateness and inefficiency of the removal company, and set about calling them. Bernadette knew he'd soon have the place full of the things family had donated, along with his belongings and her books. She knew he'd make it right; he had so far. So she rubbed her goose-pimpled arms and listened to her new husband's soft voice telling someone he hadn't expected not even to have a kettle yet, and she knew she'd soon be warm, because he'd see to that too.

Back then she had expected Richard would always find the kettle; now she knows it's up to her to find it.

The door hinge squeaks. Bernadette's fingers are still crossed. A



draught from the hall below tickles her ankles. Conor is missing and that's the main concern. Anne needs her too. For now she can put aside Richard's rare tardiness and the book's disappearance, but the thought of Conor not being where he should be is too much. She can either stay here – imprisoned by her old routine – or she can go and help Anne.

Bernadette glances back at her two bags by the lounge door, just like their luggage ten years ago. She'll return for them. This isn't the departure she planned yesterday. How can you leave a man who isn't there? Abandon a ghost that follows wherever you go?

Bernadette closes the door.

Dark stairs lead down to a large hall that she knows was once grand; a local history book she read described polished tiles and ornate double doors, and black-and-white photographs showed fresh flowers on a glass table and family paintings the size of windows. Now an economy bulb barely lights the sparse, dusty area; it flickers like a lighthouse warning boats about rocks.

Outside the taxi Bernadette called has arrived. Bob Fracklehurst – the driver who often takes her to meet Conor – finishes a cigarette and stubs it out in a takeaway coffee cup. He never throws his tab end on her drive, yet she's seen him do it in other places.

It's twilight now. The gravel crunches underfoot like spilt crisps. The trees are a black mass, in which Bernadette imagines ghosts and monsters. She gets into the passenger seat, enjoying the blast of warm air-conditioning. Taxis have always taken her to places where more than two buses would otherwise be required. Richard never saw the point in her learning to drive and she agreed that it made no sense; it was costly, and they'd only ever be able to afford one car anyway. While waiting for the children that never arrived Bernadette simply stayed at home, never using her Health and Social Care Diploma to help other families, never travelling to St Petersburg as she'd dreamed of since the age of six, never learning to swim.

'Usual place?' asks Bob.

'Usual place,' she says.

But tonight it isn't usual at all.



Having used Top Taxis for five years Bernadette has met most of their drivers. Some she talks to a little, in her shy and agreeable way – most she doesn't. A driver called Graham is kind and embarrassed about his size and asks thoughtful questions rather than talking over her few words with opinionated ones. Bob lets her daydream. He hums softly and doesn't badger her with demands for weather talk or a discussion of the local news, chatting only if she begins a conversation.

Then, between, for a smoker, curiously melodic hums, he occasionally enquires about Tower Rise's history and her husband's job and her love of reading. Bernadette always relaxes because he reminds her of her father, a gentle man who never raises his voice or hand.

'This isn't your normal time,' Bob says now, and after a thought, 'or day.'

No, it isn't. None of this is normal.

Since getting married Bernadette has never been alone in a taxi after six. She has never had anywhere to go at that time that didn't involve Richard. But for the last five years – two Saturdays a month – she has gone in one from the door of Tower Rise to meet Conor. Saturday is his convenient day and fortunately Richard works six days as a computer engineer so Bernadette can sneak out. The word sneak makes her feel guilty; she does not sneak, she escapes. Just for a few hours.

'Bob,' says Bernadette. And then she can't think of anything.

'Everything okay?' he asks her.

'Not really,' she admits.

'Shall I sing and let you be?'

'I really don't know,' says Bernadette.

'Shall we go?'

Yes, they should. Every minute that passes is one more that Conor might be in some sort of trouble. And what if Richard turns up now? She won't be able to leave. He'll demand to know what's going on and all her planned words for why she's going have changed now. Now there are only three – *Conor is missing* – and Richard doesn't know about him.

'Please, yes,' Bernadette says, and the car pulls away.



They drive under an umbrella of trees, where leaves and bark are gloomy faces watching them escape. What if Richard's headlights now illuminate the evening? Will she tell Bob to put his foot down? Will she open the window and tell Richard she'll explain everything later? What would infuriate him more – her leaving without telling him, or her telling him she's leaving?

She won't wait and find out.