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A Cotswold Family Life

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THE LAST PARTY



SPHERE

SPHERE

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Dedication to come

And now the whole wide lake in deep repose
Is hush'd, and like a burnish'd mirror glows.

William Wordsworth

NEW YEAR'S DAY

No one in Cwm Coed can remember what year the swim began, but they know they wouldn't welcome the new year in any other way. They don't remember which year it was that Dafydd Lewis went in wearing nothing but a Santa hat, or when the rugby lads bombed off the jetty and drenched poor Mrs Williams.

But everyone will remember today's swim. There's been snow on the peaks since before Christmas, and, even with the protection from the mountains, the temperature in the town hasn't climbed above seven degrees. The lake itself is even colder. Four degrees! people gasp, at once gleeful and incredulous. We must be mad!

As if rebelling against the clear skies, wisps of mist curl above the surface of the water, their reflection giving the disorientating impression that the sky's been tipped upside down. Above the mist, the air is vivid blue, an echo of last night's moon suspended above the forest.

From the very top of Pen y Ddraig mountain, Llyn Drych seems more river than lake. It's long and serpent-shaped, each bend a flick of the dragon's tail it's said to represent. 'Drych' means 'mirror', and, when the wind drops and the water lies still, the surface shimmers like silver. The reflection of the

mountain stretches into the centre of the lake, so solid you feel you could step on to it, no hint of the black and fathomless depths beneath.

Along the path that winds its way up the south side of the mountain – from the dragon’s back to its head – ramblers stoop to pick a pebble from the path. They straighten, feel the weight of it in their hands, then look around sheepishly, before hurling the stone towards the water. Legend has it that Llyn Drych’s dragon rises up if its tail is hit – few ramblers can resist the myth.

Around the edge of the lake, pine trees stand sentry, their shoulders so close that, if one were felled, you could imagine them all toppling, one after another. The trees steal the view from the village of Cwm Coed, but they take the worst of the weather too, which feels like a fair exchange to the people who live there.

On the far side of the water – less than a mile from where the crowd is now gathering – a line of buildings squats in the foothills. The trees directly in front of them have been ripped from the ground, the wood used to clad the lodges and make the vast carved sign that stands at the end of the long private drive – each letter as tall as a man.

The Shore.

There are five of them, so far. Two-storey rectangular boxes, with timber-clad roofs and decks thrusting forward, extending out above the lake on stilts rising from the mist. Metal ladders glint in the winter sun, the pontoons bereft of the boats that tug at their ropes in summer.

Luxury lakeside lodges, the glossy brochure calls them.

Carafanau ffansi, Ffion’s mam says. Fancy caravans. Airs and graces.

A bloody eyesore, most of the villagers agree. And at that price!

For a place you can't even live in all year round. Owners are not permitted to make The Shore their primary residence, says the website. As if north Wales needs any more weekends.

Soon, there'll be another row behind this first. Another, behind that. A spa, a gym, shops, an outdoor swimming pool.

'God knows why they can't swim in the lake.' Perched in the boot of her car, Ceri Jones pulls off her tracksuit bottoms, goose-fleshed thighs white against the dirty bumper.

'Because it's bloody freezing, that's why.'

The laughter comes fast and high – fuelled by last night's New Year's Eve party, by too much wine and too little sleep, by cold which forces its way through towelling robes and lodges itself into bones.

'Good night, though.'

There are murmurs of agreement.

'Chwarae teg.' Fair play. That lot at The Shore know how to throw a party. More importantly, they know to invite the locals. Curiosity wins over grudges, every time.

Splinters of ice cluster in the shallow puddles on the lakeshore, cracked by toes freed from fur-lined boots.

'There are still ten minutes to go. You'll get frostbite.'

'Can't even feel it. I think I'm still pissed.'

'This better sort out my hangover – I've got the in-laws coming for lunch, and they give me a headache as it is.'

'Kill or cure.'

'I'll take either.'

The first of two klaxons rings through the crisp air, and a cheer goes up.

'Ready?'

'As I'll ever be!'

Coats and robes are cast aside, towels draped over waiting

arms and hot water bottles readied for the return. There's a rush for the shore – a tangle of white limbs and bathing suits, brave bikinis and judicious woolly hats – and excited chatter so loud they wonder if they might miss the second klaxon. But when it sounds there's no mistaking it, and they let out a whoop and a 'Blwyddyn Newydd Dda!' as they run towards the lake, screaming as they reach the icy water.

When they're deep enough, they plunge. Mind over matter, through the low-lying mist. Cold clamps a vice around their chests, mouths opening in shock as their breath is wrenched away. 'Keep moving, keep moving!' cry the veterans, dopamine pumping smiles to their faces. Ripples become waves, the movement of people this way and that, as the wind picks up and sends shivers across shoulders.

As the mist begins to clear, a woman cries out.

It stands out among the screams of excitement, sending shivers of a different kind down the backs of those waiting on the shore. Those still in their depth stand on tiptoes, straining to see what's happening, who's hurt. The rescue boat dips its oars into the water. In and out, in and out, making its way towards the commotion.

Out of the mist floats a man.

Face down, and quite unmistakably dead.

PART ONE

ONE

NEW YEAR'S DAY | FFION

Ffion Morgan scans the prone figure beside her for signs of life. The man is tall, with broad shoulders, and black hair cropped close to his skull. On the back of his neck, where a shirt collar might lie, is a small tattooed name. *Harris*.

Ffion clears her throat, testing the silence with a tiny, tentative noise, as though about to make a speech she isn't sure how to start. The man doesn't stir. That makes things easier.

There is, however, the small matter of the arm.

The arm is big. It has smooth dark brown skin, stretched across the sort of bicep Ffion always wants to bite, although clearly now is not the time. It lies diagonally across Ffion's stomach, its hand hanging loosely by her hip. Habit makes her check the man's fourth finger and she's relieved to find it bare. She looks at his watch. Eight a.m. Time to split.

She shifts her legs first, shuffling them sideways a millimetre at a time, before bending her knees to drop her feet to the floor, all the time keeping her torso still, like a contortionist folding herself into a box. She waits a moment, then presses her upper half into the mattress as she slides slowly towards the edge of the bed. The manoeuvre is practised, honed over the past year, thanks to whatever misplaced gene

it is which makes men cast out a proprietorial arm in their sleep.

The owner of this morning's arm gives a grunt. Ffion counts to fifty. If he wakes, he'll suggest breakfast – or coffee, at least – despite neither of them wanting it. Not with each other, anyway. Ffion blames Generation Z. All those *feelings*. There was a time when men showed you the door before they'd even tied a knot in the johnny, but now they're all *woke*. It does her head in.

She tries to recall who the arm belongs to. *Harris* doesn't ring a bell. It begins with M, she's sure. Mike? Max? She fishes for pieces among the murky depths of the previous evening's drinking, reeling in a memory of straight white teeth, a shy smile, a desire to please which she found as attractive as it was unusual.

Mark?

She tears a piece of skin from the inside of her top lip. Fuck fuck fuckitty fuck. She hates it when she can't remember their names. It feels . . . slutty.

Marcus!

Ffion grins at the ceiling, relief making her giddy. Rule number one: always know who you're spending the night with.

Marcus.

Recalling his name unlocks the rest, New Year's Eve unfolding in all its drunken, glorious splendour. Marcus Something-or-other (surnames don't count): a sky-diving instructor (*I'll sort you and your mates out with freebies*) who matched her shot for shot and slipped a hand around her waist when he leaned forward to make himself heard above the noise of the bar. *Shall we head somewhere quieter? We could go to mine . . .*

Ffion closes her eyes and indulges in the memory of the tingle of Marcus's thumb on her bare skin; so full of promise. For a second she thinks about rolling over and waking him up and—

No second helpings. Rule number two.

Marcus's bedroom has the sparse, anonymous feel of a rental. Magnolia walls and vertical blinds; a scratchy carpet bristling with static. Ffion sweeps her right foot across it and finds her pants. Her left foot yields a sock, and, as the breathing beside her steadies, she slides out from under Marcus's arm and on to the floor with all the grace of a sea lion.

The blue top she was wearing the previous evening is by the wardrobe, her jeans a few steps behind it. The classic clothes trail: Ffion is nothing if not predictable. With luck, she'll find her shoes kicked off in the hall, her jumper in a puddle by the front door.

She dresses swiftly, stuffing her socks into her jeans pocket for speed, and hunts fruitlessly for her bra, before chalking it up as a loss. A quick wee, and a peek in the bathroom cabinet (a box of condoms; a half-squeezed tube of haemorrhoid cream), then she checks for her car keys and skedaddles. The pavements are frosty, and she zips up her coat. It's khaki green and covers her from chin to ankle, its warmth and practicality the trade-off for looking like a sleeping bag with feet. As she retraces her steps to her car, she does the traditional alcohol-units-into-hours calculation and concludes she can just about get away with it.

It's after nine when she gets home, and Mam's making porridge. Two swimming costumes hang on the radiator.

'You've never missed a New Year's Day swim before.'

Elen Morgan's voice is neutral, but Ffion has thirty years' experience interpreting her mam's stirring techniques, and the way she's snatching at the wooden spoon right now doesn't bode well.

Sixteen-year-old Seren bounces out of a pile of blankets on the big chair by the window. 'They found a—'

‘Let your sister have some breakfast before we get into that.’
Mam’s sharp voice cuts across Seren.

Ffion looks at Seren. ‘They found a what?’

Seren looks at Mam’s back and rolls her eyes.

‘I saw that.’

‘God, you’re good, Mam.’ Ffion lifts the kettle from the Aga, sloshing it to check how much water’s in it before moving it on to the hot plate. ‘Did you ever think of joining the Secret Service? I imagine “eyes in the back of your head” are right up there with jiu jitsu and fluent Russian.’ She plugs in her phone, dead since the previous evening. ‘How was the swim, anyway?’

‘It wasn’t.’ Seren shoots a defiant look at Mam. ‘I was only in up to my knees when they made us all get out.’

‘How come?’

‘Well, if you’d been there, you’d know,’ Mam says tightly.

‘I overslept.’

‘At Mia’s?’

Ffion gives a non-committal *mmm*. Seren – sharp as a tack – looks between Mam and Ffion, instantly alert to the possibility of drama.

‘Because I’m told she was at the party till late.’

Mia Williams. Two years ahead of Ffion at school: the sort of age gap which gives you nothing in common in your teens, and everything in common a decade later. They are friends by default, rather than choice, Ffion always thinks; who else would they drink with, if not each other?

‘Mam, I’m a grown—’

‘And Ceri left early and saw your car heading out of the village.’

Ceri Jones, the postwoman. Is it any wonder, Ffion thinks, that she prefers to do her socialising away from the town? You can’t fart in Cwm Coed without it making the front page.

'I had an errand to run.' The kettle whistles, harsh and insistent, as though challenging Ffion's lie. She finds a clean mug and drops in a tea bag.

'On New Year's Eve?'

'Mam, stop being—'

'I worry about you. Is that a crime?'

'I'm perfectly safe.'

'That's not what I mean.' Elen turns to look at her eldest daughter, voice low; expression loaded. 'It can't make you happy, Ffi.'

Ffion holds her gaze. 'It does, actually.'

Mam settled down too young, that was the trouble. Elen was seventeen when she'd met Ffion's dad, nineteen when they married. She'd never slept around, never even dated anyone else. How could she possibly understand how good no-strings sex could be? How *liberating*?

'Anywaaay . . .' Ffion changes the subject with a single, drawn-out, word, turning to Seren for sibling solidarity. 'Why weren't you allowed to swim?'

'Because someone only bloody died!' The gossip bursts out of the girl like water from a dam.

Mam cracks the tea towel at Seren. 'Watch your language.'

'Ow!'

'I'd be keeping my head down if I were you, young lady. You know full well you weren't to go to that bloody party.'

Ffion looks at Seren. 'You were at The Shore last night?'

The girl's chin juts out defensively. 'Everyone was there.'

'I don't give a monkey's if the Queen of Sheba was there – I told you to stay away from that place!' Mam's voice rises, and Seren looks as if she might cry.

'Someone drowned?' Ffion says quickly.

Mam drags her attention away from Seren and gives a curt nod of confirmation.

‘God. Who?’

Elen dishes up the porridge, mixed with stewed apple and with a swirl of cream on top. ‘A man, that’s all we know. Face-down, so . . .’

Ffion’s phone chirrup into life, the screen flooding with texts and missed calls. She scrolls past the *Happy New Year* messages, until she reaches that morning’s.

Did you hear about the body in the lake?

Do you know who it is?

Where were you last night???

She presses the blinking icon to listen to her voicemail. At any other time of year she’d put money on it being a visitor who drowned. Someone not used to the cold, or to swimming outdoors; someone who didn’t grow up around water. Cwm Coed sees them every year, pouring out of the campsites and on to the lakeshore as though it’s Bournemouth beach, throwing themselves off the jetty and letting their kids loose on cheap inflatables.

But the New Year’s Day swim is strictly for locals. No one wants incomers, driving an hour or more in anticipation of the smug status update they can post on Facebook afterwards. There’s no advert, no T-shirts, no sponsorship. No official organiser.

No safety measures, Ffion thinks grimly. She knows there’s a faction of the community who will say they’ve been proved right by today’s tragedy; people who refuse to attend the swim because it’s dangerous. *All that running and laughing and falling over; the water so cold it’ll freeze your lungs. And all with drink inside*

from the night before. It's only a matter of time before someone drowns.

Ffion's phone is full of drunken voicemails from Mia and Ceri, shouted over a backdrop of fireworks, and one from Mam that morning – *We're leaving for the swim – lle wyt ti?*

'I heard it was old Dilwyn Jones,' Seren says.

'In a tuxedo?' Mam says. 'In forty years, I've never seen that man out of a cardigan.' She lowers her voice as she turns towards Ffion. 'They moved everyone away from the body as soon as they could. He was—' She breaks off. 'He was in a bad way.'

'Someone said his face was all smashed in.' Seren rises out of her blankets, eyes wide, deliberately ghoulish. Her hair is even redder than Ffion's, with the same frizzy curls you can't do a thing with. Ffion mostly fights hers into a messy bun, while Seren leaves hers loose, to settle on her shoulders like a big ginger cloud. She's pale, smudges of last night's make-up around her eyes.

'Stop your gossip, Seren, and eat your porridge. Your bones'll be cold till lunchtime.'

'I only got in as far as my knees.'

'You've bones in your legs, haven't you?'

'Someone will have been reported missing, though, surely . . . ?' Ffion starts to say, but then she reaches the final message in her voicemail and her pulse quickens. She unplugs her phone. 'I have to go.'

'You just got home!'

'I know, but . . . ?' Ffion jumps up to pull a clean top off the airer, wondering if she can swipe a bra without Mam seeing. Half a dozen socks fall off the rack, one landing neatly in the porridge pot.

'Ffion Morgan!'

Thirty years old, with a marriage and a mortgage behind her,

yet Mam's tea towel is still a force to be reckoned with. For the second time in as many hours, Ffion beats a hasty retreat.

As she pulls away, the car's exhaust coughing in protest, she dials one-handed, balancing her phone on the passenger seat. Leaving the village, she pulls out in front of a car: a Sunday-best couple on their way to visit family, three bored kids in the back. The driver leans on the horn, staying on Ffion's tail, making a point.

'Mia?' Ffion says, when the voicemail kicks in. She puts her foot flat on the accelerator. 'It's Ffi.' Her pulse buzzes in her temples. 'If Mam asks you where I was last night, tell her I was with you.'

TWO

NEW YEAR'S DAY | LEO

'Keep your coat on!'

The shout comes as Leo Brady reaches his desk at Cheshire Major Crime Unit, at precisely nine a.m. Reluctantly he buttons his heavy wool overcoat back up and heads to the boss's office, where Detective Inspector Simon Crouch is standing by his chair. Leo has only walked from the car park to the police station – a few hundred metres at most – but his feet are like ice cubes. He wiggles his toes inside his brogues. *Too cold to snow*, people keep saying, which has never made sense to Leo.

'I need you to get your fat arse over to Mirror Lake – they've had a body wash up.'

Leo isn't fat. He is, in fact, in far better shape than Crouch, whose pale flesh looks as though it's been moulded from lumps of Play-Doh, but this doesn't stop Crouch asserting his authority through the medium of playground insults.

'Isn't that in Wales?'

'I didn't ask for a geography lesson.' Crouch shares his iPad screen to the smart board on the wall, and for a split-second Leo is treated to the first two lines of everything in Crouch's inbox. In among the burglary overviews and the violent crime

statistics, Leo sees a message from a Joanne Crouch entitled *Your mother AGAIN*, and an *urgent*-flagged email from Professional Standards, before Google Maps fills the screen.

Leo takes a moment to get his bearings. In the centre is a thin, meandering lake marked *Llyn Drych*, through which runs the border between England and Wales. Mirror Lake, Leo knows, although he has never had a job take him that far towards the boundaries of Cheshire Constabulary. A mountain range stands on the northern tip of the lake, and on the west side, just into Wales, is the small village of Cwm Coed. Between the town and the water is a band of green, running around the lake.

Crouch points at a patch of green on the eastern side of the lake, at the far end of their patch. ‘Just before you got in, we had a MisPer report from here.’ He taps his screen, and the map changes to a satellite view. The green is woodland, not grass, Leo realises: trees packed tightly around the water’s edge. Crouch draws a wonky circle and taps it meaningfully. ‘This picture’s a couple of years out of date.’ He closes the map and swipes through his apps to find Safari. Mail, Weather, Sky News – is that *Tinder*? ‘This is what’s there now.’

A website appears on the large screen, a film playing soundlessly in the banner image. *It’s a Shore thing . . .* reads the caption. Sun sparkles on the surface of Mirror Lake, as the camera swoops closer to a row of wooden cabins at the edge of the water. A laughing child, frozen in mid-air, swings on a rope above a deck more suited to the Maldives than North Wales. It isn’t a film, Leo now sees, but a computer-generated animation: an artist’s impression of what is clearly a high-end development.

‘This is The Shore,’ Crouch says. ‘And don’t get any ideas, because the chances of you affording a place there are on a par with you ever progressing beyond the rank of constable. One of

them's owned by that ex-boxer actor. The one who's married to her with the massive tits.'

'Who's the MisPer?'

'The resort's owner, Rhys Lloyd. A *male opera singer*.' Crouch slots the words alongside each other as though the combination were experimental. He refers to himself as *a traditionalist*, which Leo has found, during the course of his own thirty-six years, is often synonymous with *bigoted arsehole*. 'Very well known, I'm told,' Crouch goes on. 'If you like that sort of thing.'

'I take it you don't like that sort of thing?'

'Tights and nancy boys? Do you?'

Leo opens his notebook with the attention one might give a portal into another world. 'Who reported him missing?'

'His daughter. Rang in on the nines. The wife confirms he didn't come to bed last night, but apparently that wasn't unexpected. She thought he was partying, or sleeping it off somewhere else. Or *having* it off, maybe.' Crouch snorts.

'Do you want me to speak to the family?'

'Take a gander at the body first. Make sure the Welsh haven't fucked it up. Local enquiries, last known movements – the usual. North Wales has sent a DC – he'll meet you at the mortuary.'

'No problem.'

'If it's an accidental drowning, bat it back to Wales.' Crouch clears his screen. 'He washed up on their side.'

'And if it's murder?'

'Depends. If it's going nowhere—'

'Bat it back to Wales?'

'Not as thick as you look, are you?' Crouch waits expectantly. Leo isn't sure how to answer. 'But if there's a suspect, keep the job, and we'll get it squared away soon as. First murder of the year, done and dusted in a day, boom.'

Boom? Crouch often bemoans the fact that he is never drafted in to give statements to the press, standing on the steps of the court, or next to the fluttering tape of a murder scene. Based on what Leo has seen of his boss, this is a wise decision on the part of the comms team.

It's more than an hour from Major Crime's offices to the force boundary. The sky is bright blue, the streets full of people chasing away hangovers and the excesses of Christmas. A walk in the fresh air. Perhaps a pint, or a Bloody Mary. *New year, new you.*

Leo listens to a phone-in on 5 Live and feels a crushing sense of despair at the passing of another year with nothing to show for it. He's still living in a shitty flat with a neighbour who burns herbs in a tin by her door to ward off evil spirits. He's still working for a boss who belittles and bullies him on a daily basis. And he's still doing nothing about it.

Leo taps the screen on his phone and listens to the ringtone fill the car's speakers.

'What is it?'

'Happy new year to you, too.' Leo hears the tiny exhalation which means his ex-wife is rolling her eyes. 'Can I speak to him?'

'He's out with Dominic.'

'Can I ring later?'

'We've got some friends coming over for drinks.'

'Tomorrow, then?'

'You can't expect me to drop everything and—'

'I just want to wish a happy new year to my son!'

Allie leaves a silence so long Leo thinks she's hung up. 'I write it down, you know,' she says finally, her tone clipped. 'Every time you lose your temper.'

'For God's sake, I don't—' He stops himself, clenching a fist

and driving it through the air, stopping just short of the steering wheel. How can he ever win, when the very existence of the allegation provokes him into proving it right? ‘This isn’t fair, Allie.’

‘You should have thought of that before . . .’

‘How many times do I have to say I’m sorry?’ Leo’s voice rises again. Over and over again, the same narrative, the same guilt-trip.

‘You’re lucky I let you see him at all, after what you did.’

Leo counts to ten. ‘When would be a convenient time for me to call again?’

‘I’ll text you.’ The line goes dead.

She won’t. Leo will have to ask again, and, by the time he gets to speak to his son, *happy new year* will feel like an afterthought.

As Leo drives, the distances between the villages grow, and even the sky seems to open up, until he can look in every direction and see nothing but emptiness. Bleakness.

One day, when his lad is a teenager, Leo will be able to simply pick up the phone and call him. They’ll make their own arrangements to meet after school, or to go to a football match, without Allie as a self-appointed gatekeeper. Without her constantly reminding Leo of what he’d done. *You’re lucky I didn’t call the police*, she’s fond of saying. *Or Social Services. I still could, you know*. It hangs over him, shadowing every conversation, every brief contact she allows him to have.

I still could.

God, it’s miserable in Wales. It isn’t raining, which is a blessing – not to mention a rarity – but clouds are rolling in from the north, and wind bends the trees sideways. What do the police *do* all day, out here? There must be *some* crime, Leo supposes – sheep theft, the odd burglary – but he doubts CID is a hotbed of activity. Today’s drowning will be the highlight of their year.

The mortuary is in Brynafon, and Leo's glad of the SatNav as he winds his way around the mountain roads, before dropping back down into what passes for civilisation. A light drizzle hangs in the air, settling on the town's slate roofs. Leo follows the hospital signs to a small car park, empty except for a silver Volvo XC90 and a brown Triumph Stag held together with rust. The mortuary itself is a low boxy building. Leo presses the buzzer.

'Push the door,' comes the tinny response. 'There's no one on reception today, but I'll be through in a sec.'

Leo does as he's told, finding himself in a small L-shaped waiting room. The clock on the wall reads ten thirty-five. Sensing he isn't alone, he turns, and his mouth drops open. Standing in the corner of the room, her face flushed and uncertain, is a woman.

Harriet.

'What are you doing here? Did you . . .' Leo can barely find the words. 'Did you *follow* me here?'

The woman gives a bark of laughter. 'I was here first! If anything, you must have followed me.'

Holy crap. Harriet. Harriet Jones, or Johnson or something. A primary school teacher from Bangor, a detail Leo only remembers because he did indeed bang her.

He's about to interrogate her further when a door opens on the far side of the room, and a woman in a white lab coat brings with her the unmistakable smell of death and Dettol.

'Leo Brady, I presume? I'm Izzy Weaver, the pathologist handling your man. Shouldn't be here, to be perfectly frank, but my mortuary technician's gone AWOL. He's on borrowed time, that's all. Harriet says loudly, your SIOs I can't do the PM till the day after tomorrow, but the pathologist looks at Leo, that'd be great.'

then at Harriet. Leo coughs. Okay, so this is awkward. But Leo isn't the first man to give a fake name to a girl he's met in a bar, and he won't be the last. In the three years he's been divorced, Leo has found dating an uncomfortable experience. Eighteen months ago, he had enjoyed what he'd understood to be a mutually agreeable one-night stand, only to find himself stalked – no, *hounded* – for several months afterwards. He hasn't used his real name since.

But this still doesn't explain what Harriet Jones – or Johnson, or whatever – is doing at the mortuary.

'I take it you haven't met,' the pathologist says. Leo and Harriet look at each other.

'Well—' says Leo.

'No,' says Harriet, firmly.

The pathologist looks baffled. As well she might: Leo is struggling to understand, himself. Has Harriet been following him? Intercepting his messages? For one wild moment Leo imagines her bugging Crouch's office, keeping meticulous notes on Leo's movements.

'Harriet . . .' Leo says warily. He'll be firm with her, but not *too* firm. She's quite probably mentally unwell – this is not the action of a sane woman.

'Harriet?' says the pathologist.

'Um . . .' says Harriet. There's a long pause.

'Shall we crack on?' There's a note of frustration in Izzy Weaver's voice. She waves a hand in Leo's direction. 'Detective Constable Leo Brady, of Cheshire Constabulary.' Then waves the other in the opposite direction, towards Harriet. 'Detective Constable Ffion Morgan, from North Wales Police.'

Leo raises an eyebrow. 'Ffion?'

'Ffion,' Harriet says, quietly. Or rather, Ffion says. Leo's head

spins. At the same time, quite unexpectedly, his groin recalls the previous night. It's an unsettling combination, helped little by the waft of disinfectant.

Harriet – *Ffion!* – Christ – had taken forever to leave this morning. Leo had been desperate to pee, and instead he'd had to lie there, pretending to be asleep while she fidgeted next to him, clearly waiting to be taken for breakfast. Leo never knows what to say the morning after, and staying asleep is infinitely easier than negotiating a conversation. She'd thumped out of bed eventually, crashing about in the bathroom in the hope he might wake up, before giving up and going home.

Detective Constable Ffion Morgan. She doesn't look like a Ffion. Harriet suits her better. Perhaps it's a middle name, and she only uses Ffion for work. So, by introducing herself last night as Harriet, she wasn't giving a fake name, exactly, just—

'Not Marcus, then?' Ffion raises an eyebrow.

'Who the hell is Marcus?' the pathologist says. 'I was told there were only two of you coming – it's a morgue, not a séance.'

'Sorry,' Leo says, on behalf of both of them, although Ffion doesn't look remotely sorry. Her expression is amused – a little quizzical – as though waiting for Leo to expand.

As Izzy Weaver ushers them into the depths of the mortuary, Leo feels a sense of misgiving come over him. He hopes to hell this turns out to be an accidental drowning, because Ffion Morgan looks like trouble.