

# THE GIRL IN THE DUSTY JEANS

BY JOSIANNE BELYEA

**H**e comes at 4 o'clock every afternoon, without fail. Whether rain, hail or shine, he comes. I've watched him for about two weeks now and never once has he broken his pattern, never once straying from his path. It's like he's in some sort of trance as he walks through the gates of the park, heading straight to the same bench, opening the same worn, black briefcase and pulling out the same jam and cheese sandwich. Everyday. His suit is always immaculately clean, never with even a single wrinkle. He probably works in business, he's definitely quite well off. Most people would assume him to have a happy life, perfect even, but I know better than that. I've watched enough people to know sadness when I see it. Sadness in his eyes, sadness in the way he moves, sadness in his blank, empty gaze. It's the little things too, that help me know him, imagine his life. Like that shiny gold ring of his. He used to wear it on his left ring finger. He doesn't now.

I guess I should feel sorry for him, even though we've never talked. Another part of me, however, feels a kind of jealousy towards him, something I'm not all too proud of. No, I don't wish to be a divorced, middle aged business man, but if his largest problem in life is having a bed all to himself, I would happily switch places with him. Granted, I have no experience in divorce, or marriage, or love of any kind but as sad as his situation is, at least he doesn't have to worry about taking pills everyday just to keep his heart beating.

**S**ometimes he gets a phone call, and his eyes light up as he checks the caller I.D, but usually that light dims in disappointment as he declines the call. Each time he sees that it wasn't who he was expecting, the light dies a little bit more. Some days I cannot see it anymore. What was it that Shakespeare once said? That's right, "Expectation is the root of all heartbreak". I think that fits in here

quite well.

Only once, three days ago it was, has he actually answered the ongoing ringing, only once have his eyes kept their gleam. I noticed, however, that it was a different kind of gleam. Before, maybe he was waiting for his wife, or ex-wife, to call- maybe to apologise, or forgive him, or beg him to come back. I assume he was still waiting for that call but when he answered the phone, his tone grew softer and more content, as opposed to plagued or tense, as if he could casually chat to this mysterious caller all day. A very different man to the one who had sat down on the same park bench, day after day after day.

Maybe it was a sibling or parent, an old friend, maybe even a secret lover perhaps?

I think the most likely answer, however, would be a child- a son or a daughter- one of his own.

The next day he didn't come to the park. Not at 4 O'clock, not even at five past four. I admit that did surprise me at first. We are but slaves to routine after all.

I spent the rest of that day thinking, my mind straying between the awful news I had just received from the doctor and where the business man was. Assuming I was right about the caller from the day before, I assumed he was with his child. Maybe that's why they has been calling?

**H**e was back again yesterday and I felt myself feeling pleased that things were back to normal, the pattern once again restored and unbroken.

I can't help thinking what things will be like in a month or two.

Will he still be coming here? Will he notice I'm not here anymore, or will the world carry on by? Will anyone notice I'm not there anymore?

I can see that he's here again today. I can see him sitting down and opening his briefcase. I can see him pulling out his sandwich- same old, same old. Except he can't see me today.

I couldn't bring myself to leave the apartment, to walk over and sit on that bench like everything is okay. Because it's not. Today is one of my worse days but at least I can see everything from the window.

When I feel the pain in the left of my chest, I know.

I don't think I'll make it to the park again today, maybe never at all.

\*

She is one of the strangest characters I have ever seen. It's not something I decide upon immediately. In fact, at first glance, she looks decidedly normal, average even. Except she is almost definitely not decidedly normal. For a start is her hair, dark but greying quickly. Not unusual at all until you look closer. She is not old enough to have a single sliver of silver at all, or she shouldn't be. Granted, she is around my age- although probably slightly younger, and I have almost a whole head of greys. But that's different. I have... issues in my life but she shouldn't be exposed to such stress and rawness in the world yet. The second strangest thing I notice is her clothes. Again, normal at first glance but strange if you look closer. I've been coming to this park for about two weeks now and every day she sits on the same bench, wearing the exact same clothes. Occasionally she changes from a green hoodie to a blue one, and then back again. But she always wears the same jeans, the same dusty jeans.

I can't help wondering why she isn't doing something with her life, her full life that she probably has set out before her. I know she watches me, probably wondering why I don't have something better to do with my life than sitting on some lonesome park bench, eating soggy sandwiches at

4 O'clock every afternoon. Sometimes I wonder that too but the truth is that I can't bear to sit in my silent apartment with Caleb not wanting to see me and Sasha... gone.

I wait for Caleb to call me everyday- or rather his grandmother. He never wants to talk to me. Can you imagine that, your own son not wanting to talk to you? I know he blames me for what happened, I blame me too.

I hate to think there are some people who are exposed to so much grief, sorrow and loss so early on in their lives. It is these experiences that shape us, but not always in a good way.

The girl, I think, is one of these people. There is a deep heaviness to the way she moves and looks around that makes me decide this. That and the tablets she takes. Tablets that are probably meant to make her happy, but they don't seem to work.

I hope that Caleb isn't going to be one of these people. Growing up without a mother will be hard for him. The way things are looking, maybe without a father too. His grandmother will look after him well at least. I can't help thinking this is best for him. I don't think he will ever forgive me.

But I only closed my eyes for a second, I didn't know that truck was coming.

I've been trying to contact Sasha's family since the... accident. They don't want to talk to me and that's okay, I don't expect them to.

Except three days ago, one of them did.

It was Sasha's brother. We used to be friends but I hadn't talked to him in years. Despite this, however, the conversation was surprisingly easy. He forgave me, he told me, and I have never felt more relieved in my life. We agreed to meet the following day.

After that phone call, I noticed the girl watching me again, more intent

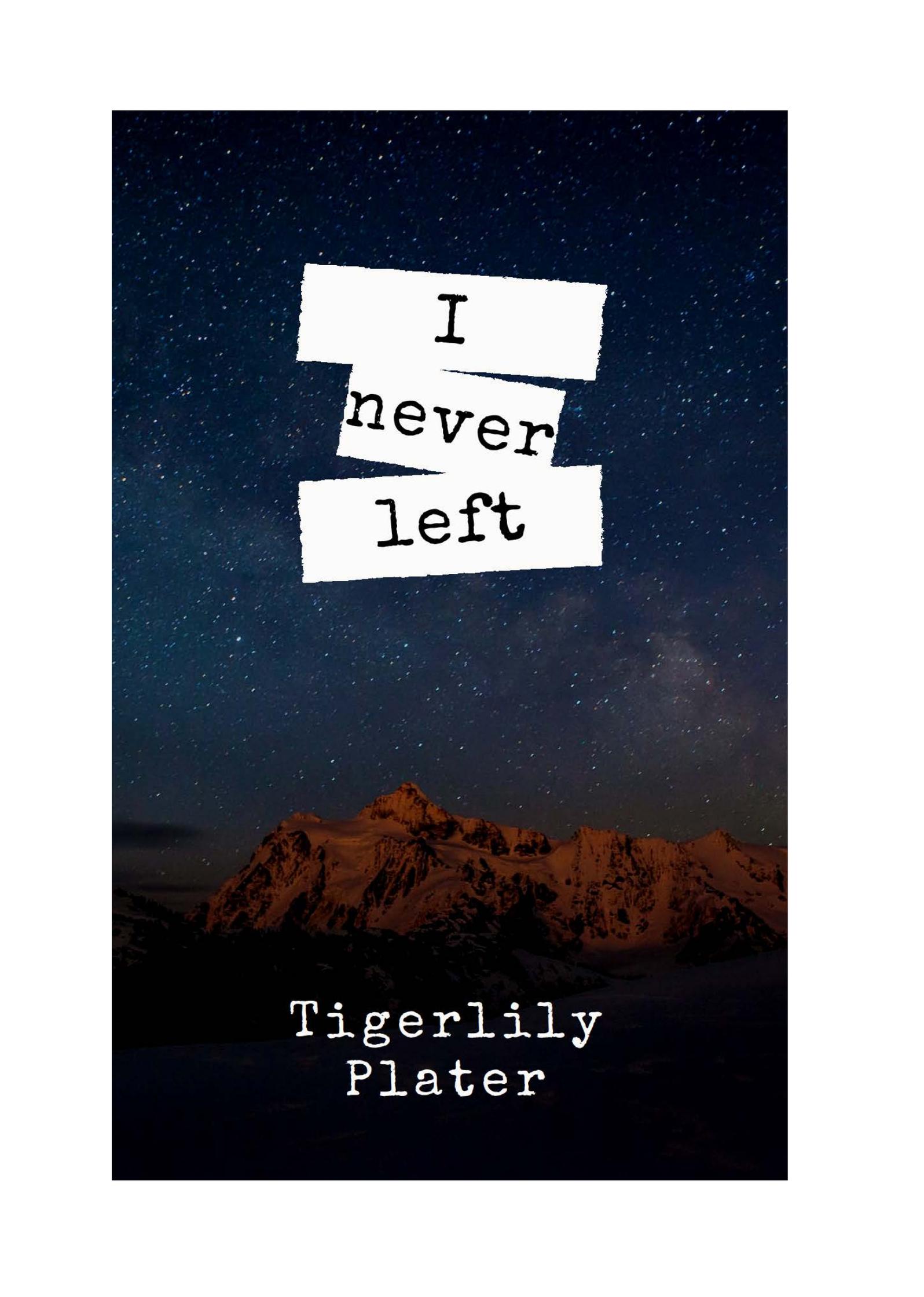
than ever. I smiled to myself, imagining the cogs in her brain turning over and over, trying to figure out who i had been talking to, what I had been talking about. I think she missed me the next day because when I walked back through the park gates and opened my briefcase to eat my sandwich, she almost looked relieved.

I imagine her to be clever and smart, having wasted her opportunities on chasing fairies and desperate half-dreams. Only to end up here, alone in the park. Just like everybody else. Just like me.

**I** am here again today. 4 O'clock like always. Caleb didn't want his sandwich again, even though jam and cheese is his favourite, as strange as that combination is. I suppose that the task of eating it will be handed back down to me again. I hope that one day he will forgive me.

She is not here today, and I have a feeling she won't be here tomorrow either. Maybe not even the day after that. Maybe she finally seized control on her life, or maybe not. The life of strangers is something one can only assume.

Either way, I will miss her. The girl in the dusty jeans.



I  
never  
left

Tigerlily  
Plater

**J** listened to the drone of the air conditioner in our banged up old car, my father in the front seat, clenching the steering wheel so hard that his knuckles were white.

'This will be good for us, Benjamin.'

It's funny. Parents always say the same thing when they want you to do something. He had said the same words when he first found out about getting posted in some station in the middle of no-where. He said it again when he packed up our lives into the back of the car and began driving off into the red dirt of the outback. My father was a police officer. He went to university thinking he was going to change the world. How childish.

Houses were starting to appear now, and dad pulled into a driveway. I stared in dismay at the hovel I was supposed to call home now. I sighed as we stepped out of the car, heavy heels hitting the dusty ground. Once we entered the house, dad began to busy himself with the unpacking.

"Dad, do you mind if I go for a walk? You know, explore a bit?"

"Just... Don't go wandering off too far, okay?"

"Yeah. Okay..." I muttered, already half way out the door. The wave of heat that hit me as I walked out stole the air from my lungs. "Bloody hell." I muttered, rubbing the nape of my neck as I made my way to the edge of this ghost town. I noticed a collection of rocks a little ways out.

"It's a nice view, isn't it?" I jolted as an unfamiliar voice sounded behind me. I turned and there she was, with light falling across her face and thick black curls daintily brushing her dark, chocolate coloured skin. A goddess. She stared at me and I swear I was found in those warm brown eyes, my eyes drifted to the necklace dangling around her neck, a carved sliver turtle hanging from a thread. She grinned. Her lips were so beautiful.

"Did I scare you?"

She started me from my reverie and I shrugged, trying to be as

nonchalant as possible.

"Nah. Nah, you're fine."

A cheeky grin spread across her face.

"You're staring, you know." She said, never once breaking eye contact.

"Am I?" I murmured, unconsciously tugging at my sleeve. I felt a heat quite different than that of the sun spread throughout my body, and I found myself at a loss for words. The girl giggled.

"What's your name then?" She murmured to me, grasping my attention.

"Ben. Benjamin... My friends call me Ben." I said, cringing inwardly. The girl smiled widely.

"Well, Ben. My name's Lucy May." She held out her hand. I took it. "So, Ben..."

She said, glancing back toward the town. "...Wanna see something cool?" She hissed, mischief glinting in her eyes.

"Yeah. Yeah, sure." I choked, swallowing thickly.

"C'mon." She said, tugging me off toward the rocks I had spotted in the distance.

*W*e walked quietly. The silence only broken by the crunch of gravel and dirt under-foot. Then, there it was, a cavern, whose depth could not even begin to have been estimated. The roof seemed on the verge of collapsing in on itself, and plants I could not identify climbed the rocky outcrop.

"Isn't it beautiful?" She murmured. I felt myself chewing on the inside of my cheek, blood blooming in my mouth.

"Yeah. It is." I lied.

"C'mon. C'mon, let's go inside." She grabbed a hold of my wrist, trying to tug me along with her.

"What? No! It'll collapse!" I said, wrenching my arm back.

"It's fine." She said, rolling her big, brown eyes. "I've been in there loads of times." She waltzed into the darkness, and a hot, desert breeze disturbed the hairs on my arms and neck.

"Oh, no wait. Hey wait!" She had already disappeared. I exhaled nervously, whipping my head back toward the town in the distance. I then followed her despite myself. It was dark in there, and the stench of rot invaded my nostrils. I walked deeper, my eyes wide and unseeing, my arms flung out so as not to fall on the unstable rocks.

"Lucy?" I called, my voice resonating eerily. "Hey, come on. It's getting dark outside you know. My dad'll kill me." I blinked a few times.

"Back here." I turned around and there she was. Yellow light filtered in through the hole in the earth. She stood there, back to me, staring out into the picturesque landscape.

"Don't you wonder who has been here?" She said softly. "This place. This place has got to have such an amazing story. Don't you think?" She turned to me. She looked so pretty. Silhouetted by that yellow light. Those beautiful, dark eyes gazing at me, so hopeful.

"You are really pretty." I said. She moved closer to me.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Do you wanna kiss me?"

"Yeah."

She did. Just like that. I never thought I'd be kissed in some God-forsaken cave in the middle of the outback, yet here I was. It was over quickly, but I felt a buzz travelling from my lips over my skin, leaving goosebumps in its wake.

"I'll walk you home, then." She said, a small smile tugging at the corner of her lips.

"Okay." I breathed.

I pulled the door closed behind me, trying to remain light on my feet so as not to wake my father. My room was about three steps away; I reached for the door-knob but stopped short, my fingertips only brushing the cool metal.

"What the hell do you think you are doing?" My father stood there. Scruffy uniform, bare feet and dishevelled brown hair that he and I both adorned.

"Dad I-"

"Why were you out so late?"

"Dad, its fine."

He looked at me, purple moons stamped under each eye. Exasperated. Then he buried his face in his hands with a sigh.

"Just go to bed."

"What-"

"Ben, just... Just go to bed." He turned away, stumbling back to the couch, probably off to read through some extra files he had brought home to study. Still trying to change the world.

I turned on my heel and walking into my room, pulling the door closed behind me with a defiant thud.

Sleep came soon enough. My dreams were hazy. I saw flash-lights. I saw red dirt and fire. Then I saw her. Big, full lips and those proud brown eyes. She leaned in and kissed me. I tasted dirt and copper. She pulled away and she didn't look like her any more. There was blood in her tangled hair and her lips were pale and chapped.

"It's so cold down here." She whispered. "I'm so tired."

"Ben."

My eyes shot open and I whipped my head towards the window. Lucy stood there. She looked so alive. "Ben, c'mon. I wanna show you something." I blinked, confusion written across my face. Walking over to the window, I pulled it open.

"What are you doing here?" I whispered sharply.

"I wanna show you something."

"Look, can you just go home? To be honest I'm kinda freaked out right now. I just had this really weird dream..."

"Right. Look, just come with me, okay? Climb out the window." She stepped back. I didn't move a muscle. "Don't be scared Ben. It's fine. "A vague sense of unease crept over me, and I found myself rubbing the nape of my neck. "C'mon, it'll be fun." She had a cheeky grin on her face. "C'mon." She murmured, looking into my eyes and batting her long eyelashes, before turning abruptly on her heel and walking down the road. I was in no position to refuse her, and to be honest, I didn't want to. I pulled on the pair of shorts I had on earlier and climbed out the window, trying not to fall. She smirked at me over her shoulder.

"Grab my hand." I did. They were so cold. "It's this way." She started running down the road. I ran with her, red dust kicking at our heels. There we were. Two teens running through the outback with stars in our eyes. The sound of laughter sounded around us, and as we rounded a corner we saw a huddle of people, gathered around the roaring flames of a bonfire, passed out teens littering the earth. We walked into the crowd. Lucy leaned in close; I felt her breath on my neck. "Stay quiet

and just watch, okay?" Before I could reply, a boy -although he was hardly a boy really- walked up, snaking his arm around Lucy's waist from behind. A plastic cup filled with God-knows-what sloshing around in his hand.

"Hello there. Didn't think you were coming tonight."

"What made you think that?" Lucy mumbled, gazing up at him. He smiled. "You wanna go get me a drink?" She whispered, batting her eyelashes at him. His smile stretched into a snake-like grin. "Sure, wait right here, gorgeous." He mumbled into the crook of her neck, and she squealed. He walked off, straying further than the light of the bon-fire could illuminate. Before I lost sight of him, I watched him grab a hold of another boy, muttering something under his breath that made both of their faces stretch into dark smirks.

**H**e walked back, a red plastic cup in hand. "Here." He handed it to her, kissing her on the mouth as he did so. She giggled, taking a sip of her drink. I watched the boy look over to the other one across the bon-fire and smirk. "Wanna' take a walk, darling?" He muttered. I watched Lucy grin. She looked so shocked and excited it made me feel sick.

"Sure." She mumbled, and the boy walked her off into the dark, the other boy slithering along behind him. Just before they disappeared from my vision, I watched her stumbling on her feet. A feeling of nausea swept over me. I couldn't move. I felt breathless. I closed my eyes, trying to regain some sort of composure. I felt myself swaying, and when I opened my eyes I found myself being held over someone's shoulder. A light was jolting around in front of me, illuminating the red rocks beneath us.

"Just drop her here." I recognised the voice of the boy before I felt myself plummet, a plume of dust puffing into the air as I landed with a painful thud on the hard earth.

"Whaddya' reckon'. Should we bury her or-"

"Nah, mate, no-one's gonna find her." A second boy muttered, and I tried

to focus on their shadows. Tried to call out. "Go grab a rock." One of them hissed, and I felt my heart start thudding against my chest, a wave of panic crashing over me. "Make sure it's a big one, mate. So we can get it done in one go. Don't wanna have to pick it up with, like, brains n' stuff all over it."

"No..." I murmured, weakly. "No, no, please don't." I slurred, my voice lost in the wind. He walked up, one leg on either side of me, a rock in his hands so large I could see his arms shake. "Please don't." I whispered shakily. He dropped it. Then I woke up.

I was in my room again. Completely fine aside from the thin layer of sweat covering my body and my racing heart.

"Oh, God..." I huffed, leaping out of bed and racing out the front door, leaving it ajar as I disappeared into the darkness of night. The wind whistled in my ears as I ran, eyes set on the cavern. I halted abruptly as I reached them, taking my phone and turning it on flashlight mode. The light wobbled, and I lurched unsteadily on my feet as I made my way down. I followed a familiar path. I felt myself shaking as the smell of rot grew stronger. How I had ignored this the first time I came down here I had no idea. Suddenly the smell became unbearable, and I scanned the floor with my light until it hit something. I walked forward cautiously, feeling my eyes sting. I gagged at the sight, turning away. There she was. Hardly recognisable. Her skull was shattered. There was so little left of her. I reached forward with trembling fingertips, pulling her necklace away from the corpse, choking back what was rising in my throat.

"Oh. Oh God." I managed to mutter, before racing back home. Back to my dad. Back to someone.

"Dad." I choked, my voice caught in my throat as I leant against the door frame of our house. I couldn't speak loud enough. "Dad!" I shouted, and he jogged over to me, eyes groggy and body swaying from being woken so suddenly.

"What, mate? You okay?"

"No, no dad, there's a girl. There's a girl." I threw the necklace onto the

dining table. "I saw her dad. I saw her." He simply furrowed his brows.

"What?"

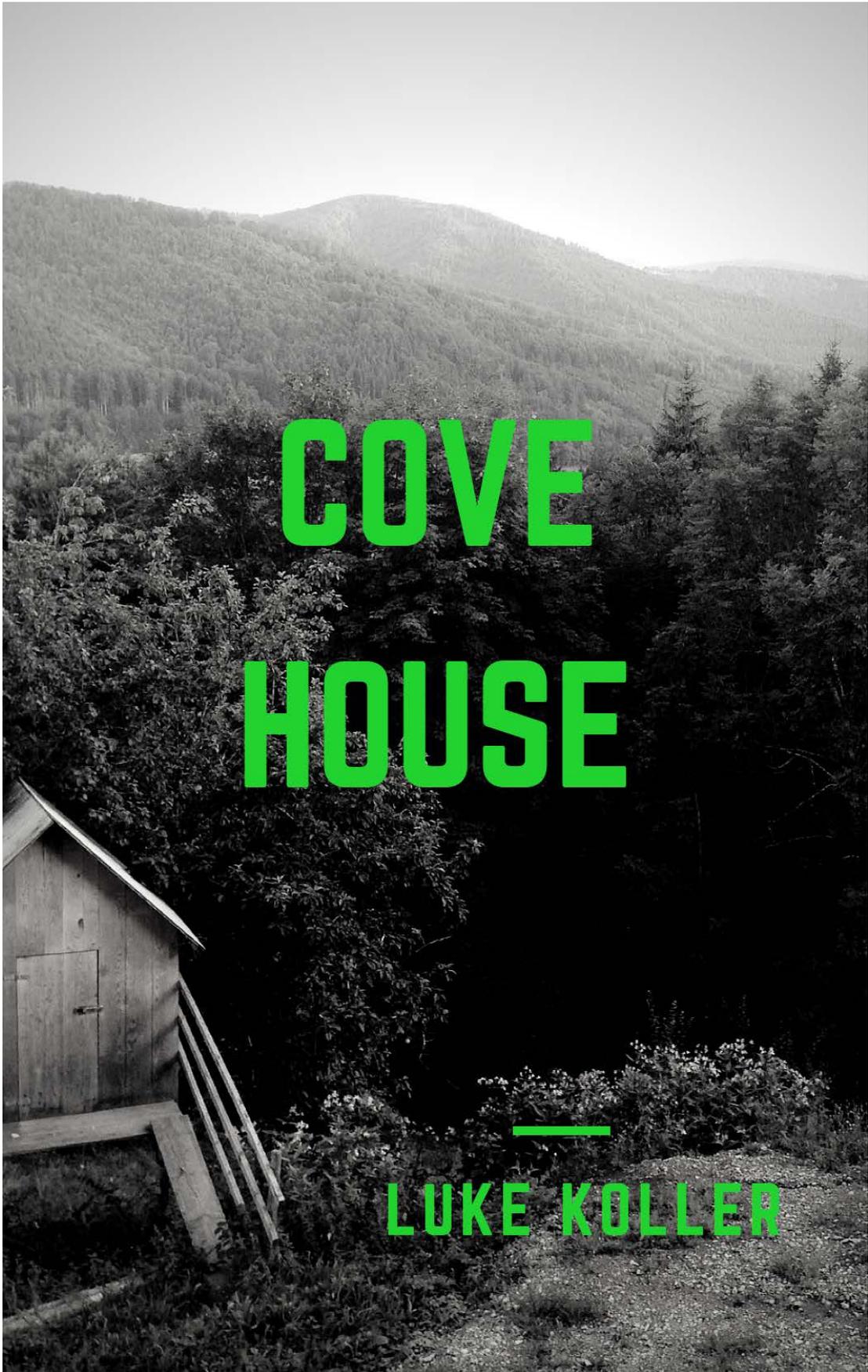
"She was only a bit shorter than me and she had s-shoulder length hair, curly hair..." I felt breathless. I couldn't breathe. "Lucy. She said her name was Lucy May and she was wearing this." I exclaimed finally, gesturing wildly at the necklace. My father started moving, rummaging through a box.

"Is this what she looked like?" In his hands he held an image. There she was. Smiling brightly. So alive. I nodded vehemently. My dad seemed awake now.

"Mate, she's been gone for, like, two months! Where'd ya' see her?"

"Dad, she's dead. She's dead; she's down in this-this cave." I breathed.

The world seemed to stop, then started going all at once. It was like I was stuck in fast forward for those next few months. My father found the body that night, along with his investigative team. I think that was when my father realised he couldn't change the world. He realised it was too far gone. He packed our lives back into the car and we went back to the city. We both tried to forget the time we spent in that town, no-matter how brief it was, however whenever a hot summer breeze slithered in through my window, I remembered with a shiver how real, how *alive* her lips had felt on mine.



# COVE HOUSE

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LUKE KOLLER

Sam ran as fast as he could along the wet surface of the sandbank using the luminous glow of the silver moonlight to negotiate the more tricky passages over rocks and sand. His arms pumped in rhythm with his pounding heart, as the icy cold sea snapped at his feet and the spray of water hit his face leaving a salty residue in his mouth. Up above he could hear the piercing cries of seagulls, which seemed to turn into screams and get louder. Without breaking stride, he pushed at his mop of curly brown hair and glanced up.

*Strange, he thought. They seem to be following me. Are they watching me? Are they warning me off?* Then he had another unpleasant idea. *Maybe they're vultures!* He ran faster and faster, barefoot until he collapsed gasping for air on a damp stretch of sand at the end of a small cove. He had reached his destination.

From along the beach a dark form emerged, which Sam watched with breathless anticipation. 'I'm over here,' he shouted. It moved closer in a cumbersome way and slowly changed to the shape of a short, stocky boy whose legs clearly didn't move as fast as his.

'Hey man ... What are they?'

Sam stood up with a superior smile. 'Why Peter, don't you know - that's our welcoming committee.'

'Ok ... right.' Peter was next to him now and the moonlight gave his face an eerie white tone, except for his spotty brown freckles, which stood out against the sliver of light. His big blue eyes opened wide with trepidation as he asked nervously, 'you sure bout this man?'

Sam snapped back that those bothersome birds didn't scare him one bit! He grabbed some miniscule beach pebbles to prove his point, and angry squawks were soon heard from above. Then the grey-scale sky was strangely quiet.

'Well, that was kinda weird.' Peter looked at Sam for direction. 'What now?'

Sam's mouth felt dry with fear but he swallowed it down. 'You know we gotta do this. We're gonna look like sissies if we don't –'

'Yeh, I know,' Peter interrupted. 'But I don't want to ... I mean, sorry – stupid question.'

The moon was an ocean of light that shrunk the darkness and led the boys up a narrow path of overgrown weeds and grass. Soon they could see the shape of the old house, perched on the small hill overlooking the cove. It was known as Cove House, though it wasn't much of a dwelling with its skeletal air of decay and warped, rotten wood, which pointed out in all directions. Beach access was cut-off most of the time - except at low-tide - and the only other way was a long, winding road surrounded by old growth forest, which stretched for miles and miles.

'Is this place really where you hear the tortuous whispers ...' Peter hesitated and then blurted, 'of lost souls in your ear?'

*What the ...? He had to bring that up now.* 'Nah, how stupid! There ain't nothing but a bit dirt an cobwebs inside. The oldest thing you'll see is a spider. Trust me ... O.k.?'

The boys reached the top and stared with fascination at the eerie beauty of Cove House. It was a ghostly sight sitting there all lonely and isolated with only the moon above shedding light on its dark existence.

Without warning, the front door swished opened with a screech and then slammed shut with a bang.

Peter stared at Sam. 'Explain that then - genius?' It seemed that the house was issuing an invitation from an invisible host to come inside.

'Let's just go ... like, right now!' Sam moved forward and cringed with each creak of his feet on the broken porch boards. As he reached the front door a sinister shadow flickered across the corner of his eye and he froze. A shiver coiled around the hairs on his neck then spread down his back. It was all he could do not to fling himself back down the beach.

*Don't be a chicken it's nothin,* he told himself.

'Keep movin!' Peter insisted from behind. 'Can't be a scaredy-cat now.'

'It's a bit dark, I can't see much,' answered Sam. Outside the landscape was covered in brilliant light but inside the backdrop was pitch-black.

He reached for the door but it squeaked open again by itself. *Must be the wind ... Or it's faulty.*

'Man, like ... this is a dump.' Sam reached for his torch to inspected things. Fragments of plaster lay damp on the floor ready to soak up rain

that fell through holes in the tin roof. Sections of ceiling hung limp, and the damp walls were covered in peeling wallpaper combined with mould, which gave out a musty odour.

Peter came up behind him. 'Sooo ... where do ya wanna start?'

The first room's door opened easily enough and Sam shone his flashlight around for anything that might jump out at him before stepping inside. It was a bare room except for a rusty bed-frame that sat in a corner, the mattress and blankets were long gone. Part of the window was broken and the frame rattled on the outside as the cold air rushed in.

Sam was genuinely disappointed as he looked around the sparse room with nothing to take. *I expected to see a broken doll with one eye glaring at me, or something.* With a disappointed exhale of cold misty air, he managed to pull the door closed before he heard -

'Arrrh, get it OFF me! Arrrrrrhh! ... Get off!'

Peter was jumping around in the dim passageway.

'Something's on me! Get it off me ... Get it off mmeeee!'

'Stay still ... And shut-up, will ya.' Sam's hands shook and it took a few seconds to discover the trouble. 'Ya walked into a spider web ... See ... Idiot.' Great relief pulsed through his veins as he tugged at the long silky threads to show as evidence. A bit of a lop-sided grin spread across his face. 'Hey, guess it didn't get its victim -'

'I don't like this.' Peter didn't smile back. 'Do we have to go through with it?'

Sam leaned towards his friend with a shrug. 'We got no choice. A dare's a dare.'

Peter bit his lip. 'But what if this place really is spooked? I think something just pushed me -'

Sam looked down the passage. 'Time to go.'

Shining his torch towards the back of the house, Sam could make out an old broken dining table that looked antique. Once it would have been a majestic display for any room, but now it was covered in thick layer of dust and looked quite hideous. 'Might be something there.' He took a cautious step. 'An old broken cup or ... whatever ... something old.'

He was getting desperate. *They needed to find proof and get out.* This creepy ghost stuff was getting a bit spooky, even for him.

Half way down the long passage he noticed Peter hesitate. His chubby round features had taken on an ashen look. 'Sam,' he said, 'I think ... No. I know ... I'm being watched.'

'It's nothin. You're just imaging it.'

But then Sam could smell a sweet lingering scent in the air. *Incense or perfume?* Chills ran through him as the temperature seemed to drop several degrees. He was sure someone - or something had just blown on his cheek. He felt increasingly light headed.

'Peter did you..?'

'Sssshhhh, did you hear that?'

'What is it? ... Where's it comin from?'

'Hello ... Heelloo ... HeellLoooO... ' From all around, a little girl's voice called out sweetly as if searching for the boys.

Sam strained to hear which direction it came from but his pulse pounded too loudly in his ears. They were not alone.

Sounds of giggles and laughter ricocheted off the walls, followed by the pitter-patter of a child's feet on the creaky, worn floorboards.

Then ... 'BOO!' It was just a whisper in his ear. But it was enough. A ball of terror shot through his stomach and he dropped his torch.

'Let's get out of heerrreee!'

But Peter was already in front, bolting for the door at a neck-breaking pace.

Down the hall and out the door, Sam's feet made thumping sounds as they moved with great speed. He crashed and lunged his way back down the path. It was the end - they'd lost. *Time for home.*

Sam had one final glance back. *Never again.* His skin crawled at the thought.

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**a**s the dust settled and the door rested back on its hinges, a middle aged lady dressed in a warm beige cardie, baggy track pants and sensible shoes came out of hiding. She twisted her necklace in her fingers. 'Well thank goodness they've gone.'

Another equally frumpy lady joined her and nodded her head in agreement. 'Ummmm, I know, I know. I'm dying for bed ... Great sound effects by the way.'

'It's an easy App to download. Lots of different creepy voices.' She looked pleased. 'Yeh - that was an excellent move too spraying perfume around.'

The ladies grinned at each other with a quick high-fived. *Mission accomplished!*

*Well, that'll teach Sam not to sneak out,* the beige lady thought smugly. She was sick of finding his bed empty, only to have him come back covered in scratches and bruises from his nocturnal adventures. She was getting too long in the tooth for such worry.

'You know, I was a bit concerned we'd get caught,' she said as she moved carefully down the hall to grab the torch, using her phone to light the way. 'I thought the little's girls voice might jam cause my phone's been playing-up.'

She stopped in her tracks. *Strange though ... I don't know where the noise of children's feet or laughter came from.*

'Right - time to go!' A quick exit was needed.

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**a**tall willowy figure drifted to a window and watched the red tail-lights of the four-wheel-drive hastily depart. 'Goodbye, please come again,' she whispered sadly. She'd so loved the company. *Another time, I would have made those mothers a lovely cup-of-tea from my good bone-china with a slice of apple-cinnamon teacake.* She touched her once pretty hair. *Though they would have had to dress more appropriately,* she thought with a sniff.

*What amateurs*, she chuckled as her proud, gothic-like birds appeared. *Really, they should have left it to me. Perfume? A child's voice?* She'd added the pitter-patter of feet and laughter for more effect. She'd been happy to help - they certainly needed her help. *What fun!*

She'd giggled as she stole a silvery web from its owner, and glided it onto the chubby boy's shoulders. And she couldn't resist giving him a bit of a shove. *How amusing!* She'd loved blowing the front door open and closed - it was her way of saying hello. *Didn't they realise it was her?* A puff on that sweet boy's cheek, followed by a 'Boo', were her finest moments yet. *Fancy coming out in the middle of the night and worrying his poor mother.*

With a flick of her elegant hand she floated back in to oblivion. The guardian birds followed in her wake. They couldn't wait for next time.

**The End**