


'A fantastic thriller'  
*Sunday Mirror*

'Very exciting'  
*Daily Mail*

You won't see him  
until it's too late.

A black and white photograph of a person walking away from the viewer on a wet, rain-splattered pavement. The person is holding a dark umbrella. The pavement is covered in numerous water droplets and footprints, creating a textured, reflective surface. The person's silhouette is dark against the lighter, wet ground.

# hidden

Emma  
Kavanagh

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## About the Book

### HE'S WATCHING

A gunman is stalking the wards of a local hospital. He's unidentified and dangerous, and has to be located. Urgently.

Police Firearms Officer Aden McCarthy is tasked with tracking him down. Still troubled by the shooting of a schoolboy, Aden is determined to make amends by finding the gunman - before it's too late.

### SHE'S WAITING

To psychologist Imogen, hospital should be a place of healing and safety - both for her, and for her young niece who's recently been admitted. She's heard about the gunman, but he has little to do with her. Or has he?

As time ticks down, no one knows who the gunman's next target will be. But he's there. Hiding in plain sight. Far closer than anyone thinks . . .

## About the Author

Emma Kavanagh was born and raised in South Wales. After graduating with a PhD in Psychology from Cardiff University, she spent many years working as a police and military psychologist, training firearms officers, command staff and military personnel throughout the UK and Europe. She lives in South Wales with her husband and young sons.

# HIDDEN

Emma Kavanagh



For Matthew. Always.

*Charlie: Sunday 31 August, 10.33 a.m.*

I CAN SMELL the blood. It is all that I can smell. It coats my nostrils, my lungs, it stains the inside of my throat. It is on me. It covers my hands, has turned my white blouse crimson, and I do not know how much of it is mine, how much comes from the dead.

The bodies litter the hospital lobby like autumn leaves blown inside on a gusty day. There are so many of them, the floor has vanished beneath them. Now, everywhere I look I see the casualties lying at uneven angles. The coffee shop, the one that was so busy just moments ago, before the world ended, now stands empty. Round metal tables have tumbled to their sides, tubular chairs overturned and scattered. Those who could run, did. A bullet has pierced the sandwich display, sending finger-cracks racing along the glass. From somewhere beyond sight comes the smell of burning bread, a toasting sandwich abandoned in the exodus. Beyond that, the automatic main doors to the hospital stand open, bringing inside a gust of warm wind. I look at the doors, study them without seeing, obliquely wonder why it is that they do not close. They should have closed, shouldn't they?

That is when I see the security guard. Ernie is stretched out on his back, a plastic coffee cup still clutched in his hand, the coffee seeping out to form a pool that mingles with the blood. His head is pressed against the right-hand door, and it would seem that he slept, but for the hole

where his face should be. His cowlick, the one that he laughed at, the one that he complained his wife hated, is stained a red so dark that it is almost black.

I look away, trying to breathe, trying not to panic. Look down at Aden. He is lying on the ground beside me, has curled inwards around me, so that his chin brushes against my knee. I am holding Aden's hand, so tight that it seems it must be hurting him, although he never murmurs. He has not opened his eyes, his lips are slack. Blood leaches through the dark of his uniform, puddling on the floor, into my skirt. I press my other hand against the hole in his shoulder, feeling warm blood ooze between my fingers. And I pray. I don't remember the last time I prayed, but today I pray. Please God, let him live.

My hearing is beginning to repair. The yawning silence ebbing away, sounds beginning to creep back in. Of course, as soon as they do, I wish they would go away again. Because now I can hear the whimpers. I don't know where they are coming from. I had thought I was the only one left alive in this hell. I'm not sure, but then I think the whimpers are coming from me. Behind that, carried in on the breeze, I hear what I first think is screaming. I wonder distantly what it is that is making the outside world tear itself apart, when the worst that can happen is here, where we are. But then the sound solidifies and I realise I am hearing sirens and that the cavalry are coming.

I look up, think to shout for help. And that is when I see her. Imogen looks different. The way she is wearing her hair, I haven't seen it like that before. But then, what does it matter how her hair looks, now that she is dead?

Imogen lies spreadeagled at the edge of the lobby. Looks as if she is making snow angels in the heart of winter. But instead of snow she is surrounded by blood that was once hers. She has tumbled backwards, blown there by the gunshot to her chest. Copper-red hair falls across her eyes, a single strand snaking its way across her chin, trapping

itself in the gloss pink of her Cupid's-bow lips. Her mobile phone lies in her wide-open hand. For a moment it seems that she can see me, her gaze fixed on me, pleading. But there is nothing there. Her overlarge green eyes are vacant.

I stare at Imogen, and stare, and my brain seems to be standing on quaking ground, because now I recognise her, now I don't. And then I think that it must be the sheen of death on her. This is why she looks so alien to me. So other.

A feeling is rising through me, and I think it must be panic. I fight against it, push it down. There is only me. There is only me amongst them all. I cannot let go.

Okay, Charlie. Take it slowly. My father always said that the only way to climb a mountain is one step at a time. So I focus on my breathing again, slowing it. I know that my lungs are pumping, my heart is beating like a drum, and I am absurdly angry with them both, willing them to calm the hell down. I cling to Aden's hand, so tightly that it seems his skin has become a part of mine, and I breathe in, holding a blood-stained breath in my lungs, and think that I am at the bottom of the pool, and there is nothing more to it than that. Just an easy dive, down into the piercing blue deep. And any second now I will skim the bottom, then I will turn, arching my body up towards the light. And then I will break the surface. And this time the air will be clean. Bloodless.

I remember the doors, swooshing open onto the still August air. The sun on the linoleum. The barrel of the gun. The shape it made as it faced me. The endless darkness hidden inside. The certain knowledge that I was going to die. Then Aden. That look, from me to him and back again. Then the gun, swinging around, finding him.

Then a voice, low-sounding of whisky and darkness, breaks into my reverie. 'You okay?'

I start and release a sound, one that I have never heard from myself before, a kind of a cross between a yelp and a sob. Aden's face is creased in pain. Eyes open, so slowly. He

lies there for a minute, as if he cannot believe that he is alive.

I wait for him to look at me. At least I give him that, before I throw myself at him. I can feel his breath on my cheek, hear his heart beating on mine. I'm dimly aware this is unlikely to help his wounds, but I cannot seem to stop myself, and after a second, as he presumably works at convincing himself that he isn't dead, I feel his arm wrapping itself around me, pulling me in tighter.

'You're alive.' His voice is rough, low.

'You too.' He smells of soap and gunpowder.

'How bad?'

I know what he's asking. I know what he wants me to do. But I stay, cradled against him, until I absolutely, completely have to move. Then, with my one good arm, I push myself up. His shoulder is bleeding. The wound looks ragged, terrifying even, and I have no idea what will come next.

'You'll live,' I lie.

He grins, a fleeting smile so out of place in this setting, yet as welcome as a long drink of water on a burningly hot day. I know that he knows I'm lying. 'Such a bedside manner. I meant the others.' He gestures with one hand around the lobby, wincing, trying to look past me, but I don't move. Ridiculous as it may sound, what with who he is and what he does, but I don't want him to see. But I know that he won't settle, not until he knows.

I don't have to look up. I see them anyway. I will see them every time I close my eyes for the rest of my life.

There's the elderly lady with the navy-blue raincoat, taupe slip-on shoes, yards away from us. Her head is rested on her arm, and it seems that she is merely sleeping. Just got tired and fancied a nap. The blood pools around her, turning her blue coat black. There's a man, about my age, perhaps late twenties. He is slumped against the opposite wall, one partner in a pair of bookends. Only his chin, with the carefully trimmed goatee, is tilted forward onto his chest,

his hands resting, palms up on his lap, as if to say: look at me, I won't hurt you. His brains splattered across the wall that supports him.

And him, the one who did this. He is lying amongst the casualties. As if he is one of them.

'It's bad, Ade. It's really bad.'

*The Shooter: Sunday 31 August, 10.25*

*a.m.*

*Day of the shooting*

THEY DON'T SEE me. No one ever sees me. Their eyes skit across me and away, like I've been greased and their gazes just can't get any traction. I am, to all intents and purposes, invisible.

They cluster around the hospital doors. The smokers who just need one last fix. An achingly thin man sucks on a cigarette, the red glow creeping its way down towards yellowing fingers. He doesn't look at me, even though I am right in front of him. He has a far-off gaze, and all that exists for him is that cigarette, the metal strut that supports his IV bag. He's leaning on it, a hobo against a flimsy lamp-post.

I have parked in the car park today, for the first time. I have been here before, and the times that I have been here before I have come through the woods that back onto the hospital, have left my car on the other side of it, on Mullins Road. But not today. Because today it doesn't matter where the car is. I will not be returning to it.

I step into the hanging cloud of cigarette smoke, standing stark in the stagnant air. The gym bag is on my shoulder. The weight of the gun makes it heavy, pulls me off-centre, so that I'm leaning into it. I hold on tight to the strap. Cigarette smoke catches in my throat, makes me cough, and I glance at the man, so old that he looks like he has lived a thousand lifetimes already, and I think about killing

him. He is wearing a hospital gown, white with blue checks. It hangs just above his knees, his legs jutting out beneath it, two lollipop sticks, his back warped into a question mark. Still he has not noticed me. I would laugh if it wasn't so damned pathetic. My step slows. I feel the weight of the bag. I could do it. Could turn, pull the gun free, level it at his blank, empty face and pull the trigger. It wouldn't be the first time. My hands twitch, aching for the feel of the roughened grip, cold metal, the kickback as it hits the palm of my hand. The swell of relief that follows.

But, with one final look at the man as he sucks on his cigarette so hard that his cheeks plunge inwards, I turn, keep walking. Because there is a plan. I must stick to the plan.

The hospital doors swoosh open, stale thick air, a plunge into a stagnant pool. There is a burst of sound in the lobby, voices. Somewhere a radio is playing. The Beatles. She loves you. The irony hits me along with the heat, and I step onto the slick linoleum. Breathe. The coffee shop is busy, people lining up at a metal-strut counter. The security guard, his grey hair sticking up at odd angles, belly hanging low over his trousers, holds a paper cup, curls of steam climbing from it. He looks up, and for a moment I think that he has seen me. But then his gaze trickles away, back towards the clear-domed stand where the muffins are kept, and his tongue snakes out, wetting his lips. He reaches down, a movement that looks fluid and practised, adjusts his utility belt, mouth curling like he thinks he's Batman.

I wait in the sun-dappled lobby, the doors hanging open in my presence. I'm not sure what it is that I am waiting for. Is it for the security guard? Am I thinking he will stop me? I study him, his back turned to me now, can see the awkwardness of his movements, that arthritis is setting in, that in truth he isn't stopping anyone. I stand there, a boulder in a stream of people, and I look for a feeling - any feeling. I'm not sure why. After all, lately my life has

revolved around running from them. Yet now, here at the end, it seems to me that they have vanished. That the sea of emotions, always raging, always yanking at me, threatening to pull me under, has suddenly stilled, like it has frozen in an instant. I prod at it, a tongue into a cavity, but I can find nothing. Just the relief of the coming silence.

I turn, feet squeaking against the linoleum floor. Look to the signs. I don't know why. I have, after all, been here before. I know my way to Ward 12.

I pull the gym bag higher up onto my shoulder. Or, at least, my hands do, although they feel like someone else's hands. My feet begin to move, someone else's feet. It occurs to me that nothing is yet set. I could always change my mind. But I won't, I know I won't. Because beneath the frozen sea the waves are still raging, and I know that I cannot survive them again.

I glance back, out into the car park, through the pall of smoke, my last glimpse of sunshine. I think it is because I want to say goodbye. But instead I see a figure, hurrying towards me. And she is not like the others. She sees me. Is looking straight at me.

Charlie pushes her way through the crowded smokers. And I hang there, like I am frozen. She knows. I don't know how it is possible that she could know. But she knows. I see it in her face, eyes wide, frightened, jaw set, even in the movement of her hands, like she is reaching for me, like if she can just get to me in time, then she can stop me.

I turn, breaking into a run. I don't know why. I could just shoot her. But for some reason the thought never occurs to me, and so instead I run, because there are things that I must do before the end.

They are all looking at me now. They stare at this crazy man running through the hospital. Suddenly they all see me, give me a wide berth, which suits me fine. I make for the stairs. Can hear Charlie's voice at my back, calling me.

Wonder what the hell she is thinking. That she thinks she is capable of stopping me on her own.

I am almost there, am reaching for the stair doors, when they swing open.

Imogen steps into my path. She doesn't see me. Is looking down at a phone in her hand, is texting, sunlight catching on her red hair. I sway. Because she looks so much like the other one. The image of her dances in front of me, shifting like a hologram, so that now I see her, now I don't. Then, all of a sudden, she stops shifting, the figure coalescing so that my brain can make sense of what my eyes are seeing, and I feel a breathtaking sense of familiarity. I realise then what it is that I have done.

Now everything I thought I knew is gone. Because I've already killed her once today.

My fingers move. They move without me, travel to the bag that is slung across my shoulder, reach in for the gun. Pull it free.

Time has stopped now.

I hear a voice behind me shout a warning, dimly recognise it as Charlie. Hear, from everywhere else it seems, a scream, an intake of breath that sucks all of the air from the room. And now the woman before me looks up, pulls her gaze from her phone. Sees me. Sees the gun. And I can see it - the moment of her death - reflected right there in her eyes, as she realises what I am about to do. She opens her mouth, like she thinks that it can make a difference.

'I . . . your text. I didn't see—'

But I have stopped listening. I know that I do not want to hear what she has to say.

I pull the trigger.

*Charlie: Monday 25 August, 11.30 p.m.  
Six days before the shooting*

THEY MOVE WITH care, black figures dipping in and out of the flashing blue disco-ball lights. The police cars are parked at odd angles, as if some giant wave has picked them up, thrown them there, so that now they lie prostrate like fish on the sand. I listen, straining against the distant thrum of traffic, the odd car still making its way down the eastbound carriageway, the lights looming, slowing as the drivers ease off the accelerator. It seems that I can see the drivers craning their necks, peering at the scene before them. Just a little something to break up a dark journey. I can just about pick up the distant thrum of conversation from the police officers on the ground, the outer edges of it, its rhythm. Then someone laughs, a high-frequency jab that shatters the quiet night air. The movement of the figures changes then, a flock of birds, heads turning in unison towards a source of alarm, and the laughter stops, the laugher swinging his head, looking up to where I stand, watching. He stares at me for a minute, then looks down, shaking his head.

I tuck my hands into my jacket pockets, lean back against the car. It's cooler now, a breeze springing up across the sea, whipping my skirt around my bare legs, sweeping across Swansea Bay after another long, corpulently hot day. They are already calling this 'The Year of the Heatwave', are lining it up alongside the years of the more traditional

British summer rain, proof positive of global warming, our fast-approaching doom. The temperatures began to climb more than a fortnight ago, at first sitting snug at a pleasing twenty-three degrees, before shooting upwards, and upwards. Yesterday it was thirty-two degrees, today thirty. The dense heat has settled over the city, a looming dome, pushing back the sea air until it seems that nothing is moving, that when one breathes, one pulls in nothing but hot dustiness. Tonight, for a change, the sea air is winning. I turn my face to the breeze, can taste the salt in it. It tugs at my hair, whipping it around my face, the strands dancing in front of my eyes. I brush my hair back impatiently, wish I had thought to bring a band. I'm rarely that organised, unfortunately.

The gathered police officers have carried on their conversation, albeit in a lower tone. It sounds like bees, buzzing just at the limits of my hearing. I should go home. I know I'm not supposed to be here. They know I'm not supposed to be here. But I stay, leaning against the car while my hair tangles in front of my face, because even standing here in the midsummer heat on the side of the M4 is better than going home. Especially tonight. I lean forward, peer down the bank. Can just about make out the rough shape of the body from here, a once-human form, roughly covered with a sheet. Spare a moment to wonder at the grotesqueness of my life; that this, with its death and its blue flashing lights, could come as a relief, a way to forget this day and this date.

One of the figures stands a little away from the others. I can't see him properly, not well enough to make out his features. But I can see the way his back is curved, that there is a strange up-down motion in his shoulders, and I know that he is trying not to vomit. I wonder if he is new. If this is the first dead body that he has seen. Another figure detaches itself from the pack, walks along the grassy embankment that runs beside the now-closed motorway.

Stands beside him. I strain to listen, wondering what he will say, if he will offer words of comfort or – I roll my eyes, even though there is no one there to see – if he will take the piss.

I've worked with the police for a long time. My money is on the latter.

They stand like that for a moment, then the second figure claps the newbie on the back, turns into the light. Looks up at me, his face briefly illuminated by the swirling lights. I wave. I swear I can hear the sigh from here. He turns, begins the long trek up the steep bank to see me.

I shouldn't be here. Lydia, my editor at the *Swansea Times*, would like it, but I have learned over the years that the acceptabilities of human behaviour should rarely be judged based on the approval of one's editor. Had I been a normal person, I would be at home now, surrounded by a loving family, a couple of . . . I don't know – cats, maybe? I prefer cats to dogs. They are more self-sufficient. And I appreciate their disdain, the way they are able to look at people in a manner I have only dreamed of. Had I been a normal person, the last place I would want to be is standing above the motorway watching as the police peel a body from the tarmac. But then I have never pretended to be normal.

My mother wanted me to stay. I'd love to think that was because she had remembered, that she worried about me going home to an empty flat on today of all days, but that thought doesn't sit easily, doesn't gel with my stiff-upper-lip mother, who flits through life, never dwelling on its darkest passages. I had gone for our weekly dinner, just her, me and Ed – my old stepdad, as he keeps jokingly referring to himself. At least, I hope he's joking. My mother had cooked a leg of lamb, some nice spring veg, which we ate in silence – distantly moored boats in a too-big harbour. She never mentioned the date, and so neither did I. Just ate my lamb and kept my mouth shut, like a good little girl.

‘I’ve made up the spare bed for you. Why don’t you stay? It would be like old times,’ my mother had said as I pulled my jacket on, collected my keys.

I didn’t answer for a minute, pretended to be struggling with the strap of my handbag. Wondered briefly which old times she was referring to, and why the hell she would think I would long for their return. ‘I should go home. I have to be in the newsroom early in the morning.’

She had nodded, grace in defeat. Has never really recovered from the shock of her daughter choosing journalism as a career, a high-flying job at the *Swansea Times*, instead of something stable, respectable. Accountancy perhaps. Sometimes I can hear her thinking the word ‘hack’, even though it is not something she would ever say. My mother is above such language. She leaned in, standing in their Anaglyptaed hallway, gave me the merest facsimile of a kiss, her cheek, doughy with pressed powder, lightly touching mine. Her perfume lapped against me, the same one that she has worn for ever, sweet and cloying, the smell of my childhood bedroom and stuffed animals and a funeral home with a bright mahogany coffin.

I had been driving along the A-road, still a good ten minutes from home. Was driving absurdly slowly, because better here, in this car, with the illusion of forward motion, than at home in my sparkingly empty flat where all life has ground to a halt, caught on the thorn of this day – the anniversary of my father’s death. Then I had seen the lights, had offered up a quick prayer to the gods of crime-reporting, had pulled in, movements clumsy in my haste.

The figure pulls himself up the last few steps with an effort. ‘Charlotte Solomon, do you ever sleep?’ Del has put on weight since we were in school together, has rounded out across the belly and the jowls. He is sweating with the climb, beads catching in the street light, rolling down the deep notches that have begun to form along the sides of his

nose, down to his mouth. I think that if I listen hard enough I will hear the plop as they fall onto his fluorescent jacket.

‘Rarely. How are you, Del?’

His name isn’t Del. It’s Peter. But his father was a market trader and we went to a school more known for its television-viewing than its creativity. Hence, Del-boy.

He grins down at me, pulling at the collar of his shirt. ‘Fucking roasting. You see that climb?’

I glance down the bank towards the motorway and the body, back up at him. ‘Mmm. Steep.’ I move my stance slightly, tucking in behind him so that he blocks the breeze. There are often advantages to being five-foot-two. Wind cover not least amongst them. ‘So . . . wife okay?’

‘Yeah.’ He won’t look at me, because he figures that if he doesn’t look at me, then he won’t crack. ‘Due any day now. Like living with a bloody bear.’

‘I’m sure she feels so sorry for you, Del. I’m sure she’ll be telling you that, as she is giving birth to your child.’

‘Yeah, well . . . you know you’re not supposed to be here? Right?’

Yes.

‘No? I was just taking some air. Why shouldn’t I be here?’ I peer down the bank again. ‘Something going on? Besides, isn’t this Traffic’s patch? What’s a uniform sergeant like you doing here?’

Del looks at me, shakes his head. ‘You’re a pain in the arse, Charlie.’ Stuffs his hands in his pockets, hunching down low like he’s cold, even though I can still see the sweat coursing off him. ‘There’s a vacancy come up in Traffic. I’m thinking of transferring over. You know, fast cars and all that jazz. Of course, I pick tonight for my ride-along.’ He looks back down the bank, voice dropping. ‘Bloody typical. Look, you know I can’t talk.’

‘I know.’

‘The thing is . . . Fuck!’

That's when I realise that there are tears mixed in with the sweat.

'Shit, Del. I'm sorry.' I reach out a hand, awkwardly pat him on his luminous arm, wish like hell I had just got in the damn car. 'Ah . . . You, ah, you okay?'

Don't tell me, don't tell me.

He shakes his head, brushing a hand across his eyes, up over his forehead. 'God, it's hot.'

I nod, happy to pretend right along with him.

'I . . .'

 He glances around him. I feel absurdly like I'm in some low-budget film noir. 'I'm not telling you this. Okay?'

'Okay.'

'I mean . . . I'm not - it's not cos you're a reporter. It's just, y'know, cos you knew her an' all.'

My stomach flips and suddenly I'm sixteen again, and the phone is ringing, cutting through the early-morning darkness, and I am trying not to fall down as I hear the words - Your father is dead - and my world unravels around me. I cough, clear my throat. 'Who, Del?'

He looks down the bank, not at me, voice dropping to an almost-whisper. 'It's Emily. Emily Wilson?'

I stare up at him, take a step back, trying to reorient myself. 'You're kidding?'

Del shakes his head. 'Wish I was.'

We grew up on a narrow street - Emily raised four doors down from me, the houses bunched together like they are sheltering from some incoming storm. In the summer, the trees that line one side take over, drooping heavy branches over the skinny road, so that it seems like you are running through a tunnel. In the winter, the leaves die back and you can see the sea. Just about. It is a street built for a different time, before every family had two cars, satellite TV and conservatories. Our childhood games revolved around the cars, the way they parked, tilted like a row of drunken men, half on the pavement, half off. We would play hide-and-seek behind them, would kick footballs, waiting to see how long

before an irate owner came out to scold us. Emily wasn't a huge fan of that game.

I don't remember a time when I didn't know Emily Wilson. Can bring to mind now a yellowing photo of her in a dungaree dress, her hair in bunches, clapping as I blow out candles on a birthday cake shaped like a donkey. You could say that we were friends, but that as a word seems incomplete. She was a part of my childhood, like the trees or the iron railings that lined our road at its steeper excesses, the ones that we would tumble over - in our minds the Olympic gymnasts of the future. She was always there.

I stand there, shivering now, follow Del's gaze down towards the blue lights and the tarmac. 'Is she okay?'

The words have left my mouth before I realise that it's a stupid question. That I haven't seen an ambulance. That there is nothing here but death.

Del shakes his head.

I stare down at the motorway. This really is a shit day. 'Do you know . . .?'

'An accident. Driver said she came from nowhere.' Del shrugged, trying to be a policeman again instead of a kid who has just seen his classmate dead. 'These things. They happen, I guess.'

We both stand there, nodding, even though I'm not sure what it is that we are agreeing to.

'You seen her recently?'

I shrug. 'I don't know, maybe like a year ago. We . . . we grew apart.' When my father died and my world fell apart and the For Sale sign went up, and suddenly my mother and I are whisking away, living in Mumbles, because, darling, that's where everyone wants to live, and the teenage me screeching that I don't give a shit where everyone wants to live, that it's not what I want. But it had all changed anyway, and there was no choice, and so we left. I didn't see Emily much after that.

Del isn't looking at me. He is staring out across the dancing blue lights. 'I bumped into her, couple of months back. She's a nurse.' Caught himself, looking back down at where her body lies. 'Was a nurse. She was taking care of that Lowe boy. You know, the one from the shooting?'

It feels like the breeze has chilled, and I start, look at him. My mouth opens, but before the words can come out, a sound breaks out, an inappropriate musical tone, breaking into the night air. We both turn, staring down at the body - Emily - watch as figures move towards it, towards Emily's ringing mobile phone. Then, before they can reach it, it stops, and the silence returns, deeper now.

I shake my head, trying to regain my train of thought. But it is gone, lost in the thought that someone is calling Emily, that she will never answer again.

'The driver . . .?' I ask.

'Gutted. Couldn't do anything about it. Didn't see her till it was too late.'

I nod. Thinking.

'You know,' Del glances back at me, 'I'd get into a lot of trouble . . .'

'I'll sit on the name, Del. Until its official release.'

He studies me. 'Yeah?'

'Yes.' I cross my arms, fix him with a look. 'I wouldn't burn you, you know that.'

Del studies me for a moment. 'You still single?'

I grin. 'Why Del, are you flirting with me?'

He pulls a face. 'Yeah, cos that's what I need. Another bloody woman on my plate. No, I'm just saying . . . I could set you up.'

'Yeah, whatever.'

'No, seriously. That guy down there,' he points down towards the murky figures who knot around the police cars, 'he's single. Nice guy.'

'You mean the one who's up-chucking on the hard shoulder?'

He winks at me. 'That's the one.'

I laugh. 'Thanks, Del. I think I'm okay.'

'Well, if you're sure . . .'

I watch the figures. I can see heads glancing up towards us, know I have to tell him to leave because soon he'll be in trouble. I pause for a moment. 'Del?'

'Yeah?'

'What shoes was Emily wearing?'

Del gives me a long look. 'Seriously, Charlie. My wife's a thousand months pregnant. That should tell you that I'm not gay.'

'Ha-ha. Rapier wit. Just . . . was she wearing heels?'

'I . . . yeah . . . I had to collect one from . . . Yeah, she was.'

I look. From left to right. Down the precipitously steep bank. 'Then let me ask you this. How the hell did she get there?'

He frowns. 'How do you mean?'

I flick my fingers along the westbound carriageway. 'It's three miles to the nearest exit.' Back along the eastbound. 'Two that way.' Down towards the embankment. 'This is pretty steep all the way along. So how the hell did she get here? I mean, say she did walk. It would have taken her a while. You would have had reports of someone walking along the M4.'

Del nods, thoughtful.

I fold my arms across my chest, suddenly cold. 'Unless, she was dropped off here. Unless someone left her.'

*Aden: Monday 25 August, 11.30 p.m.  
Six days before the shooting*

ADEN TRIED NOT to breathe. Kept his tread soft, heavy boots crunching lightly against fallen leaves, ground that had not seen rain in far too long. A breath of air, the first of a stiflingly hot day, wound its way through the darkened trees, making the leaves whisper and dance. Beads of sweat worked their way from beneath his ballistic helmet, trickling down, along the sides of his face. The sub-machine gun heavy in his hands.

He could see the lights in the distance, the orange glow of the hospital car park bisected by the black of trees. Could just about make out the boxy outline of the hospital building, low-slung, the occasional splotch of white light from unshielded windows. The odd flutter of movement as dark figures passed before the light. Aden thought about how easy it would be to shoot them. Pick a spot, somewhere in between the trees, somewhere with nice clear sight-lines, drop to one knee, steady, steady, making sure that your target – the splotch of light, the figure within – sat central within your scope. Squeeze the trigger. He could feel it, the movement of the cold metal, the recoil, the boom that seems to come from far away. And then, seemingly all at once, the shattering of glass, the figure folding into itself, vanishing from the light.

Two nights in a row, the same call to the control room. Man with a gun seen at Mount Pleasant Hospital. They had

been kitting up, still in the station when the orders had come through, Aden just about ready to head out, Rhys running in, late as usual, having to throw his kit together just so they could make it out of the door. Tonight, thought Aden. Tonight he would find him. Aden gathered his breathing, adjusted his grip, slick with sweat now, his gaze playing against the dark shapes of the trees, the shadows that seemed to form an army. Listened.

There were footsteps behind him. And for a second, just a second, Aden's heart stopped. It was as if he had forgotten about Rhys; the darkness and the shadows and the chattering leaves had convinced him that he was out here all alone. He paused in his movement, spared a glance back over his shoulder at where the younger man stood, his weapon held high and level, ballistic helmet pulled low over his brow. Rhys's face was set, lips pulled so tight that they seemed to vanish, his gaze sweeping across the trees.

It was the boy's second week back. Boy. Rhys Malloy was hardly a boy. Not really. Maybe ten years younger than Aden's thirty-four. But Rhys seemed like a boy. With his wide eyes, olive skin, the kind of looks that the ladies went nuts for. Aden knew this - they told him. The female officers he shared coffee breaks with, went through training with, bumped into in the gym. They all had the same question. When's that hottie Rhys coming back?

Aden caught the younger man's gaze, held it. Okay? A silent nod.

Aden turned, shifted his grip on the G36. Flicked the narrow torch that he carried at the trees. Where are you? Where are you, you bastard?

Aden measured his step, keeping his tread cautious on the uneven ground. The man had been seen running through the hospital corridors, had vanished before security could get there (and for this Aden offered up a silent prayer of thanks), out through the sliding doors, the puddled light of the car park. Into the woods. Was he waiting? A dark figure

sitting up against the shadow of a tree, watching their torchlight dancing towards him, his weapon raised, his finger on the trigger. Aden's heart thudded in his ears, and he shook his head slightly. Calm down. Concentrate. Then something else, a memory of rain and blood, breaking through the way it always did. Aden gritted his teeth, forcing his breathing to slow. Not now.

Then Aden heard a sound, one that seemed to come from nowhere. It filled the air, getting louder and louder. A bright beam of light swept through the trees, breaking up the darkness. The trees looked like sheepish adults caught in a game of musical statues. Tuk-a-tuk-a-tuk-a-tuk-a. Aden looked up, shielding his eyes from the downdraught of the helicopter as it swept overhead. The light marching from left to right, right to left.

This would be it. If he was in there, if he was hiding, this is when he would run, flushed out by the chase. Aden felt his finger hard against the trigger, scanning the treeline. Waiting. Aden tried not to think about the last time, with its driving rain and the darkness that was so absolute, trying not to think about the blood and whether the trigger would move. It was just like training. That was all.

Then, after minutes or hours, a crackle of static, the radio sparking to life.

'Yeah, Whisky Tango Three Eight, we got nothing up here. No visual. No heat signatures. Your boy's rabbited.'

Again.

Aden stopped, sighed. He lowered his weapon, thumbed the radio. 'Okay, roger that, Hotel Lima Nine Nine. Thanks for the help, guys.'

'Any time.' Then the helicopter lifted, the wind dissipating as it climbed, and suddenly the light was gone.

'Shit!' Aden could feel the adrenaline roller coaster begin to enter its downward slide - so many chemicals, nowhere to go. He kicked at a fallen branch, a lacklustre effort that made him feel no better.

Rhys had lowered the G36, pushed his helmet back. 'Thought we'd get him tonight.' He looked to Aden like a little boy home from school.

Aden stood, eyes roaming across the darkness, the trees that seemed now to be crowding in, closer than they had been before. Where are you, you little bugger? He let his gaze run from the brightness of the car park, hugging the side of the building, closer, closer, turned, peering through the trees. There were more lights through there. Street lights, little orange dips of colour.

'That's Mullins Road, right?'

Rhys looked, gaze following Aden's nod. 'Yeah. But the other ARV has swept it.'

'Maybe he's leaving a car there. Ducking through the woods, out that way and into a car,' said Aden.

'Maybe,' shrugged Rhys. 'There's no CCTV there, though.'

Aden glanced back at him. 'There's not?'

Rhys shook his head. 'I worked a couple of cases there when I was in uniform. Residents were always complaining that the cameras hadn't worked in years. And you know how that goes.' He sighed, shifted the weight of the weapon. 'You want to head back?'

Aden stood, staring through the trees at the street lights beyond. 'Let's just pop into the hospital for a second.' He could see Rhys's expression, see his fight between deference and confusion, and Aden grinned. 'You're allowed to say it, you know.'

'Um, okay. Why? Aren't CID going to do the follow-up now?'

Aden nodded. 'Yeah. But I'm curious. Let's just go and have a look.'

The light of the lobby was jarring after the darkness. It was quiet, few people moving about this late at night. But Tony Waterton stood at the centre of it, G36 held loose in his hands, his face set like he was ready for war. He looked at them. 'Nothing?'