
THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLER
SHARON BOLTON
'Spine-tingling suspense'
LISA GARDNER
BLOOD HARVEST
She's been watching us for a while now . . .

About the Book

Sometimes I wish that she'd just leave me in peace.

NOW YOU SEE HER . . . Gillian is haunted by the disappearance of her little girl two years ago. A devastating fire burned down their home, but she remains convinced her daughter survived.

NOW YOU DON'T . . . Ten-year-old Tom lives by the town's neglected churchyard. Is he the only one who sees the strange, solitary child playing there? And what is she trying to tell him?

NOW YOU *RUN . . .* There's a new vicar in town – Harry – and he's meeting the locals. But menacing events suggest he isn't welcome. What terrible secret is this town hiding?

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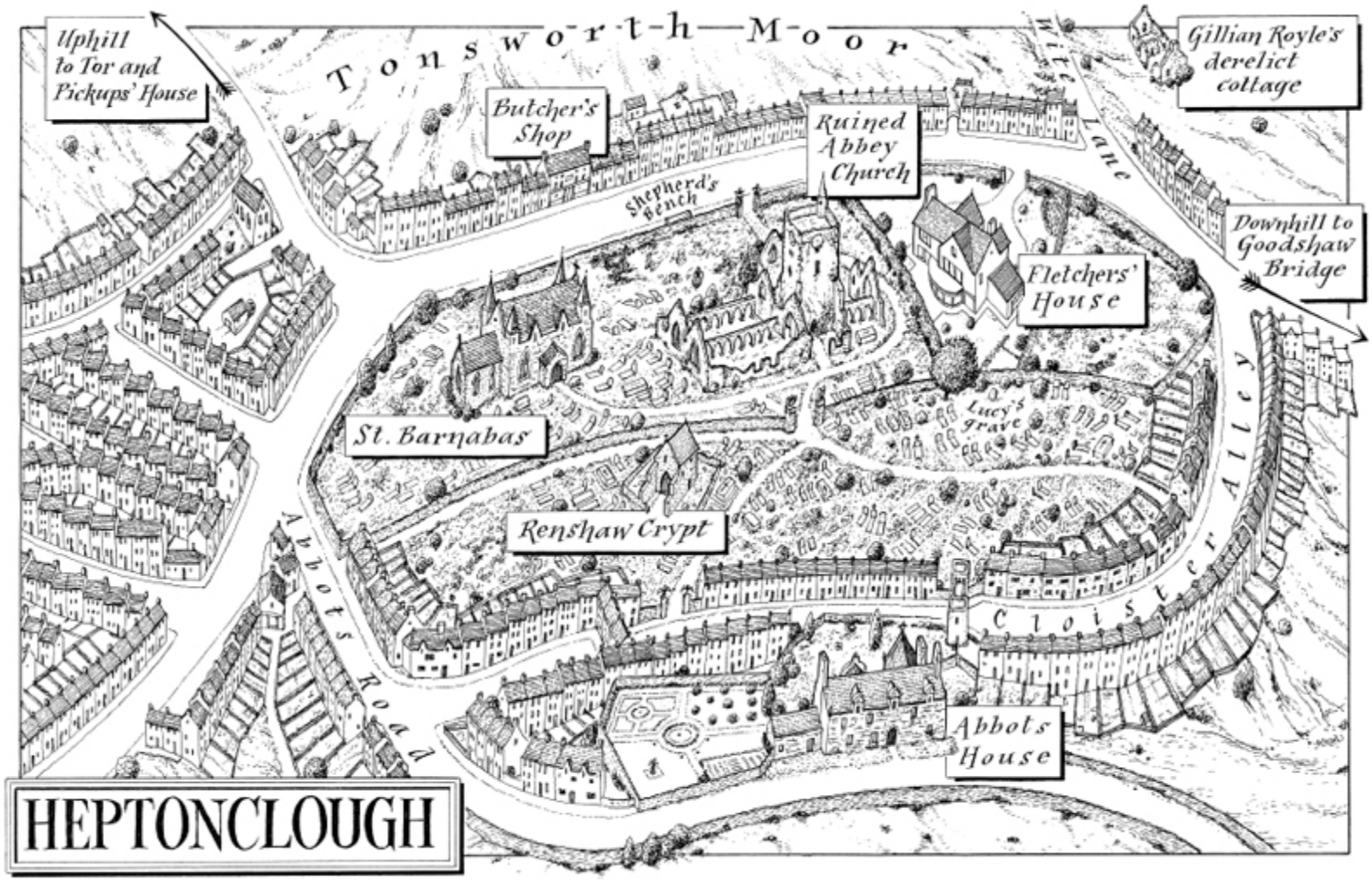
Blood Harvest

Sharon Bolton

For the Coopers, who built their big, shiny new house on the crest of a moor . . .

‘Battle not with monsters, lest ye become a monster, and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.’

Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher (1844–1900)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HEPTONCLOUGH

‘She’s been watching us for a while now.’

‘Go on, Tom.’

‘Sometimes it’s like she’s always there, behind a pile of stones, in the shadow at the bottom of the tower, under one of the old graves. She’s good at hiding.’

‘She must be.’

‘Sometimes she gets very close, before you have any idea. You’ll be thinking about something else when one of her voices jumps out at you and, for a second, she catches you out. She really makes you think it’s your brother, or your mum, hiding round the corner.’

‘Then you realize it’s not?’

‘No, it’s not. It’s her. The girl with the voices. But the minute you turn your head, she’s gone. If you’re really quick you might catch a glimpse of her. Usually, though, there’s nothing there, everything’s just as it was, except . . .’

‘Except what?’

‘Except now, it’s like the world’s keeping a secret. And there’s that feeling in the pit of your stomach, the one that says, she’s here again. She’s watching.’

Prologue

3 November

It had happened, then; what only hindsight could have told him he'd been dreading. It was almost a relief, in a way, knowing the worst was over, that he didn't have to pretend any more. Maybe now he could stop acting like this was an ordinary town, that these were normal people. Harry took a deep breath, and learned that death smells of drains, of damp soil and of heavy-duty plastic.

The skull, less than six feet away, looked tiny. As though if he held it in his palm, his fingers might almost close around it. Almost worse than the skull was the hand. It lay half hidden in the mud, its bones barely held together by connective tissue, as though trying to crawl out of the ground. The strong artificial light flickered like a strobe and, for a second, the hand seemed to be moving.

On the plastic sheet above Harry's head the rain sounded like gunfire. The wind so high on the moors was close to gale force and the makeshift walls of the police tent couldn't hope to hold it back completely. When he'd parked his car, not three minutes earlier, it had been 3.17 a.m. Night didn't get any darker than this. Harry realized he'd closed his eyes.

Detective Chief Superintendent Rushton's hand was still on his arm, although the two of them had reached the edge of the inner cordon. They wouldn't be allowed any further. Six other people were in the tent with them, all wearing the same white, hooded overalls and wellington boots that Harry and Rushton had just put on.

Harry could feel himself shaking. His eyes still closed, he could hear the steady, insistent drumbeat of rain on the roof of the tent. He could still see that hand. Feeling himself sway, he opened his eyes and almost overbalanced.

‘Back a bit, Harry,’ said Rushton. ‘Stay on the mat, please.’ Harry did what he was told. His body seemed to have grown too big for itself; the borrowed boots were impossibly tight, his clothes were clinging, the bones in his head felt too thin. The sound of the wind and the rain went on, like the soundtrack of a cheap movie. Too much light, too much noise, for the middle of the night.

The skull had rolled away from its torso. Harry could see a ribcage, so small, still wearing clothes, tiny buttons gleaming under the lights. ‘Where are the others?’ he asked.

DCS Rushton inclined his head and then guided him across the aluminium chequer plating that had been laid like stepping-stones over the mud. They were following the line of the church wall. ‘Mind where you go, lad,’ Rushton said. ‘Whole area’s a bloody mess. There, can you see?’

They stopped at the far edge of the inner cordon. The second corpse was still intact, but looked no bigger than the first. It lay face-down in the mud. One tiny wellington boot covered its left foot.

‘The third one’s by the wall,’ said Rushton. ‘Hard to see, half-hidden by the stones.’

‘Another child?’ asked Harry. Loose PVC flaps on the tent were banging in the wind and he had to half-shout to make himself heard.

‘Looks like it,’ agreed Rushton. His glasses were speckled with rain. He hadn’t wiped them since entering the tent. Maybe he was grateful not to see too clearly. ‘You can see where the wall came down?’ he went on.

Harry nodded. A length of about ten feet of the stone wall that formed the boundary between the Fletcher property and the churchyard had collapsed and the earth it had been holding back had tumbled like a small landslide into the

garden. An old yew tree had fallen with the wall. In the harsh artificial light it reminded him of a woman's trailing hair.

'When it collapsed, the graves on the churchyard side were disturbed,' Rushton was saying. 'One in particular, a child's grave. A lass called Lucy Pickup. Our problem is, the plans we have suggest the child was alone in the grave. It was freshly dug for her ten years ago.'

'I'm aware of it,' said Harry. 'But then . . .' He turned back to the scene in front of him.

'Well, now you see our problem,' said Rushton. 'If little Lucy was buried alone, who are the other two?'

'Can I have a moment with them?' Harry asked.

Rushton's eyes narrowed. He looked from the tiny figures to Harry and back again.

'This is sacred ground,' said Harry, almost to himself.

Rushton stepped away from him. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he called. 'A minute's silence, please, for the vicar.' The officers around the site looked up. One opened his mouth to argue but stopped at the look on Brian Rushton's face. Muttering thanks, Harry stepped forward, closer to the cordoned area, until a hand on his arm told him he had to stop. The skull of the corpse closest to him had been very badly damaged. Almost a third of it seemed to be missing. He remembered hearing about how Lucy Pickup had died. He took a deep breath, aware that everyone around him was motionless. Several were watching him, others had bowed their heads. He raised his right hand and began to make the sign of the cross. Up, down, to his left. He stopped. Closer to the scene, more directly under the lights, he had a better view of the third corpse. The tiny form was wearing something with an embroidered pattern around the neck: a tiny hedgehog, a rabbit, a duck in a bonnet. Characters from the Beatrix Potter stories.

He started to speak, hardly knowing what he was saying. A short prayer for the souls of the dead, it could have been

anything. He must have finished, the crime-scene people were resuming their work. Rushton patted his arm and led him out of the tent. Harry went without arguing, knowing he was in shock.

Three tiny corpses, tumbled from a grave that should only have contained one. Two unknown children had shared Lucy Pickup's final resting place. Except one of them wasn't unknown, not to him anyway. The child in the Beatrix Potter pyjamas. He knew who she was.

Part One

Waning Moon

1

4 September (nine weeks earlier)

THE FLETCHER FAMILY built their big, shiny new house on the crest of the moor, in a town that time seemed to have left to mind its own business. They built on a modest-sized plot that the diocese, desperate for cash, needed to get rid of. They built so close to the two churches – one old, the other very old – that they could almost lean out from the bedroom windows and touch the shell of the ancient tower. And on three sides of their garden they had the quietest neighbours they could hope for, which was ten-year-old Tom Fletcher's favourite joke in those days; because the Fletchers built their new house in the midst of a graveyard. They should have known better, really.

But Tom and his younger brother Joe were so excited in the beginning. Inside their new home they had huge great bedrooms, still smelling of fresh paint. Outside they had the bramble-snared, crumble-stone church grounds, where story-book adventures seemed to be just waiting for them. Inside they had a living room that gleamed with endless shades of yellow, depending on where the sun was in the sky. Outside they had ancient archways that soared to the heavens, dens within ivy that was old and stiff enough to stand up by itself, and grass so long six-year-old Joe seemed drowned by it. Indoors, the house began to absorb the characters of the boys' parents, as fresh colours, wall-paintings and carved animals appeared in every room. Outdoors, Tom and Joe made the churchyard their own.

On the last day of the summer holidays, Tom was lying on the grave of Jackson Reynolds (1875–1945), soaking up the warmth of the old stone. The sky was the colour of his mother's favourite cornflower-blue paint and the sun had been out doing its stuff since early morning. It was a *shiny day*, as Joe liked to say.

Tom wouldn't have been able to say what changed. How he went from perfectly fine, warm and happy, thinking about how old you had to be to try out for Blackburn Rovers to . . . well . . . to not fine. But suddenly, in a second, football didn't seem quite so important. There was nothing wrong, exactly, he just wanted to sit up. See what was nearby. If anyone . . .

Stupid. But he was sitting up all the same, looking round, wondering how Joe had managed to disappear again. Further down the hill, the graveyard stretched the length of a football field, getting steeper as it dropped lower. Below it were a few rows of terraced houses and then more fields. Beyond them, at the bottom of the valley, was the neighbouring town of Goodshaw Bridge where he and Joe were due to resume school on Monday morning. Across the valley and behind, on just about every side, were the moors. Lots and lots of moors.

Tom's dad was fond of saying how much he loved the moors, the wildness, grandeur and sheer unpredictability of the north of England. Tom agreed with his dad, of course he did, he was only ten, but privately he sometimes wondered if countryside that was predictable (he'd looked the word up, he knew what it meant) wouldn't be a bad thing. It seemed to Tom sometimes, though he never liked to say it, that the moors around his new home were a little bit too unpredictable.

He was an idiot, of course, it went without saying.

But somehow, Tom always seemed to be spotting a new lump of rock, a tiny valley that hadn't been there before, a bank of heather or copse of trees that appeared overnight.

Sometimes, when clouds were moving fast in the sky and their shadows were racing across the ground, it seemed to Tom that the moors were rippling, the way water does when there's something beneath the surface; or stirring, like a sleeping monster about to wake up. And just occasionally, when the sun went down across the valley and the darkness was coming, Tom couldn't help thinking that the moors around them had moved closer.

'Tom!' yelled Joe from the other side of the graveyard, and for once Tom really wasn't sorry to hear from him. The stone beneath him had grown cold and there were more clouds overhead.

'Tom!' called Joe again, right in Tom's ear. Jeez, Joe, that was fast. Tom jumped up and turned round. Joe wasn't there.

Around the edge of the churchyard, trees started to shudder. The wind was getting up again and when the wind on the moor really meant business, it could get everywhere, even the sheltered places. In the bushes closest to Tom something moved.

'Joe,' he said, more quietly than he meant to, because he really didn't like the idea that someone, even Joe, was hiding in those bushes, watching him. He sat, staring at the big, shiny-green leaves, waiting for them to move again. They were laurels, tall, old and thick. The wind was definitely getting up, he could hear it now in the tree-tops. The laurels in front of him were still.

It had probably just been a strange echo that had made him think Joe was close. But Tom had that feeling, the ticklish feeling he'd get when someone spotted him doing something he shouldn't. And besides, hadn't he just felt Joe's breath on the back of his neck?

'Joe?' he tried again.

'Joe?' came his own voice back at him. Tom took two steps back, coming up sharp against a headstone. Glancing all

round, double-checking no one was close, he crouched to the ground.

At this level, the foliage on the laurel bushes was thinner. Tom could see several bare branches of the shrub amongst nettles. He could see something else as well, a shape he could barely make out, expect he knew it wasn't vegetation. It looked a little like – if it moved he might get a better look – a large and very dirty human foot.

'Tom, Tom, come and look at this!' called his brother, this time sounding as if he was miles away. Tom didn't wait to be called again, he jumped to his feet and ran in the direction of his brother's voice.

Joe was crouched near the foot of the wall that separated the churchyard from the family's garden. He was looking at a grave that seemed newer than many of those surrounding it. At its foot, facing the headstone, was a stone statue.

'Look, Tom,' Joe was saying, even before his older brother had stopped running. 'It's a little girl. With a dolly.'

Tom bent down. The statue was about a foot high and was of a tiny, chubby girl with curly hair, wearing a party dress. Tom reached out and scratched away some of the moss that was growing over it. The sculptor had given her perfectly carved shoes and, cradled in her arms, a small doll.

'Little girls,' said Joe. 'It's a grave for little girls.

Tom looked up to find that Joe was right – almost. A single word was carved on the headstone. *Lucy*. There could have been more, but any carving below it had been covered in ivy. 'Just one little girl,' he said. 'Lucy.'

Tom reached up and pulled away the ivy that grew over the headstone until he could see dates. Lucy had died ten years ago. She'd been just two years old. *Beloved child of Jennifer and Michael Pickup*, the inscription said. There was nothing else.

'Just Lucy,' Tom repeated. 'Come on, let's go.'

Tom set off back, making his way carefully through long grass, avoiding nettles, pushing aside brambles. Behind

him, he could hear the rustling of grass being disturbed and knew Joe was following. As he climbed the hill, the walls of the abbey ruin came into view.

‘Tom,’ said Joe, in a voice that just didn’t sound right.

Tom stopped walking. He could hear grass moving directly behind him but he didn’t turn round. He just stayed there, staring at the ruined church tower but not really seeing it, wondering instead why he was suddenly so scared of turning round to face his brother.

He turned. He was surrounded by tall stones. Nothing else. Tom discovered his fists were clenched tight. This really wasn’t funny. Then the bushes a few yards away started moving again and there was Joe, jogging through the grass, red in the face and panting, as if he’d been struggling to keep up. He came closer, reached his brother and stopped.

‘What?’ Joe said.

‘I think someone’s following us,’ whispered Tom.

Joe didn’t ask who, or where, or how Tom knew, he just stared back at him. Tom reached out and took his brother’s arm. They were going home and they were doing it now.

Except, no, perhaps they weren’t. On the wall that separated the older part of the church grounds from the graveyard that stretched down the hill, six boys were standing in a line like skittles, watching. Tom could feel his heartbeat starting to speed up. Six boys on the wall; and possibly another one very close by.

The biggest boy was holding a thick, forked twig. Tom didn’t see the missile that came hurtling towards him but he felt the air whistle past his face. Another boy, wearing a distinctive claret and blue football shirt, was taking aim. With quicker reflexes than his older brother, Joe threw himself behind a large headstone. Tom followed just as the second shot went wide.

‘Who are they?’ whispered Joe as another stone went flying overhead.

‘They’re boys from school,’ Tom replied. ‘Two of them are in my class.’

‘What do they want?’ Joe’s pale face had gone whiter than normal.

‘I don’t know,’ said Tom, although he did. One of them wanted to get his own back. The others were just helping out. A rock hit the edge of the headstone and Tom saw dust fly off it. ‘The one in the Burnley shirt is Jake Knowles,’ he admitted.

‘The one you had that fight with?’ said Joe. ‘When you got sent to the headmaster’s office? The one whose dad wanted to get you kicked out of school?’

Tom crouched and leaned forward, hoping the long grass would hide his head as he looked out. Another boy from Tom’s class, Billy Aspin, was pointing at a clump of brambles near the little girl’s grave that Joe had just found. Tom turned back to Joe. ‘They’re not looking,’ he said. ‘We have to move quick. Follow me.’

Joe was right behind as Tom shot forward, heading for a great, upright tomb, one of the largest on the hill. They made it. Stones came whistling through the air but Tom and Joe were safe behind the huge stone structure, which had iron railings around the outside. There was an iron gate too and, beyond it, a wooden door that led inside. A family mausoleum, their father had said, probably quite large inside, tunnelled into the hillside, with lots of ledges for generations of coffins to be placed on.

‘They’ve split up,’ came a shout from the wall. ‘You two, come with me!’

Tom and Joe looked at each other. If they’d split up, why were they still close enough for Tom to feel Joe’s breath on his face?

‘They’re knob-heads,’ said Joe.

Tom leaned out from behind the crypt. Three of the boys were walking along the wall towards Lucy Pickup’s grave. The other three were still staring in their direction.

‘What’s that noise?’ said Joe.

‘Wind?’ suggested Tom, without bothering to listen. It was a pretty safe guess.

‘It’s not wind. It’s music.’

Joe was right. Definitely music, low, with a steady rhythm, a man’s deep voice singing. The knob-heads had heard it too. One of them jumped down and ran towards the road. Then the rest followed. The music was getting louder and Tom could hear a car engine.

It was John Lee Hooker. His dad had several of his CDs and played them – very loud – when their mother was out. Someone was driving up the hill, playing John Lee Hooker on his car stereo, and this was the time to move. Tom stepped sideways, away from the shelter of the mausoleum.

Only Jake Knowles was still in sight. He looked round and saw Tom, who didn’t hide this time. Both boys knew the game was up. Except . . .

‘He’s got your baseball bat,’ said Joe, who’d followed Tom into the open. ‘What’s he doing?’

Jake had got Tom’s bat and his ball too, a large, very heavy red ball that Tom had been warned on pain of a prolonged and tortuous death (which was how his mum talked when she was serious) not to play with anywhere near buildings, especially buildings with windows and was she making herself clear? Tom and Joe had been practising catches earlier by the church. They’d left both bat and ball near the wall and now Knowles had them.

‘He’s nicking them,’ said Joe. ‘We can call the police.’

‘I don’t think so,’ said Tom, as Jake turned away and faced the church. Tom watched Jake toss the ball gently into the air. Then he swung the bat hard. The ball sailed into the air and through the huge stained-glass window at the side of the church. A blue pane shattered as the car engine switched off, the music died and Jake fled after his friends.

‘Why did he do that?’ said Joe. ‘He broke a window. He’ll get murdered.’

‘No, he won’t,’ said Tom. ‘We will.’

Joe stared at his brother for a second, then he got it. He may have been only six and annoying as hell, but he was no knob-head.

‘That’s not fair.’ Joe’s little face had screwed up in outrage. ‘We’ll tell.’

‘They won’t believe us,’ said Tom. Six weeks in his new school: three detentions, two trips to the headmaster’s office, any number of serious bollockings from his class teacher and no one ever believed him. Why would they, when Jake Knowles had half the class on his side, jumping up and down in their seats they were so eager to back him up. Even the ones who didn’t seem to be Jake’s mates were too scared of him and his gang to say anything. Six weeks of getting the blame for everything Jake Knowles started. Maybe he was the knob-head.

He took hold of Joe’s hand and the boys ran as fast as they could through the long grass. Tom climbed the wall, looked all round the churchyard, and then bent down to pull up Joe. Jake and the other boys were nowhere in sight but there were a hundred hiding places around the ruins of the old church.

An old sports car was parked just by the church gate, pale blue with lots of silver trim. The soft roof had been folded back over the boot. A man was leaning across the passenger seat and fumbling in the glove compartment. He found what he was looking for and straightened up. He looked about Tom’s dad’s age, around thirty-four or thirty-five, taller than Tom’s dad, but thinner.

Beckoning Joe to follow, Tom picked up the baseball bat (no point leaving evidence in plain sight) and ran until they could scramble into their favourite hiding place. They’d discovered it shortly after moving in: a huge rectangular stone table of a grave, supported on four stone pillars. The grass around it grew long, and once the boys had crawled underneath they were completely hidden from view.

The sports-car driver opened the car door and climbed out. As he turned towards the church, the boys could see that his hair was the same colour as their mother's (strawberry blonde, not ginger), and curly like their mum's, but his was cut short. He was wearing kneelength shorts, a white T-shirt and red Crocs. He walked across the road and into the churchyard. Once inside, he stopped on the path and looked behind him, then span slowly on the spot, taking in the cobbled streets, the terraced houses, both churches, the moors behind and beyond.

'He's not been here before,' whispered Joe.

Tom nodded. The stranger walked past the boys and reached the main door of the church. He took a key from his pocket. A second later the door swung open and he walked inside. Just as Jake Knowles appeared at the entrance to the churchyard. Tom stood up and looked round. Billy Aspin was behind them. As they watched, the other members of the gang appeared from behind gravestones, clambering over the wall. The brothers were surrounded.

2

‘IT HAD BEEN burning for three hours before they Managed to put it out. And they said the emperatures inside, at the point of – I can’t remember what they said . . .’

‘Origin?’ suggested Evi.

The girl sitting opposite nodded. ‘Yes, that’s it,’ she said. ‘The point of origin. They said it would have been like a furnace. And her bedroom was right above it. They couldn’t get anywhere near the house, let alone upstairs, and then the ceiling collapsed. By the time they managed to get it cooled down enough, they couldn’t find her.’

‘No trace at all?’

Gillian shook her head. ‘No, nothing,’ she said. ‘She was so tiny, you see. Such tiny soft bones.’

Gillian’s breathing was speeding up again. ‘I read somewhere that it’s unusual, but not unheard of,’ she went on, ‘for people to . . . to disappear completely. The fire just burns them up.’ The girl was beginning to gulp at the air around her.

Evi pushed herself upright in her chair and the pain in her left leg responded immediately. ‘Gillian, it’s OK,’ she said. ‘Get your breath back. Just take it steady.’

Gillian put her hands on her knees and dropped her head as Evi concentrated on getting her own breathing under control, on focusing on something other than the pain in her leg. The wall clock told her they were fifteen minutes into the consultation.

Her new patient, Gillian Royle, was unemployed, divorced and alcoholic. She was just twenty-six. The GP’s referral letter had talked about ‘prolonged and abnormal grief’

following the death, three years earlier, of her twenty-seven-month-old daughter in a house fire. According to the GP, Gillian had severe depression, suicidal thoughts and a history of self-harm. He'd have referred her sooner, he'd explained, but had only just been made aware of her case by a local social worker. This was her first appointment with Evi.

Gillian's hair trailed almost to the floor. It had been highlighted once, but now, above the old blonde streaks, it was an unwashed mouse-brown. Gradually, the rise and fall of the girl's shoulders began to slow down. After a moment she reached up to push her hair back. Her face reappeared. 'I'm sorry,' she began, like a child who'd been caught misbehaving.

Evi shook her head. 'You mustn't be,' she said. 'What you're feeling is very normal. Do you often have difficulty breathing?'

Gillian nodded.

'It's completely normal,' Evi repeated. 'People who are suffering immense grief often experience breathlessness. They suddenly start to feel anxious, even afraid, for no apparent reason and then they struggle to get their breath. Does that sound familiar at all?'

Gillian nodded again. She was still panting, as if she'd just run a race and had narrowly lost.

'Do you have any mementoes of your daughter?' asked Evi.

Gillian reached to the small table at her side and pulled another tissue from the box. She hadn't cried yet but had been continually pressing them against her face and twisting them round in her scrawny fingers. Tiny twists of thin paper littered the carpet.

'The firemen found a toy,' she said. 'A pink rabbit. It should have been in her cot but it had fallen down behind the sofa. I suppose I should be glad it did, but I can't help thinking that she had to go through all that and she didn't

even have Pink Rabbit wi—' Gillian's head fell forward again and her body started to shudder. Both hands, still clasping flimsy peach-coloured paper, were pressed hard against her mouth.

'Did it make it harder for you?' asked Evi. 'That they didn't find Hayley's body?'

Gillian raised her head and Evi could see a darker gleam in her eyes, a harder edge around the lines of her face. There was a lot of anger in there as well, struggling with grief to get the upper hand. 'Pete said it was a good thing,' she said, 'that they couldn't find her.'

'What do you think?' asked Evi.

'I think it would have been better to have found her,' Gillian shot back. 'Because then I'd have known for sure. I would have had to accept it.'

'Accept that it was real?' asked Evi.

'Yes,' agreed Gillian. 'Because I couldn't. I just couldn't take it in, couldn't believe she was really dead. Do you know what I did?'

Evi allowed her head to shake gently from side to side. 'No,' she said, 'tell me what you did.'

'I went out looking for her, on the moors,' replied Gillian. 'I thought, because they hadn't found her, that there must be some mistake. That she'd got out somehow. I thought maybe Barry, the babysitter, had managed to get her out and put her in the garden before the smoke got too much for him, and that she'd just wandered off.'

Gillian's eyes were pleading with Evi, begging her to agree, to say yes, that was quite likely, perhaps she's still out there, wandering around, living off berries, Gillian just had to keep looking.

'She would have been terrified of the fire,' Gillian was saying, 'so she'd have tried to get away. She could have got out of the gate somehow and wandered up the lane. So we went out looking, Pete and me, and a couple of others too.

We spent the night walking the moors, calling out to her. I was so sure, you see, that she couldn't really be dead.'

'That's completely normal too,' said Evi. 'It's called denial. When people suffer a great loss, they often can't take it in at first. Some doctors believe it's the body's way of protecting us from too much pain. Even though people know, in their head, that their loved one is gone, their heart is telling them something different. It's not uncommon for bereaved people to even see the one they've lost, to hear their voice.'

She paused for a second. Gillian had pushed herself upright in the chair again. 'People do that?' she asked, leaning towards Evi. 'They see and hear the dead person?'

'Yes,' said Evi, 'it's very common. Has it happened to you? Did you – do you see Hayley?'

Slowly Gillian shook her head. 'I never see her,' she said. For a second she stared back at Evi. And then her face deflated, collapsing in on itself like the air slowly trickling out of a balloon. 'I never see her,' she repeated. She reached for the tissues again. The box fell to the floor but she'd managed to keep hold of a handful. She pressed them to her face. Still no tears. Maybe they were all used up.

'Take your time,' said Evi. 'You need to cry. Take as much time as you like.'

Gillian didn't cry, not really, but she held the handful of tissues to her face and allowed her dried-up body to sob. Evi watched the second hand make its way round the clock three times.

'Gillian,' she said, when she judged she'd given the girl enough time. 'Dr Warrington tells me you still spend several hours a day walking the moors. Are you still looking for Hayley?'

Gillian shook her head without looking up. 'I don't know why I do it,' she mumbled into the tissues. 'I just get this feeling in my head and then I can't stay indoors. I have to go out. I have to look.' Gillian raised her head and her pale-grey eyes stared back at Evi. 'Can you help me?' she asked,

suddenly looking so much younger than her twenty-six years.

‘Yes, of course,’ said Evi quickly. ‘I’m going to prescribe some medication for you. Some anti-depressants to make you feel better, and also something to help you sleep at night. These are a temporary measure, to help you break the cycle of feeling so bad. Do you understand?’

Gillian was staring back at her, like a child relieved that a grown-up had finally taken charge.

‘You see, the pain you’ve been feeling has made your body sick,’ continued Evi. ‘For three years you’ve not been sleeping or eating properly. You’re drinking too much and you’re wearing yourself out on these long walks over the moors.’

Gillian blinked twice. Her eyes looked red and sore.

‘When you’re feeling a little better in the daytime and you’re sleeping properly at night, then you’ll be able to do something about the drinking,’ continued Evi. ‘I can refer you to a support group. They’ll help you get through the first few weeks. Does that sound like a good idea?’

Gillian was nodding.

‘I’m going to see you every week for as long as it takes,’ said Evi. ‘When you’re starting to feel better in yourself, when you feel you have the pain under control, then we have to work on helping you adjust to your life as it is now.’

Gillian’s eyes had dulled. She raised her eyebrows.

‘Before all this happened,’ explained Evi, ‘you were a wife and mother. Now your situation is very different. I know that sounds harsh, but it’s a reality we have to face together. Hayley will always be a part of your life. But at the moment she – the loss of her – is your whole life. You need to rebuild your life and, at the same time, find a place for her.’

Silence. The tissues had fallen to the floor and Gillian’s arms were crossed tightly in front of her. It wasn’t quite the reaction Evi had been hoping for.

‘Gillian?’