

Monday 30 October 2023, 5.15 pm

JEMMA

This is my story and no one else's.

In it, I am a killer.

That has nothing to do with what I did or didn't do. I'm talking about who I am, not who I want to be or have the potential to become.

I felt myself switch over in an instant; something broke inside me and something new and powerful sprouted up in its place. If I didn't know better, I could almost believe that a button must have been pressed, so startling and sudden was the change. And it wasn't brought about by me murdering anyone. That's something I've never done and hopefully never will. It's the other way round: because I now know myself to be a killer on the inside, I have to stop myself from killing. You don't need to strangle someone with your bare hands, poison them, stab them or shoot them in order to be a murderer.

The being is the chicken and the doing is the egg.

Marianne would say, 'Ah, but which comes first, the chicken or the egg? If it's the egg — and it might be, or else that question wouldn't be asked as often as it is — then you've got it the wrong way round.'

She is never not speaking in my head.

When I tell it in my favourite way, what I'm about to tell the police, that's how it always starts: *This is my story and no one else's. In it, I am a killer.* And I might never have become one if someone else hadn't given me the idea — someone who was a killer before me, who tried but didn't succeed. That's neither an excuse or a distraction. If stories were buildings, that detail would be a load-bearing wall.

My favourite way to tell the story is silently, only to myself and far from this cold, humming, brightly-lit building, so that no one can sully or distort what I know to be true. But someone has to be the first to risk the huge leap from concealment to honesty, and I don't think anyone ever will apart from me. And I crave clarity, more than happiness or freedom

or safety. Sometimes I think it's all I need and want: all of the truth, plainly laid out. Nothing else matters.

I'm here to tell my part of it. To give a statement. I'm pretty sure the police still take those, and that they're always the unaltered words of the statement-giver, even if it's a police officer who notes it down or types it up. It's a comforting idea: my statement. My words, that no one will subsequently be allowed to change.

Meanwhile, the sergeant on the desk with the bleached blonde hair and red lipstick has already misunderstood me, so the distortion of my story has started. She's apologised three times for how long it's taking the promised detective to come and deal with me, convinced I must be finding the delay distressing.

Nothing could be further from the truth. I'm making the most of this waiting time. I feel calmer than I have in weeks. The ordeal of deciding is over (*Was I really going to do it? Yes, I was.*) and the next ordeal, the telling part, hasn't started yet.

The sergeant has no idea that I want this small pocket of waiting time to stretch as far as it can. She assumes that, since I'm here to confess to a murder, I must want to rush into the confession room and get it over with.

Interview room, I correct myself. This is a police station, not a church: the perfect secular space for giving up your secrets.

Ollie thinks most people don't understand what's behind the need for secrecy, and he's right. It's one of the things he said when I saw him in July, and I knew immediately, as soon as I heard it, that it was a truth I wanted to memorise and think about later. 'We imagine secrecy is all about, and only about, our fear of what might happen to us if others found out,' he said. 'Not true. It's driven at least as much by a desire to protect our personal property from vandalism. Anything you tell to even one person is like...a shirt in a tug of war. You're pulling on one sleeve, they're pulling on the other. Shirt gets torn to bits. Or sometimes there's no obvious tug of war, but somehow the shirt ends up in their wardrobe, a different colour and size from the one you thought you gave them. No matter how carefully we choose our words, others won't hear what we intend to say. Which means that if they're listening, they're stealing — unintentionally, simply by understanding it in their own unique way. Then they pass their misinterpretation of it on to someone else and that's stage two: more twisting occurs, then more still when that listener tells someone else. Eventually our version becomes the minority report. Like in *Minority Report*.' He repeated the movie title with a grin. I nearly smiled back but stopped myself. We'd loved

that movie and watched it together more than once. Ollie was trying to leverage my emotional attachment to the memory, hoping I'd stop demanding that he tell me the truth.

He miscalculated. Our happy memories have lost their power to make me happy, and I knew he'd only said it to distract me from the answers he knew I wanted.

Why wouldn't you tell me, Ollie? I wouldn't be here now — in danger, being a living, breathing danger to others — if you had. Don't you realise? Don't you care?

I wipe my eyes. A new person, a man, has taken over behind the reception desk, and the bleached-blonde sergeant is heading towards me, probably thinking I was crying about being kept waiting.

She sits down next to me. 'I'm really sorry about this. I've no idea where DC Waterhouse has got to, but it's getting ridiculous. Let's find a free room and you can talk me instead.'

'I don't mind waiting,' I say. 'I need to talk to a detective.'

'I used to be a detective, if that makes you feel any better. Might be one again soon too, if I'm crazy enough to agree.' She raises her eyebrows slightly. 'Long story.' She's twitchy. Can't sit still in her chair.

'I don't mind waiting for DC Waterman.'

'Waterhouse,' she corrects me. 'And I think we're done waiting. Come on. Follow me.'

I don't want to move. What if DC Waterhouse appears as soon as we've gone?

'Look, I'm not convinced Simon's on his way,' she says. 'DC Waterhouse, sorry. I think he might have fibbed and said he was, while actually intending to disappear and let everyone down. Because he's a *dick*.' She sighs, pushing her hair back from her forehead with one hand. 'Sorry. Shouldn't have said that, but on the other hand, I'm his wife, so maybe it's fine.'

'You're his wife?'

'Yup. You married?'

I nod.

'Also to a *dick*?'

I'm startled by this and don't know what to say.

'Is it your husband you've killed? What's his name? Is his last name Stelling, like yours?'

'No. Yes.' Why the hell would she think I've killed Paddy? 'He's called Paddy Stelling, but...I haven't done anything to him. He's alive. Why would you think...?'

'A guess. Women who look like you don't kill people, unless it's their violent boyfriends or husbands, in self-defence.'

'Paddy's never been violent.'

'Can you tell me the name of the victim? Speaking of names, I'm Sergeant Charlotte Zailer, but you can call me Charlie.'

'The victim?'

'The murder victim. You're here to confess to a murder, right?'

I nod. 'Yes. Sorry. Marianne Upton is her name.' I hear the words first, like something I've hurled at myself, then feel them inside me, tumbling down and down and down. I scrunch my hands into fists to stop them from reaching for something that isn't there.

I can't now undo this. Everyone will find out. There will be a knock on the door of Marianne's and Dad's house. That's how it will start...because Marianne will need to be warned...

'I'd...please, can we just wait for DC Waterhouse?' I say, because I'm really not sure about this woman at all.

She looks as if she's about to argue with me, but, thankfully, she decides against doing so. With a shrug, she turns and heads back to the other side of the reception area.

Once she's left me alone and it's safe, I pull my laptop out of my handbag and open it. I try to put on the face I'd be wearing if I were about to open something work-related — next term's budget spreadsheet or something like that. I like my job because it's completely stress-free and no one ever complains about me doing things the way I want, but I can't pretend that being the bursar for a tiny independent school is the most thrilling career in the world. Still, I have a boss who's happy to be in charge only in theory while letting me be entirely my own boss, so I regard myself as lucky. I'm not good with authority

figures, thanks to Marianne. I know it's ridiculous, but when anyone suggests I might like to consider doing something that wasn't my idea in the first place, my first thought is always 'Here comes tyranny.'

I open the diary folder on my laptop, knowing exactly which entry I want and need to read before I speak to any detective. I'm so nervous, it's hard to think straight, and I could do with reminding myself of why I'm here — of what I both desperately want to do, and can't allow myself to do.

Here it is: July 7, the entry that feels like the most important of all the ones I've written since I started writing this...journal or book, or whatever it is, on my laptop. The first word is 'Marianne...' it makes me feel sick, the way everything has to be about her.

If she didn't exist, I wouldn't be a killer right now. I wouldn't need to tell the police a story about murder.

As I read, I start to have the feeling that something's not right — something about my own words. It's almost as if...

No, that's ridiculous. These are my words. No one else wrote them. I remember writing them. Starting with the word 'Marianne'...

JULY 7, 2023

Marianne pushes open the door of her study with a ‘Ta-daaa!’. She’s put on a special dress for the occasion, a long black kaftan I’ve never seen before with a silver brocade pattern around its square neck and lines of sequins down its sides: glistening slug-trails on dark ground. On her feet are shiny black sandals with matt black soles as thick as bricks and elaborately bumpy arrangements near the toes: white lace bows and pale pink pearls. She has painted her toenails the same pink; same shade of lipstick too.

Marianne hardly ever bothers with dresses or make-up. I’ve known her for nearly 30 years and I’ve seen her done up like this no more than five times. Normally she wears a floppy white or pale blue shirt, dark blue jeans and the plainest, flattest flip-flops on her always-bare feet. She boasts about her good circulation — how she never feels the cold.

Arm still outstretched, she stands back to give me an unbroken view. I look, but there’s nothing. Her study — or rather, the room that used to be her study — has been stripped of all its contents. She has dressed up like this — her ‘glad rags’, she’d call them — to show me emptiness. A derelict room.

The three windows have marks around them, suggesting the presence of curtains and blinds at some point, but it’s all gone. The walls are patchy pink-beige plaster, like skin that has suffered one trauma after another. Shelves have been torn down, light fittings pulled off. None of it has been done with care. Covering the floor is a fuzzy grey substance, unevenly distributed; there are thicker clumps and sparse patches.

I haven’t seen the inside of this room for seventeen years, but the three windows are just as they have been all this time in my memory. One, large and rectangular, overlooks the black wooden barn and the thin gravel path that separates it from the house. The second is tiny and square and offers a glimpse of what Marianne calls her ‘show-piece’, the formal, walled section of the front garden. The third is the size and shape of a large car wheel and faces the wildflower meadow at the back and the lodes and fens beyond.

Dad took an instant dislike to this room when we came to look round the house in 1998. He said it jutted out from the side of the house in a way that was jarring, and thought the odd assortment of clashing window styles made it look untidy. ‘Oh, Gareth, don’t be so unimaginative.’ Marianne laughed at him, delighting in his wrongness as she always did. In her eyes, Dad has never been someone whose thoughts needed to be taken seriously. ‘Things don’t have to be identical to belong together,’ she said, providing him with his new opinion, to be learned by heart. ‘These windows are the perfect trio. Think of an orchestral trio. You’d want violin, cello and double bass, wouldn’t you? Not three boring old identical violins.’ This winning argument was perfectly calibrated to silence all opposition. She’s a master at those.

All three windows look mistakenly designed and clumsily placed, but for some reason Marianne enjoys pretending things work that don't. Like me and Paddy.

When we moved into the house in late 1998, Marianne immediately claimed the room Dad had 'pooh-poohed' as her own. Throughout all the years that she kept its door locked and the key hidden, she never stopped trying to provoke him by singing the praises of its ill-matched windows. 'It's so clever,' she told every visitor loudly, with one eye on Dad who never seemed to notice or react. 'It's not only that they're different shapes and sizes, it's also that the views are all wrong, but deliberately so — at least, I'm sure it must be deliberate, since the house was built when architects still cared about beauty and attention to detail. I refuse to believe it's by chance that the biggest of the three windows reveals far too much of what no one really wants to see: the side of an old, weather-worn barn. And the smallest one reveals just enough beauty to tempt you over to it in order to see the most stunning garden, but if you step even a foot back then you can't hardly see it anymore. Somehow, that makes the best view feel even more special than if you could see it easily from anywhere in the room.'

Over and over she would recite the same lines to different guests, who would then be told they weren't allowed to see any of it for themselves because the study was sacrosanct. 'Just for me, and no one else,' Marianne would say with a shrug, as if nothing could be done about it. She only started to give her 'Room I can't show you because it's my private sanctuary' speech in 2006, the year I chose Paddy and ended my relationship with Olly. Before that, her study was a perfectly ordinary and accessible part of our house. For many years I believed it was a coincidence that both these things happened at roughly the same time.

I never heard any guest question why Marianne's study couldn't be glimpsed by anybody, or the door opened even for a brief glance. She made sure always to offer a generously thorough tour of the rest of the house: 'It's quite something: the most romantic old rectory — well, it was a rectory at one time — that's *so* like something out of a Jane Austen novel, but not in a civilised village in Hampshire or anywhere like that. No, just plonked down in this flat fenland village full of squat, beige brick bungalows where nothing ever happens — a place that, frankly, is fit for nothing but sugar beet and barley farming — and *I love it*. I adore the contrast, the...*unexpectedness* of it.'

I wonder if dolling herself up as if for a fancy cocktail party in order to show me this ravaged room had the same appeal for her: the clash factor. Unexpected.

She has won again and she knows it. I'm shocked, though not surprised to be, so that isn't her victory. I was expecting to be blindsided by whatever I saw inside this room — as shocked as I felt when she offered to show it to me as if it were no big deal, after keeping it hidden from the whole family for seventeen years. The unexpected part is how gutted I feel, as gutted as Marianne's study has been; I'd hoped to be surprised by a presence, not an absence — by the answer, whatever it might be. Instead, new questions seethe and swarm in my mind.

Marianne turns to face me, grinning. There's pink lipstick on the side of one of her front teeth. She can smell my desperation to know, as strongly as I can taste it: a thick sourness in my mouth.

‘What was in here, before you got rid of it?’ I ask.

‘How do you know it hasn’t always been like this?’

‘It wasn’t like this when we moved in.’

‘True,’ she says. Marianne can sound like the fairest person in the world when she wants to. ‘Do you remember the wallpaper, when we first came here? This was the only papered room — all the others were painted plain colours, but this one had grass-green wallpaper with a pattern of small pink tulips. Should have been gorgeous but wasn’t. Brought to mind a sickly person with a painful rash.’

‘What was in here before today that’s now gone?’ I ask, having chosen my words carefully. ‘No-one locks their family out of a room for so many years if there’s nothing in there.’

‘Well, someone might,’ says Marianne. ‘People will do all sorts of irrational things if you leave them to their own devices.’ She laughs, then points. ‘There was a lovely leather chair there, under the round window. And I had my battered old velvet *chaise longue* by the tiny window, so that I could read with my feet up and see the best part of the garden at the same time. I had a matching desk and Captain’s Chair set, too — medium oak, green leather.’ She sighed. ‘And framed photographs everywhere — so many of those. All of family. Always and only family. You were in nearly all of them. Whereas your house contains no photographs of me. It’s all right, I don’t mind any more. But I had at least twenty of you, on shelves, up on the wall —’

‘So where’s it all gone?’ I snap. She’s won again: made me lose my cool. She feigns a look of surprise at my outburst, which she knew would come. It’s what she’s been waiting and hoping for. ‘You haven’t just moved a few pictures. You’ve reduced the room to a shell.’

‘A more useful question than “Where?” would be “Why?”.’

‘If I ask why, will you tell me?’ I stop myself from adding, *I know that, somehow, the reason is linked to Olly.*

‘I can’t believe you haven’t worked it out already,’ Marianne says.

I pull in a long, deep breath. ‘Why have you got rid of the contents of this room? I’ll never work it out. If you want me to know, tell me.’

‘You don’t know I’ve got rid of anything. I might have moved it all.’

‘Why?’

‘Because of you.’ Her feigned meekness makes me want to scream. *Just a brief, simple answer*, her tone proclaims. *Just the truth, unadorned*. ‘Because you made a phone call, didn’t you? To Norman. N P Pelphrey, as you would think of him.’

The name is instantly familiar. *N P Pelphrey, N P Pelphrey...* Where did I hear it? It was recently, I know that much. The surname is similar to Pumphrey, and there was a girl in my class at primary

school called Janice Pumphrey. I was in Dad and Marianne's bedroom when one name led to the other in my memory, sitting on their bed. They were out, and I was wondering if there was anything I could do to...

Oh, no.

NP Pelphrey. In the search results on my phone. Easily found, the specifics soon pushed to the back of my mind...

There is nothing this can mean apart from the worst thing.

I try to breathe, but the air in my mouth and throat feels like a solid chunk of something too hard to inhale.

'Norman told me what you asked him to do,' Marianne says. 'Did you think you *just happened* to fail?' Her emphasis advertises her contempt for all things that occur by chance, that are not orchestrated by her.

Yes, that's exactly what I thought. I made a request and a man — NP Pelphrey — told me to forget it, in a tone that was blunt-verging-on-rude. I decided his response was typical — not noteworthy at all, given the state of everything: everyone angrier and more self-centred than they used to be.

And then, all the others...

I wonder how much danger I'm in, now that Marianne knows what I did. Tried to do.

She smiles. This is the bit she's been looking forward to most: forcing me to watch her savouring the full extent of my failure.

'That's why everything had to go.' She nods in the direction of the empty room, then moves towards me and pulls me into a hug that stinks of the only perfume she ever wears, a peppery, leathery vanilla smell that I've come to loathe. My body is rigid, fossilised in her arms. 'Don't worry,' she says. 'I'm not angry. In your shoes, I'd have done the same.'

Except you'd have found a way to succeed.

'Like mother, like daughter, eh?' she whispers next to my ear, and it occurs to me that what I need is for her to die. I want to make that happen.

I want it more than I've ever wanted anything.

Monday 30 October 2023, 5.20 pm

JEMMA

Like mother, like daughter, eh?

I didn't include the words that fought to get out of my mouth in response, because I was too scared to say them: 'You're not my mother. You never have been and you never will be. You're my enemy.' I remember thinking to myself as I typed, my tears hitting the keyboard harder than my fingers: *Sorry, but no. If you were too much of a coward to say it, then it doesn't get to be part of the story.*

I slam my laptop shut, my heart hammering as if it's still happening now: the horror of that moment, that conversation, being alone with Marianne on the top floor of the house. I don't know what I thought she was going to do to me...

I guess I've just proved to myself that my writing has the power to deliver an emotional gut-punch, so if I ever decide I want to go public with this diary or book or whatever it is, maybe it's not out of the question that someone might deem it to be publishable.

Still, I can't shake this irrational feeling that what I've just read wasn't written by me, when I know for a fact that it was. Maybe it feels as if it can't be because more skilfully put together than I remembered. Or I'm just being paranoid. If I am, I blame my present location a little bit — an eerily impersonal police station reception area — and Marianne a lot. If she hadn't stolen and read all the other diaries I've ever kept, I'd probably still be handwriting in notebooks with turquoise and purple ink pens like I always used to until 2006, when my diary of the moment went missing and never reappeared. Before then, Marianne had always returned them to wherever she'd found them in my bedroom, once she'd had a good nosey. Not the 2006 diary, though. Clearly she wanted to read and reread my thoughts from that crucial year: the one that contained the end of my relationship with Ollie and the beginning of me and Paddy trying to make a proper go of it together.

Nice way of putting it, Jemma. It would have been quicker and easier to say 'the year I chose Paddy and dumped Ollie', but let's not make things any more painful by assigning responsibility, shall we?

My words on the subject of Ollie getting dumped and Paddy being declared the winner of the Who-Gets-To-Be-Jemma's-boyfriend competition were evidently so important to my stepmother ('Wicked enough to convince anyone that Cinderella really didn't know how lucky she was,' as my best friend Suzanne always says, then laughs at her own joke) that she decided to deprive me of them forever. I'm sure my 2006 diary was one of the things she kept locked inside her study, before she gutted it.

Where is it now?

'Oh, she's got it stashed away somewhere, for sure,' Suzanne said, after I told her about Marianne showing me the empty, stripped room. 'She was way too invested in your love life and which boyfriend you chose.'

I thought but didn't say, *I don't care where it is, as long as I don't have to read it again. Too painful.*

'Jemma? Is it okay if I call you Jemma? Are you all right?' The dyed-blonde sergeant is hovering over me again. What's her name again? That's right: Zailer. Charlotte Zailer. I didn't notice her coming over. I wipe my eyes. So much for trying keep a boring-budget-spreadsheet look on my face.

'Will you come with me to an interview room so that we can talk about this properly?' she says. 'And I'll need an address immediately, please — where the body is.'

'Body?'

She leans in closer. 'Of the murder victim. Marianne Upton.'

'There's no body,' I manage to say, praying she'll decide to leave me alone 'I'll explain the situation to DC Waterhouse when he gets here.' I'll make his arrival my fresh start. Soon as I see him — a detective who deals with murders — I'll pull myself together. Somehow.

'Would you like a glass of water? Jemma, I do need Marianne Upton's address.'

Not yet. I need to explain first.

‘Oh, no,’ Sergeant Zailer mutters. I look up. She’s staring over my shoulder, looking angry. ‘Here he comes, breaking new records for whatever’s the opposite of “in mint condition”. I thought he’d gone home, but no such luck. Too late: you wanted him? You’re about to get him.’

I turn and find a tall, broad-shouldered man standing behind me, blinking at me. There are patches of stubble on his face. He looks stunned — as if he’s just come round from a general anaesthetic and found himself standing, fully dressed, in a police station’s reception area. His probably-once-white shirt is creased and sweat-stained, his greying dark hair just long enough to look untidy. ‘Simon Waterhouse,’ he says abruptly; it’s almost a grunt. ‘You Jemma Stelling?’

I don’t know what I was expecting, but it wasn’t this.

‘She’s here to confess to the murder of a Marianne Upton, and says there’s no body,’ Sergeant Zailer tells him, pronouncing each word distinctly, as if this is his first encounter with the English language. *His wife. Who thinks he’s a dick.*

I wonder if there’s a different police station I could go to. Silsford, maybe — that’s not too far. These two are making me want to run away, but they probably won’t let me leave given what I’ve already told them. Then again, maybe they’d shrug and say, ‘See you’. There’s something not quite right about either of them, and both of them together. It’s as if they’re impersonating police officers. Badly.

‘Why’s there no body?’ Waterhouse asks me.

‘Can we go somewhere more — ’

‘Why no body?’

Feeling his words like something tightening around me, I take a deep breath. ‘I haven’t killed her yet.’

‘For God’s sake.’ Sergeant Zailer lets out an expansive sigh. ‘Then...how about you carry on not killing her, or anyone else? Then there’ll be no problem, will there?’

‘If I hadn’t come here, I’d have killed her today,’ I say. I want to explain everything properly, from the beginning, alone in a room with a serious, attentive detective. At the same time, now that I’ve started, I can’t stop talking. ‘I’d be killing her now, if I weren’t here talking to you. I have a fully-worked-out plan, one I’ve been working on for months. And I’d have got away with it. No one would have been able to prove it was me. If it weren’t for the

fact that I've got a thirteen-year-old daughter, I'd have allowed the inevitable to happen, but I don't want to risk—'

'What "inevitable"?' asks Sergeant Zailer.

Hasn't she been listening to me?

'I think I know what you mean, but I don't want to assume,' she says.

I spell it out. 'Me killing Marianne. That's the inevitable. Or it was, before I came here. Which I did because I can't take even the tiniest risk of going to prison and leaving my daughter alone, so —'

'Alone? What about Paddy Stelling?' Sergeant Zailer interrupts again.

DC Waterhouse isn't looking at either of us. He's staring straight ahead, unblinking, like a dubious piece of public art that no sensible organisation would want in its foyer.

'Anyone who's only got Paddy is effectively alone.' The words are out before I can stop them. 'Even if he were different, which he never can be...I don't want Lottie to have a convicted murderer as a mother. I'm already a murderer inside — that won't change — but I'm not yet a murderer who's committed a crime, and it was getting more and more obvious every day that I would soon become one if I didn't do the unthinkable: come here and confess, like I am now. I tried a hundred times to tell myself, "Don't do it, don't think about the plan, don't take the next step" but it wouldn't go away. I started to do things to—'

DC Waterhouse yawns in my face.

'What the hell is wrong with you?' I ask him.

'He's having a bad day,' says Sergeant Zailer. 'Carry on, since we've got this far. You'd started to — what?'

'Lay the groundwork. Despite all my fears and attempts to rein in it, I was acting like someone who was going to do it. It took up every inch of space in my mind: that I could make Marianne not exist any more, and so easily. Without any negative consequence, apart from the big one: living with the risk of getting caught, maybe one day actually getting caught. However much you imagine you've thought of everything, that can always happen, can't it? That's why I had to come here. This is the only way for it to be over. If I tell you what I was going to do, then I'll never do it. My life will go back to normal, which isn't wonderful but it's so much better than *this*. And there'll be no risk of Lottie losing her mum to a long prison sentence.'

‘Telling us will be enough to stop you from doing it?’ Sergeant Zailer asks. ‘Is that the idea?’

I nod. I knew it would work, and I can feel a subtle difference already. The evil that’s been burrowing into me for so long is still there, but it’s loosened its hold and is now standing off to the side. There’s distance between us. ‘Telling the police kills my plan stone dead,’ I say. ‘Now, if anything were to happen to Marianne, you’d know I was behind it. The chance of me getting away with it would be zero. So please can one of you take my statement?’ I’m no longer sure that my first choice is DC Waterhouse. Charlotte Zailer might only be a sergeant and not a detective, but she seems far more skilled when it comes to interacting with other humans. ‘And...I think you probably have to tell Marianne, don’t you?’ I direct this at Waterhouse. Let Marianne get a visit from him; I’d enjoy imagining that, if I knew it was happening. ‘You’ll need to warn her, presumably, that I’ve come in and said all this? I mean, there’s been a threat to her life. I assume you have a duty to inform her.’

‘According to you, the threat is now nonexistent,’ Sergeant Zailer points out.

‘You’re not going to warn her? What, you’re just going to take my word for it that I won’t do it now?’ These two don’t give a toss, clearly. Maybe their top priority is keeping their To-Do list as light as possible. ‘I don’t care, as long as you take my statement. It has to be on record: how I was going to do it and get away with it.’ The police deciding I’m no danger to anyone and sending me home is not good enough. Nowhere near.

DC Waterhouse has started to walk away. ‘Follow me,’ he calls over his shoulder, and then ‘Which room?’

How am I supposed to know? You’re the one who works here.

‘Four.’ Sergeant Zailer’s voice echoes along the tiled corridor. ‘Go on.’ She nods at me for emphasis and I realise I need to move. Follow. Even though no one who wanted to improve any aspect of their life or anyone else’s would allow the weird, dead-eyed detective-husband to lead them anywhere.

I’ve nearly caught up with Waterhouse when Sergeant Zailer calls after me, ‘Jemma?’

I turn.

‘If he breaks during the interview, come and find me,’ she says.

