

# 1

Beth Latimer jerks upright in bed. This is the way she used to wake up when her children were babies, some sixth sense flooding her veins with adrenalin and shaking her wide awake seconds before they started to cry. But her children aren't babies any more, and no one is crying. She has overslept, that's all. The space beside her is empty and the bedside clock is dead. She gropes for her watch. It's gone eight.

The others are awake: she can hear them downstairs. She's in and out of the shower in under a minute. A glance out of the window tells her it's going to be another hot one, and she pulls on a red sundress. You're not supposed to wear red with auburn hair, but she loves this dress; it's cool, comfortable and flattering too, showing off the flat (for now, at least) belly that is one of the few benefits of having kids so young. It still smells vaguely of last year's sun lotion.

Passing Danny's bedroom, she notices with a shock that he has made his bed. The Manchester City duvet cover that his dad hates so much – he has taken Danny's sudden defection from Bournemouth FC as a terrible betrayal – is smooth

and straight. She can hardly believe it; eleven years of nagging have finally paid off. She wonders fondly what he wants. Probably that smartphone that his paper-round wages won't quite stretch to.

She can tell by the trail of destruction in the kitchen that Mark is making himself lunch. The fridge door hangs open. The milk is on the counter, lid off, and the knife is sticking out of the butter.

'Why didn't you wake me?' she asks him.

'I did,' he grins. He hasn't shaved; she likes him this way and he knows it. 'You told me to piss off.'

'I don't remember,' says Beth, although it sounds like her MO. She drops a teabag into a mug, knowing even as she does that she won't have time to finish drinking it. A jumping electric pulse snags her attention; the clock on the oven is flashing zeros. Same with the microwave. The radio is stuck on 3.19.

'All the clocks have stopped,' she says. 'In the whole house.'

'Probably just a fuse or something,' says Mark, wrapping his sandwich. He hasn't made anything for Beth, but she wouldn't have time to eat it anyway.

Chloe is eating cereal and flicking through a magazine. 'Mum, I've got a temperature,' she says.

'No, you haven't,' says Beth, without bothering to check.

'I'm. Not. Going,' Chloe whinges, but her hair, an immaculate blonde plait, and the perfectly applied make-up tell Beth that she knew this battle was a losing one from the off. You can't kid a kidder. She remembers herself at this age – exactly this age, almost to the day – missing school to

meet Mark. There's no way she's letting history repeat itself.

Before Chloe can come up with a counter-argument, Beth's mum bustles through the back door, calling hellos and carrying a bowlful of eggs. She sets it down on the worktop next to – oh, for God's sake, thinks Beth – Danny's lunch-box. It's not like him to forget his packed lunch. Perhaps the effort of making his bed was too much for him. She'll have to drop it off on her way into work. Like she's not going to be late enough already.

'Love you zillions, babe,' says Mark, kissing Chloe on the top of her head. It must be the millionth – the zillionth? – time Chloe has heard this family phrase, and she rolls her eyes, but when Mark turns to leave and she thinks no one is looking, she allows herself a small, secret smile. Then she tries on the temperature trick with her grandmother, who puts her hand on Chloe's smooth brow, but it's just for show. Liz has been through all this twice now and is even less likely to fall for it than Beth.

Mark's out of the door, to catch his usual lift with Nigel, and his goodbye kiss is quick. He tastes of tea and cereal.

'Did you see Danny?' Beth shouts at his back.

'He'd already gone!' he throws over his shoulder. 'I'm late!'

He leaves Beth standing in the kitchen, Danny's lunch-box in her hand.

Detective Sergeant Ellie Miller's work suit feels weird and stiff after three weeks in a bikini and sarong, but they've brought the Florida sunshine back home with them.

Broadchurch High Street shimmers in the early morning haze and everyone's in a good mood. The sky is cloudless and people are feeling brave enough to put out signs and set up stalls in the street.

She's glad to be back, and not only because she knows that good news awaits her in the station. It feels right to be here, to be home again. This is Ellie's street, her old beat, although it's a long time since she's been in uniform.

She pushes Fred in the buggy, a bag of duty-free goodies for the gang slung over one handle. At the end of the road, she'll hand the buggy over to Joe, who'll walk Tom the rest of the way to school. For now, Joe has Tom in a loose headlock and they're both laughing. They are reflected, Ellie and her boys, in the plate-glass window of the tourist office. Her sons are so different; Fred's got her dark curly hair while Tom's got choirboy looks. His blond hair is just like Joe's was before his hairline started to recede and he did the dignified thing and buzzed it all off.

It's one of those rare, unplanned moments when she sees her little family from the outside and recognises happiness, captured as in an unposed snapshot. She knows she's lucky. She refocuses her gaze to look through the window and nod a hello to Beth, but she's not at her desk yet.

Mark's there, though, at the other end of the High Street, plumber's bag over his shoulder, charming his way down the street. Ellie watches him flirt with a couple of girls in summer dresses and then Becca from the hotel, and trade banter with Paul, the vicar who's younger than she is. Mark almost bumps into a jowly, unsmiling woman whom Ellie doesn't know – a tourist? Doesn't look like it – out

walking her dog. She alone seems impervious to the Latimer charm.

Tom opens his mouth to frame a question. ‘No,’ says Ellie, before he can make his usual request for a dog.

When their paths cross, Mark wishes Tom good luck for sports day and he beams.

‘We should get the lads together,’ says Joe.

‘Good idea,’ says Mark, without breaking his stride. ‘I’ll text you later.’

Ellie takes comfort from this small exchange. She and Joe both know that their set-up works – that it plays to both their strengths for her to be the breadwinner while he stays at home with Fred – but she still worries. She worries that people might think Joe is emasculated. She worries that he might *become* emasculated. So while the other wives are on the phone begging their husbands to come home in time to put the kids to bed, she’s virtually throwing Joe out of the house and into the pub.

‘Look!’ says Tom, pointing across the street at a familiar figure with cherry-red hair. ‘It’s Auntie Lucy!’ He lifts his arm to wave but Ellie pulls it down by the wrist. Three weeks have done nothing to take the edge off her anger at her sister. Lucy’s lies and excuses have no place on a morning like this. Ellie glances back: Lucy hasn’t seen them. Her eyes are on the pavement and she’s dragging her hairdresser’s kit behind her in a wheeled suitcase, probably off to give some old dears their weekly shampoo and set. Ellie hopes they’ve locked up their valuables. The last thing she wants is to nick her own sister.

Tom pulls his arm away and rubs it, hurt and confused.

‘Sorry, darling,’ says Ellie. ‘We don’t want to be late.’ It’s true: they’re in enough trouble as it is for taking Tom out of school in term time. They don’t want to give the head even more ammunition against them.

Nigel Carter pulls up in the blue van with *Mark Latimer Plumbing* in white letters on the paintwork.

‘You’re late!’ says Mark, swinging himself up into the passenger seat. Ellie lip-reads Nige say something about the traffic and then they both laugh. Whatever it is that Nige says next clouds Mark’s expression. He snaps at Nige, wiping the smile off his face, like he’s been put in his place, although Mark’s not the kind of boss to bully or pull rank.

If her suit feels strange, the station feels stranger. The strip lighting inside is a harsh neon shock after weeks basking in real sunshine. She still can’t get used to this building with its curved corridors of polished concrete. It’s clean and comfortable and all that, but it’s just not very *Broadchurch*.

Wolf whistles and clapping herald her return, turning to gasps of appreciation as they realise that she has come bearing gifts. No one is left out and everyone seems pleased with their souvenirs. She knows her team all too well. Just as she’s settling in for the gossip, Chief Superintendent Jenkinson calls her in for a word. Ellie, knowing what this is all about, can’t resist grinning at her team on the way in.

Jenkinson isn’t grinning, but then that’s not her style. While Ellie’s already sweaty and frizzy from the walk into work, the Chief Super is her usual pristine self, her short blonde hair sleek, her shirt and cravat crisp. A bubble of

anticipation swells inside Ellie. But instead of the expected congratulations, Jenkinson drops a bomb:

‘We’ve given the job to someone else.’

The bubble bursts and Ellie feels the smile slide down her face.

‘The situation changed. I know it’s a disappointment.’

Disappointment doesn’t begin to cover it. The tears press behind Ellie’s eyes but there’s anger too and that gives her voice attack. ‘You said it would wait till I got back from leave,’ she says, her post-holiday high well and truly punctured. ‘You said I was a shoo-in! That’s why I took three weeks. Who got it?’

‘DI Alec Hardy. He started last week.’ The name rings a distant bell but it’s his sex that really annoys Ellie. ‘A *man!* What happened to “This area needs a female DI”, what happened to “You’ve got my backing”?’

Is it Ellie’s imagination or does Jenkinson look shame-faced? It’s gone before she can pin it down. ‘Alec Hardy has a lot of experience . . .’

And then Ellie knows how she knows that name. Every police officer in the country knows that name. Christ, to be passed over at all, to be passed over for a bloke, but *him?*

She holds it together until she gets to the toilet, sits on the closed seat and slides the bolt across the door. She’s actually shaking with rage, her feet doing a little tap dance to expel the nervous energy. She calls home and cries hot, angry tears down the phone to Joe. He feels it as bitterly as she does. This was his promotion as much as hers; they’d already mentally spent her pay rise on finishing the house. ‘Shall I just clear out my desk and go?’ she asks him, and although they

both know she doesn't mean it, it feels good to vent. She's gearing up to tell him about the salt in the wound – he won't *believe* it when he hears who got the job – when there's a knock on the cubicle door. Can't she even rant in peace?

'I'm *in here!*' She throws the full force of her frustration behind her words.

'Ellie?' It's one of the female PCs. 'You've got a shout.'

## 2

Two miles down the coast, a man stares at the dissolving blue horizon. His rumpled suit hangs off his wiry frame; his top button is undone beneath his tie. A barbed-wire fence, rows of tiny devil's horns, has been severed between two posts. It's a clean and confident cut, done with a (professional?) tool.

With the fence breached, nothing stands between him and a seventy-foot drop. He could look over the edge, but he doesn't want to get too close and tempt the vertigo.

'You want to see this or not?' says the farmer.

Reluctantly, Detective Inspector Alec Hardy turns towards the crime scene, although it hardly seems to warrant the term. 'Siphoned the whole bloody tank,' says the farmer, pointing at the fuel cap that dangles open. Bob Daniels, the PC who called it in, shakes his head in commiseration and Hardy sighs inwardly. Is this the best use this force can make of a detective inspector? What next? Calling out a chief super for a cat stuck up a tree? He knows he wanted a change of pace after Sandbrook, but this is ridiculous.

‘We’ll be in touch,’ says Hardy, turning back to the squad car, even as the farmer starts asking why they haven’t got forensics involved.

‘You called me at seven in the morning, for that?’ he says to Bob when the farmer’s out of earshot.

‘Too good for it, are you?’ sneers Bob. Hardy doesn’t rise to the bait. It’s not the first little dig his new team have made and it won’t be the last. They resent the way he was brought in from outside. And of course, his history goes before him. Then Bob’s tone changes. ‘Just got a call. Coastguard reported something down by the shore.’

By the time Beth gets into school, sports day is in full swing and the playing field is alive with children wearing PE kits in house colours. The starting pistol goes off and the Year 3 sack race begins. It’s hot – the teachers are walking around handing out water – and the colours are vivid. Beth scans the green for Danny. She can usually pick him out in a crowd within seconds. It’s not so much the look of him as the way he moves that catches her eye. His pre-teen spideriness has recently given way to a rolling swagger that’s pure Mark. Where *is* he? She squints into the sunshine and recognises Danny’s teacher, Miss Sherez. A row of parents clap and cheer on a bench beside her. Beth marches towards it, lunch-box in hand.

She’s distracted for a moment by Olly Stevens. He’s there in his capacity as reporter for the *Echo*, persuading egg-and-spoon racers to strike a Usain Bolt pose for a photograph. Olly’s been doing the job for over a year now and makes no secret of his ambitions to write for the nationals, but Beth

still can't quite take him seriously as a journalist. Perhaps it's because she's known him since he was a teenager and always gets a shock when she sees him in a shirt and tie rather than his South Wessex Secondary uniform. She watches him swap his phone for an old-fashioned notebook and pen as he takes their names and ages.

Beth has barely sat down when Miss Sherez says, 'No Danny?'

Beth's cheeks burn. *Please* don't say he's bunking off. 'I thought he was here,' she says. Miss Sherez's face creases with concern.

'No, we haven't seen him since yesterday.' *Neither have we*, thinks Beth and her mind's eye presents her with two sharp images: the perfectly made bed and the lunchbox on the worktop.

Her pulse doubles its pace as the first cold trickle of panic begins.

She tells herself to stay calm, that it's probably nothing, but her fingers slip on the keypad when she pulls up Danny's number on her phone. Even as it goes straight to voicemail she resolves to keep it breezy because she doesn't want him to think he's in trouble, although if she finds out he's bunking off, God help her, she'll – 'Danny, it's Mum,' she says after the beep. 'So you're not at school, can you give me a call straight away, sweetheart, just want to know where you are.'

But even while she's talking her mind is running ahead of her and her next call, one second after ringing off, is to Jack Marshall at the paper shop to check that Danny did his round earlier in the morning. Jack tells her that Danny didn't

turn up. He didn't call. This has never happened before. Beth cannot conceive a situation that would make Danny miss his paper round.

She keeps the next call short to free up the line for Danny. 'Mark, it's me, ring me *now*.'

And then what? She has tasted a diluted version of this quicksand terror before. All mothers have, when a little hand slips from yours in the supermarket or at the funfair. It's the speed of it that gets you; the way everything goes from happiness to hell in the gap between two heartbeats. Your breathing grows fast and shallow and your heartbeat speeds to a whirl and then a few seconds later they appear and you hug them tight enough to crush them, before holding them at arm's length and giving them a telling-off they'll never forget. The panic drains away as quickly as it arrived but you still feel its after-effects hours later, the flash-flood of adrenalin and the terror of 'what if'.

Beth tries to slow her breathing. She needs to keep a clear head.

She sees Danny's best friend, Tom Miller, with a plastic medal around his neck. She forces herself to walk, not run, towards him, to speak, not shout.

'Danny didn't say he was going anywhere this morning, did he, Tom? It's all right. He's not in trouble.' Tom shakes his head and Beth has no reason not to believe him. With a calmness she doesn't feel inside, she asks Miss Sherez to call her if Danny shows up. She starts to retrace her steps; she can feel the teacher's eyes boring into her back.

From the corner of her eye she can see Olly Stevens watching her, his antennae twitching. She spins uselessly

around on the grass and sweeps the field one more time, but panic is making her half-blind and her gut tells her Danny's not here. Where then? In town? On the beach? She runs to her car and fumbles for her keys.

The road into Broadchurch shimmers in the heat. Exhaust fumes mix with the haze, making number plates blur. Beth's phone is on the passenger seat beside her. She keeps checking it, refreshing it, checking the volume, and the signal. It's still term time but the traffic is gridlocked, like August bank holiday in a heatwave. Horns toot in frustration. A few years ago there was talk of widening the road or building a bypass. Beth's was one of the voices of opposition, but now she regrets it. Let them pave over the whole fucking countryside if it gets her into town quicker.

Nobody likes traffic jams but Beth *really* hates them. She has nightmares about them. She can't bear being confined at the best of times, let alone now, when she needs motion, action. She feels as though she's in a sealed glass box that is quickly filling with cold water. She can't breathe. She lasts maybe five seconds before she has to throw open the door and escape. She asks the woman in the car in front what's going on.

'Someone said the police are at the beach,' she says. 'Might've found a body.'

Body. Police. Beach. Body. Police. Beach.

*Danny.*

Beth has the feeling of all her blood plummeting through her body, landing with an electric shock at her toes. Leaving the key in the ignition and the radio on, she runs. A police van overtakes her, going the wrong way down the dual

carriageway, the pitch of its siren shifting in a Doppler effect as it passes. Beth just has time to read the side: Forensic Investigations. She lengthens her stride. She feels that she could outrun it.