

# KNOW ME NOW

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ZAFFRE



First published in Great Britain in 2018 by

ZAFFRE PUBLISHING  
80–81 Wimpole St, London W1G 9RE  
[www.zaffrebooks.co.uk](http://www.zaffrebooks.co.uk)

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978–1–78576–031–0

*also available as an ebook*

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Typeset by IDSUK (Data Connection) Ltd  
Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives Plc



Zaffre Publishing is an imprint of Bonnier Zaffre,  
a Bonnier Publishing company  
[www.bonnierzaffre.co.uk](http://www.bonnierzaffre.co.uk)  
[www.bonnierpublishing.co.uk](http://www.bonnierpublishing.co.uk)



*For my godchildren  
Kate, Maddie and Monte, with love*

## CHAPTER ONE

Connor Baird couldn't believe it. He was lost.

Trying not to panic, he quickly dropped into the mist towards where he thought the main track into town should be. The rain increased. Torrential. And it wasn't mist, he realised. He was in cloud. Dodging a small rock fall, he tried to keep his sense of direction but it was almost impossible when all the rivers and mountainsides looked the same.

He pushed on.

As he rounded a corner, he expected to see the old shepherd's bothy dead ahead, which would show that he was barely a mile from Duncaid, but all he saw instead was a rock face.

He slid to a stop and at the same time, the cloud parted.

Below was a seemingly endless monochrome carpet of peat and waterlogged moorland. Nothing was familiar. He could have been on the other side of the Cairngorms for all he knew.

Shit, shit, *shit*.

Should he keep going, or retrace his tracks?

He dithered briefly before he decided to keep going downhill. How could he have been so stupid? Talk about teaching him a lesson: never storm off in a temper. He'd spent a great day at his

grandpa's, but then his mother had ruined everything by asking him to babysit tonight. For the third time in a week! Hadn't she got the message yet? He was sick of the baby, the way everyone made stupid goo-goo noises at it, grinning like idiots. It was just a baby for Chrissakes, but when his little brother had taken his first steps last week you'd think he'd walked across the English Channel unassisted. And when little Dougie threw Connor's mobile phone on to the flagstone floor, smashing its screen into a thousand pieces, it wasn't the baby's fault. It was Connor's, for leaving the phone within the baby's reach. He was still without a phone a week later.

Connor wound down a snaking track, the tips of heather blurring into his peripheral vision. Why should his mum go out again and leave him alone with the baby? Why couldn't she get a proper babysitter? And what about his dad? Why couldn't he help out? Just because he'd had an affair shouldn't mean he could wriggle out of his parental responsibility. He was the sodding father after all.

Connor pedalled faster, squinting through the rain. He'd been out for hours now and he was hungry. He was fantasising about what he'd eat from the fridge when he got home, when a building loomed through the fog, its stone walls slick with rain. As he got closer his spirits lifted when he saw a long industrial-style building with a couple of cars parked outside. It looked like he'd come to the back of the Blackwater Industrial Estate. How on earth had that happened? He supposed it made a weird kind of sense he'd done a zigzag loop around the back of town but he wasn't sure

how he'd done it, and if he was asked to do it again he wouldn't have a clue where to start.

Propping his bike against the wall, he went and knocked on the door. He wanted a hot drink, to dry off for a bit and maybe hitch a ride home. He knocked again, louder. Nothing. He waited a while, shifting from foot to foot. It may be September but it couldn't be called warm, not with the rain.

He tried the door, but it was locked.

Frustrated, he walked to the next building and had a look around. He glanced up at the security cameras. Was anyone watching him? He'd never seen anybody here. It was probably derelict inside and the cameras defunct.

When he saw one of the windows had a chink in its blind, right at the bottom, he bent to have a look. He saw a tiled floor and white-washed walls. The room seemed empty, except—

*What the . . . ?*

He reared backwards, blinking rapidly. His brain seemed to have stalled. He stayed where he was for a moment. He was trembling, but whether it was with fear or from the cold, he didn't know.

He bent down to have another look. He needed to be sure. But he hadn't imagined anything.

At the far end of the room was a girl.

She was lying on a table.

She was naked.

She had short-cropped curly dark red hair and her skin held a weird green tinge and looked wet and waxy.



She had three soaring ravens tattooed on her wrist and although he was too far away to read the words beneath, he knew what they were.

*Let it be.*

She'd had more ravens tattooed on her back, spiralling out of a tree that covered the whole of her left shoulder blade and curled its delicate branches up her spine and along her neck. The accompanying text, in a dainty Brush script, read:

*The worst thing is  
holding on to someone  
who doesn't want to be  
held on to.*



Connor's heart began pounding so hard he wondered how it didn't leap from his chest.

Nimue Acheson.

She'd been named after the 'Lady of the Lake', or at least that's what she'd said. Teachers thought she was fantastic: great grades, always neatly dressed, helpful and polite. But then she'd been dumped by her boyfriend, Rickie Finley, and things changed. She'd become depressed and struggled with school work. When she started talking about suicide, her family sent her to a shrink. But she still killed herself. Jumped to her death from Collynie Bridge and onto the rocks below.

Connor had been at her funeral two weeks ago along with the rest of the school. He'd seen her coffin, covered with pink and white hearts made out of miniature roses. He'd watched



her being buried. Heard her dad saying he was going to get a beautiful headstone made out of marble for her and have a raven carved into its top. That he'd plant bluebells and snowdrops around her grave to welcome her each year into spring, her favourite time of year.

Connor moaned.

What was Nimue doing here?

Why wasn't she in her grave?

The moan began to rise into a shout of horror from the back of his throat.

At that moment he heard something behind him. He spun round and jumped in shock. The man was *so close!*

'I just . . . I mean . . . ' Connor stammered. He held his hands high. 'I'm s-sorry . . . ' He wanted to step back but couldn't. Not with his back thrust against the window.

The man moved so fast Connor didn't have time to react. One second he was standing there, both hands behind his back, the next he'd rammed something sharp into Connor's thigh.

'Hey!' Connor scrambled aside, yelping with pain.

The man watched him without expression.

Connor looked down to see a syringe hanging from his jeans. 'What the . . . ' He pulled it free. Held it up. The hypodermic needle dripped blood. Then he took in the fact that the plunger had been pushed almost to the end of the barrel and that any liquid that had been inside was now inside *him*.

'Shit.' He looked at the man. 'What's in it? What the fuck . . . '

The man didn't move. Didn't blink.

A thought formed in Connor's head: *I have to get out of here.*

He started to move for his bike but he'd barely gone a few paces when his legs collapsed. He fell to the ground, gravel scraping his face.

*No, no, no!*

He tried to get up, but his limbs wouldn't move. He tried to shout but his mouth wouldn't work. Terror flooded him.

He was paralysed.

He heard the man's footsteps coming towards him. Connor desperately tried to open his mouth to scream as a dark wave enveloped him.

No breath.

No feeling.

No thought.

Nothing.

## CHAPTER TWO

Grace Reavey was pulling wallpaper off the wall, great chunks of damp plaster coming with it, when her phone rang. Pushing her hair back with her wrist, she grabbed it off the windowsill.

It was still light, sunset another three hours away. One more hour of daylight than she was used to in England, which was great, but what about the winter months? She was already dreading the notoriously short and dark days, but she hadn't said anything to Ross. If she went stir crazy for sunshine, she'd get a sunlamp.

'Dr Reavey,' she answered her phone.

'Oh, Doctor,' a woman said. 'I'm so sorry . . .' She started to sob.

Grace made a murmuring, soothing noise, and waited.

'I don't know . . . I'm so sorry . . .' The woman was forcing her words out. 'I'm trying to see . . . but I don't know if he's dead or not. He's jumped, you see. Just like that girl . . .'

Alarm filled Grace.

'Dead?' she said.

'I don't know.' It was a wail. 'I don't know what to do!'



Grace gripped the receiver. 'Dial 999 immediately. But first, what's your name?'

'Mary Gibson.'

'Mary, can you tell me where you are?'

'I'm on the Collynie Bridge. I was walking Billy home, you see. Wanting to get back for our tea.'

'That's on the other side of Duncaid, am I right? On the road to Knockstanton?'

'Aye. That's the one.'

'I'm on my way.' She was already moving across the room as she spoke. 'But call 999 *now*, OK? They'll send an ambulance straightaway.'

'Aye, OK.'

After frantically scrubbing her hands clean, Grace pulled on a fleece, grabbed her doctor's bag and raced to her car. Flinging her bag on the passenger's seat she started her Golf in such a hurry she nearly stalled. *Steady*, she told herself. *You'll get there just as fast if you're not in a panic.*

Grace tore down the drive, stones spitting from her tyres. She couldn't see Ross. He was probably in one of the cottages, clearing it of debris. She rumbled over the cattle grid. Turned right on to the road to Duncaid. As she drove, she called the emergency services who confirmed they'd heard from Mary Gibson. They'd sent a blue light.

Although Collynie Bridge wasn't far from Duncaid, it always took longer than you expected because of the narrowness of the road and the countless hairpin bends. Luckily, she only met one tractor en-route, which she overtook easily, and made it to the



other side of town in under twenty minutes and well before the ambulance, which had to come all the way from Elgin.

Grace parked her car on the narrow verge and jumped out. She could hear the roar of the water and smell the peaty spray from the river before she stepped on to the cast-iron bridge. Mary Gibson rushed to greet her, grey hair askew beneath her waterproof hood, expression distraught. A damp looking West Highland terrier tagged alongside. Billy, Grace assumed.

‘I cannae get down there,’ Mary gasped. ‘I’m too bloody old.’

Grace looked past the floral tributes to Nimue Acheson, who’d jumped here just three weeks ago. A mountain bike was propped next to them. *Please God, let there not be an epidemic of copycat suicides.* Heart in her mouth, she peered into the ravine.

Straightaway she knew he was dead from the catastrophic angle between his head and neck, but she still had to check. She scrambled down the bank, grabbing handfuls of heather and grass to stop her falling. The bridge was single span, two car lengths at the most, but the drop had to be at least a hundred feet. A waterfall thundered past, dampening her face and hair. She passed the spot where Nimue’s body had been found, marked by several strings of police tape strapped around some rocks. As the bank steepened, she braced herself, sliding her way down, and by the time she reached the bottom her hands and clothes were covered in mud.

Carefully, Grace crabbed her way over some boulders to the edge of the river and quickly washed her hands before squatting beside the body. He’d not only broken his neck, but both legs were also broken along with his right arm. Without any hope

she tried his pulse. Pressed her fingers against his carotid artery. Zero. He'd died not long ago as the skin was still in early rigor mortis. Less than six hours, she guessed.

She gently pushed the hair back from his face.

Her heart clenched.

'Ah, no.'

## CHAPTER THREE

It was Connor Baird. She'd met the boy a fortnight ago in her surgery when his mother, Sam, brought him in to treat a nasty gash after falling off his bike.

He was so *young*. His features were smooth and clear, surprised and uncomprehending, maybe even disbelieving, and she had to force down her emotions. She was a professional. She mustn't let sentiment get in the way.

She looked up at Mary Gibson and shook her head. The woman brought her hand to her mouth and turned away. Grace pulled out her phone to ring the ambulance, tell them there was no rush, but she had no signal. Great.

She wasn't a police officer or a forensic physician, but her training demanded that she discreetly inspect the body to ensure that there were no concealed findings which might be relevant to death. She could see a messy wound on the boy's right thigh that seemed at odds with his fall, but she decided not to move him to study it. She couldn't assume it was definitely a suicide, and whilst there was a possibility of death from unnatural causes the area was a potential crime scene.

She checked Connor over and frowned when she saw lividity on his upper right arm, an area of the boy's body that hadn't been in contact with the ground. Had the body been moved?

She was studying his hands – no defensive wounds that she could see – when someone shouted above the din of the waterfall.

'Hoy there!'

She looked up to see a burly man in a florescent jacket heading down the river bank.

'Hello,' she called.

Like her, he arrived at the bottom of the bank soaked and with mud up his trousers.

'Lachlan,' he told her cheerfully. 'Your local paramedic.'

'Grace Reavey.'

He came and squatted beside her. 'Ach,' he said, shaking his head. 'Two jumpers in less than a month. A crying shame.'

'I wouldn't be so sure he jumped.' She hated it when people made assumptions.

Lachlan gave her a sideways look. 'Why is that?'

'Well, there's this small patch of lividity . . .' She swallowed her words when Lachlan raised his head and yelled, 'Dave!' His voice boomed as clear and loud as a trombone. 'Get Murdoch on the phone, would ya? Tell him it's Connor Baird we've found.'

Dave's affirmative yell was faint against the constant beating sound of the waterfall. 'Aye, OK!'

‘So,’ said Lachlan. ‘You’ve an opinion on Connor here. Are you from the polis?’

‘No. I’m a doctor.’

He gave a low whistle, sinking back on his heels as he looked her up and down. ‘I’ve heard about ye. Aye, that I have.’

Grace didn’t know what to make of this, so she kept quiet.

‘How are you finding us up here?’ he asked, sounding genuinely curious.

‘I’m finding you pretty good, thank you.’

He smiled a big broad smile that showed twin rows of large white teeth.

‘That’s all right then.’ His cheerful expression remained. ‘How’re the renovations coming along?’

‘Fine, thank you.’

Her tone must have given something away because he said, ‘Not so keen on DIY yourself, then?’

‘The house will be beautiful when it’s finished.’

‘Aye.’ His gaze turned shrewd. ‘But there’s a long way to go yet. It’s a bit of a wreck, that place.’

‘We’ll get there.’

‘Aye,’ he said again. This time he nodded. ‘He’s a strong worker, your man.’

She wasn’t sure if this was a compliment to Ross or a rebuke to her. She hadn’t admitted it to anyone but she loathed DIY, and the thought of spending every weekend of the foreseeable future scrubbing mucky old flagstone floors did nothing but make her feel monumentally depressed.



Luckily Lachlan changed the subject, asking where she'd trained, where her first placement had been, diverting her from Connor's cold body until Murdoch, a uniformed policeman, slithered down the bank to join them.

'Crying shame,' he echoed Lachlan. He had his hands on his hips and was shaking his head. 'Hate it when it's kids. They tend not to realise that when they jump it's forever.'

'Aye,' Lachlan agreed.

The policeman turned and looked at Grace. 'You don't have to stay,' he told her not unkindly. 'Lachlan and I can bring him up.'

Grace blinked. 'You're moving him?'

He frowned. 'Can't leave him here, can we?'

'But what about forensics?'

He sucked his teeth. 'You're the new doc, right?'

'Yup.'

'Well, not wanting to be rude or anything . . . I know you probably do things differently down south, but here we're a bit more practical, OK?'

'Practical,' she repeated. Her voice may have been even, but inside a coal of indignation began to burn.

'We dinnae have the resources.' His voice hardened. 'You'd better get used to it.'

She lifted her chin. 'I can't issue a death certificate.'

A look of disbelief crossed his face. 'You cannae confirm the cause of death?'

'No, I can't.' She repressed her natural urge to add 'sorry' because she didn't want to appear weak.



He flung up his hands. 'Jesus fucking Christ.'

'There's lividity on his arm that concerns me,' she pointed it out. 'It could well be that his body was moved after he died.'

'You're fucking kidding me.' Then his gaze turned sly. 'This isn't the first time, is it? That you've insisted on a post-mortem.'

'No,' she agreed.

'And how many of those were proven to have died in suspicious circumstances?'

*None*, she thought, but she refused to give in. She wasn't going to let him get away with it and bully her into submission. Connor deserved more than that.

'This isn't the same,' she told him.

They locked gazes.

She could feel Lachlan's tension, riveted by the confrontation, but she didn't look at him. She was concentrating on Murdoch.

Finally the policeman looked away. He rubbed his hands over his face, took a deep breath and blew it out again. 'OK, then. I'll ring my boss. He'll be thrilled to hear you'll be blowing his already-stretched budget to kingdom come for fucking nothing, but if you insist . . . He'll be the one who'll decide if it's a crime scene or not. Satisfied?'

'Thank you.' She smiled sweetly but dislike rose in his eyes. Ross had warned her about alienating people in such a small community, but what was she to do? Let every unexplained death go unexplored?

She'd attended a rash of sudden deaths recently. All of the victims had been in their early sixties and all had died from a range of afflictions from strokes to cancer and liver disease.

When she'd questioned the high mortality rate for such a relatively young group, the pathologist had said in a cheerful tone, 'We all die young up here.'

But not as young as Connor Baird.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Dan Forrester was staring at a road sweeper outside his office window. Jenny had told him not to go to work but it wouldn't have done any good. He hadn't slept much last night and thought it a waste to lie there in the dark when he could be catching the early train to London. He had stacks of things to do, and he hadn't even started to get his head around arranging the repatriation of his father's body, let alone sending an email to all of his dad's friends and work colleagues to tell them he'd died. He'd do that when he got home tonight.

His father had died in the Golf-Klub Isterberg near Braunschweig in Germany. A massive heart attack. He'd just come off an eighteen-hole course where he'd been playing with his friend Arne and they were headed to the club house with Arne's wife, Anneke, to celebrate Arne's beating his handicap. A good day out for both of them until Bill had dropped dead, but as everyone said – including his German friends, who admittedly had been a bit shell-shocked at the time – it was a great way to go, dying with no warning and doing something you loved. No hanging about in hospital. No lingering in a hospice waiting for God.

Even Dan had to agree it was probably a good thing as his father would have hated any form of debilitation. Bill'd always enjoyed robust health and had been incredibly active through his seventies and into his eighties. That said, Dan could remember when his father had been forced to stop sailing three years ago. He'd become a real liability on the boat, and when Gordon, his yachting buddy since they were at university, broke the news he couldn't take Bill on board anymore, he hadn't spoken to Gordon for the rest of the year. And even then, when Bill eventually started speaking to Gordon again, it was only because Gordon had admitted he wasn't so steady on his pins either and had sold the boat.

*Stubborn old goats*, Dan thought, shaking his head and smiling ruefully.

The landline rang on his desk and he picked it up. 'Forrester,' he said.

'Dan, it's me. Christopher.'

Dan blinked. 'I was just thinking about Gordon.'

'Christ . . .' The man's voice broke. 'I'm sorry . . .'

Without realising, Dan got to his feet.

'What is it? What's wrong?'

'It's Connor. He . . . he's . . .'

Dan felt a cold wave wash over him. *Not Connor, please, not my godson.*

'T-they found him . . . at the b-bottom of a ravine. They say he j-jumped off Collynie Bridge.'

Dan sat down abruptly. He felt sick.

‘They say it’s suicide. That he *killed himself*. But it’s not true. I know it’s *not true*. But I don’t know what to do. Dan, please. Tell me *what to do*.’

Dan’s fingers were already at work on his computer keyboard. He glanced briefly at his wall clock. In its centre was a man in a suit with a bowler hat and briefcase. His legs were the minutes’ and seconds’ hands, making him look as though he was always running. ‘Running home to us,’ Jenny had told him, smiling.

‘What I want you to do,’ Dan said, ‘is meet me at Inverness Airport this afternoon. I’ll text you my flight details.’

‘But you can’t,’ Christopher protested. ‘Bill just died. You can’t come up here when—’

‘Unless I say differently, I’ll be on the eleven twenty-five flight, arriving at twelve forty-five.’

‘Dan, seriously—’

‘See you there.’

He hung up, knowing it was the only way to silence his friend. There was no way he could stay down here with Connor dead. Bill would have agreed. He could almost hear his dad’s voice in his mind, a strong baritone, brooking no argument.

*Of course, you must go. Not much you can do about me, is there? Send them my love.*

Dan began moving around his office, grabbing the essentials. The scar on his stomach tightened at the activity, making him wince. He’d been lucky that the bullet had passed through the muscles and never entered the abdominal cavity, and even



luckier that he'd healed so fast. Yet another scar to go with the rest. Another wound for Jenny to tenderly kiss.

Passport – he never went anywhere without it – his tablet and phone, the chargers, his wallet. Everything went into his grab bag, the contents of which he'd overhauled after he'd returned from his last assignment a fortnight ago. Underwear, clean shirt and socks, toothbrush and paste, electric shaver. And a tie, just in case.

He moved swiftly through reception. Their receptionist wasn't in yet. His boss was, though, and also Julia from the sound of the coffee machine whirring through her open door, but he didn't have time to explain. Outside he hailed a cab to take him to Paddington. He caught the Heathrow Express with three minutes to spare. Sitting in an aisle seat with his tablet on his lap, his grab bag between his feet, he rang Jenny.

'Hi, Daddy,' his daughter answered.

'Aimee?' he said, surprised. 'Aren't you meant to be at school?'

'We're late 'cause Poppy hid my shoe! Mummy's driving really fast . . .'

He heard Jenny say something, and Aimee giggled. 'She says she's not driving fast. She's driving effici . . . effi . . .'

'Efficiently.'

'Yes!' There was a short pause before she said 'Daddy?', drawing the word out to indicate she was posing a serious question. He could almost see the frown appearing on her face.

'Yes, sweetpea?'

'Who's going to babysit me when you and Mummy go away?'

She didn't have to add, 'now Granddad's dead.' because Dan knew that's what she meant.



‘We won’t be going away for ages,’ he assured her. ‘But if we do, Granny Becky and Grandpa Adam will look after you in Bath.’

Another short pause.

‘OK.’ Her voice suddenly brightened. ‘Look, there’s Tara! She’s late too . . .’

It was one of those times he felt glad she was still young enough to be easily distracted. He heard a flurry of activity at the other end of the phone which he assumed meant they were pulling up outside the school gates and that Aimee was unbuckling her seatbelt – always too soon in his opinion – and grabbing her backpack.

‘Aimee?’ he called.

‘We’ve got relationship education today!’

Aimee may have just turned seven but even so, Dan wasn’t sure how to respond. ‘Great,’ he said.

‘Byeeee!’

‘Bye,’ he responded but she’d already gone.

‘Dan.’ Jenny sounded cautious; he rarely called her from work and when he did it was usually to say he was running late. Hence the wall clock she’d given him.

‘Jen, I’m sorry but something’s come up. I’m on my way to Heathrow.’

She didn’t say anything, just waited.

He leaned back and closed his eyes, belatedly realising he should have held off calling her until she was home. ‘I don’t know if this is the right time to tell you . . .’

‘What is it?’ her voice was alarmed.

‘I don’t want you driving—’



‘Jesus, Dan. It’s too late now. Just tell me, OK?’

‘I’m really sorry . . .’ He rubbed his forehead with the tips of his fingers. ‘Christopher rang. He told me Connor died.’

‘What?’ She sounded blank.

He repeated what he’d said.

‘Oh, no.’ It was a whisper. ‘How?’

‘They say it’s suicide.’

‘Dear God. That’s awful. I mean, really . . .’ Her voice thickened into tears. ‘Shit. He was such a great kid.’

‘I know.’ He rubbed his forehead. ‘I can’t believe it either. Christopher sounds a mess so I’m going to Scotland. Will you be OK? I can always go up tomorrow if you—’

‘No, you must go.’ Her tone started to firm. ‘They need you far more than I do, Dan. I’ll be fine.’

‘If you’re sure . . .’

‘I’m sure. There’s nothing to keep you down here, is there?’

‘It was only stuff to do with repatriating Dad’s body, which can probably wait.’

‘Let me do that. What about the death certificate?’

‘I need to get a provisional one, apparently.’

‘I can do that too . . .’

Not for the first time he thanked his lucky stars for his wife. She was upset over Connor but she wasn’t falling apart. She was supporting him the best way she could, by freeing him to go to Christopher. They’d been married fourteen years, and although they’d had their ups and downs – some resembling the cliffs of Everest in a snowstorm – he didn’t think he’d ever loved her more than he did right at that moment.



‘Concentrate on Sam and Christopher,’ she told him. ‘They really need their friends right now. And poor Gordon . . .’

Gordon and Bill had met at Magdalen College in Oxford. It was thanks to their friendship that their sons, Christopher and Dan, had also become friends. Since he was a toddler, Dan and his family had spent three weeks of every summer holiday at the Bairds’ place, a Scottish estate with a loch and a boathouse, and red deer on the front lawn. For Dan, a London boy brought up with pavements beneath his feet and streetlights keeping the night at bay, those weeks in Scotland had been frightening and exciting in equal measure, and he’d been inordinately gratified to learn that when Christopher came and stayed with him in London he’d felt just as challenged. Not that either admitted it until they’d been down the pub one evening as adults. How they’d laughed at their childhood insecurities.

‘Thank you,’ he said.

‘Just send them my love.’

‘Look . . .’ He took a breath. ‘Will you be OK if I stay up there overnight?’

‘I’m pregnant,’ she told him with a sigh. ‘Not disabled.’

He wasn’t so sure about that since she couldn’t sleep comfortably, couldn’t eat without heartburn and her ankles were the size of watermelons, but he wasn’t going to mention any of that to her.

A stab of grief that his father had died before his second grandson was born pierced him. Bill had already promised to teach him how to fish, like he’d taught his first grandson, Luke. Bill had adored Luke, and Luke had adored him back, riding around on Bill’s back shouting ‘Horsey!’ Not that Dan could



remember this. He'd lost great chunks of his memory from the shock of what everyone believed to be his 'breakdown' when he'd witnessed Luke's death, and it was only thanks to Jenny that he had any kind of mental map of what life had been like with his first son.

'Love you,' Jenny said, and he could almost see the softness in her eyes as she spoke.

'Love you too.'

After he'd hung up, he called his boss.

'Take the week off, Dan.' Philip was brisk. 'More, if you need it. Help your friend then get started on your father's affairs. What's outstanding here?'

'Most can wait,' Dan told him, 'except for Norse.'

Dan talked Philip through the case. DCA & Co specialised in political risk analysis, and this particular client of Dan's was looking at investing in a company in Brazil and needed impartial, professional advice on the potential risks and benefits, before he sank his considerable amount of money into it at the end of the week.

'I'll take Norse, then,' Philip told him. 'The rest will be covered by Julia. OK?'

'Great. Thanks.'

At Heathrow Dan bought a cappuccino and a panini which he devoured at the gate. He hadn't eaten much since his father had died, he realised. It was only now he'd been given a mission to help someone else that his appetite had kicked in. He licked his fingers, glad to be feeling a bit more normal until he remembered what he was doing here.



Connor Baird, thirteen years old, mountain biker and all-round pretty decent kid, was dead.

Had he really committed suicide? Dan pictured Connor's vivid expression, always curious, questioning everything. He'd thought him an intelligent, well-balanced boy, outgoing and active, and about as far from being suicidal as he could imagine, but what did he know? He hadn't seen the boy for two years and who knew what had gone on behind closed doors, behind the screen of his computer. Had he been bullied? Lost any friendships? Had his school let him down somehow? Had he been abused in some way? Dan supposed any one of those things could trigger suicide.

Connor had been so vital, so enthusiastic and *alive* when Dan had last seen him. Had he really changed that much?

He guessed he'd soon find out.