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# T.M. LOGAN

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**WOMAN’S WAY**

T.M. Logan is a former science reporter for the *Daily Mail* and subsequently worked in higher education communications. He was born in Berkshire to an English father and German mother. His debut novel *Lies* was a number-one bestseller and has sold over 300,000 copies. He now lives in Nottinghamshire with his wife and two children.

Also by T.M. Logan

*Lies*

*29 Seconds*

# THE HOLIDAY

T.M. LOGAN

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*For my brothers,  
Ralph and Ollie*

*The fly circles, and lands.*

*Crawls undisturbed on cooling skin.*

*An outstretched finger.*

*An open palm, smeared red.*

*An arm bent backwards, bone broken against the rock.*

*More flies circle around the head, drawn by the scent of death.*

*Drawn by blood pooling darkly around the shattered skull.*

*Below, blood drips steadily into the clear mountain stream.*

*Above, a cliff edge sharp against the perfect blue sky.*

**SATURDAY**

# 1

We drove north, away from the coast.

Through the outskirts of Béziers and deeper into the Languedoc. Vineyards heavy with fruit lined the road on both sides, ranks of low green vines marching off into the distance under a deep blue Mediterranean sky. Sean driving, his eyes hidden behind aviator shades, the kids in the back with hand luggage wedged between them, Lucy dozing while Daniel played on his phone, me staring out of the window as the scenery rolled by, the hire car's aircon just about keeping the sticky mid-afternoon heat at bay.

If I'd known what was coming, what we were driving towards, I would have made Sean stop the car and take us straight back to the airport. I would have grabbed the steering wheel myself, forced the car off the road and made him do a U-turn right there.

But I didn't know.

My instincts had been telling me for a couple of weeks, as we wound down towards the summer holidays, that *something* was up. Something was wrong. Sean had always been the one to look on the bright side, to make the kids laugh, to bring me a gin and tonic when I needed cheering up. In the unconscious allocation



of roles in our marriage, I was the organiser, the rule-setter, the guardian of boundaries. Sean was the light to my shade – always open, funny, patient, the optimist of the family.

Now he was defensive, secretive, serious. Distracted, constantly staring at his mobile. Perhaps work was getting on top of him – hassle from his new boss? He'd half-suggested that maybe he should stay at home this week, because of work. Or perhaps it was his fear of reaching forty, which seemed to grow stronger as his birthday drew nearer. Some kind of midlife crisis? I'd asked him if he thought he might be depressed – if I knew what was wrong, we could tackle it together. But he had brushed my questions aside, insisting he was fine.

I flinched as he touched my thigh.

'Kate?'

'Sorry,' I said, forcing a smile. 'Miles away.'

'How long until we turn off this road?'

I checked my phone.

'About another ten minutes.'

He took his hand off my thigh and moved it back to the steering wheel. The warmth of his fingertips lingered for a moment and I tried to remember the last time I'd felt his touch, the last time he had reached out to me. Weeks? A month?

*The fact that you're even thinking it means something isn't right.* That's what Rowan would have said. The holiday had been her idea, two years in the planning. Rowan, Jennifer, Izzy and me – best friends marking our fortieth birthdays with a week together in the south of France, husbands and children included.

'Grand,' Sean said. 'You OK?'

‘Fine. Just want to get there, get unpacked.’

‘Have you heard from Jennifer and Alistair?’ He glanced up at the rear-view mirror. ‘Since they lost us?’

‘No, but I’m sure they’re not far behind.’

‘I *told* them I’d lead the way and they could follow.’

I turned to look at my husband. It wasn’t like him to worry about Jennifer and her husband – he got along with them OK but had little in common with them, apart from me.

‘You know what Alistair’s like,’ I said. ‘He could get lost in his own back garden.’

‘Sure, I suppose you’re right.’

I went back to staring out of the window at the lush green vineyards rolling past, dark grapes ripening in the summer heat. Off in the distance, the conical black towers of an ancient chateau stood out against the skyline.

After ten miles or so, Google Maps directed us off the main road and up through one tiny hamlet after another. Puimisson, St Genies, Cabrerolles – sleepy villages of narrow streets and ancient stone, old men sitting impassively in the shade watching us pass by. We peeled off onto an even smaller road that climbed higher, winding back and forth up a hill where the vineyards gave way to dark pine trees, finally emerging onto the crest of a hill above the village of Autignac, a tall, whitewashed wall flanking the road. The wall ended in black metal gates tipped with faux spear points and my phone informed us that we had arrived at our destination.

Sean slowed the car to turn in and the black metal gates swung noiselessly open. Gravel crunched softly beneath the

wheels as we turned onto the estate and headed for the villa, tall cypress trees, slim and straight and perfectly pruned, lining the long driveway like a guard of honour. On both sides were lush lawns of thick green grass, watered by sprinklers circling lazily in the mid-afternoon heat.

Sean pulled up next to Rowan's Land Rover Discovery, already parked in front of the villa's sweeping stone staircase.

I turned in my seat. Lucy was still asleep in the back, head tucked into her balled-up sweatshirt, long blonde hair falling across her face. Since hitting her teens she seemed able to sleep anywhere, at any time of the day, if she sat down for more than ten minutes: she had slept on the way to the airport, and on the plane, and was fast asleep now. I had always loved watching her sleep, right from when she was a baby. She would always be *my* baby, even though she was sixteen now – and taller than me.

'Lucy, love,' I said, softly. 'We're here.'

She didn't stir.

Her younger brother, Daniel, sat next to her, headphones on, absorbed in a game of something on his mobile. He was her opposite in many respects – a little ball of energy who had never been keen on sleep, either as a newborn or now, an excitable nine-year-old. He uncovered one ear and took his first look out of the window.

'Are we there?'

'Give your sister a nudge,' I said. '*Gently*.'

He grinned mischievously and poked her arm.

'We're here, Sleeping Beauty. At the holiday house.'

When she gave no response, Sean unclipped his seatbelt.

‘Might as well let her have another five minutes while we take the bags in. Come on.’

I opened my door and stepped out, stretching my arms after the journey, the air-conditioned chill vanishing instantly as the late July heat enveloped me like a blanket. The air smelled of olives and pine and summer heat baked into the dark earth. There was no sound – no traffic, no people – except for the gentle swishing of the breeze high up in the cypress trees, the car engine ticking quietly as it cooled.

We stood there, stretching and blinking in the dazzling sun, taking in the villa. Rowan hadn’t lied: three wide storeys of whitewashed stone and terracotta tiles, the parking circle shaded by olive trees, broad stone steps leading up to a double front door in dark, studded oak.

‘Wow,’ Sean said beside me, and for a moment he looked happy, like his usual self – his old self.

I slipped my arm around his waist, needing for a moment to feel his physical presence as we stood side by side, admiring the villa. I needed to feel his warmth, the touch of his skin, the solidity of muscles beneath his shirt. To anchor him to me.

But after a few seconds he moved away, out of my grasp.

## 2

Rowan appeared at the top of the stone staircase, holding her hands out in greeting.

‘Welcome to Villa Corbières!’ she said with a grin. ‘Isn’t it *marvellous*?’

She made her way down towards us, the heels of her expensive-looking sandals clicking on the stone. Since starting her own business she always looked immaculate, and today she was wearing a pale cream cami dress with Cartier sunglasses pushed up into her straight auburn hair. How far my slightly awkward student friend – who’d had braces on her teeth and Take That posters on her wall – had come since we’d first met. I guess we had all come a long way, but Rowan definitely felt the furthest from her past self. She hugged me and I closed my eyes for a second, letting the smell of her expensive perfume surround me.

‘This place is even bigger than it looked in the pictures!’ I said, forcing myself to smile, watching Sean out of the corner of my eye as he ducked his tall frame into the car and checked his mobile.

‘Wait until you see the interior,’ she said. ‘Come on, I’ll give you the tour.’

Inside, it was all white marble and smooth stone walls, one exquisitely furnished room after another, full of light and beautifully decorated with discreet abstract paintings here and there. It was also deliciously cool, thanks to the air conditioning.

‘It belongs to a client.’ Rowan flashed me a conspiratorial smile. ‘We’ve been getting on particularly well, recently.’

‘It’s amazing,’ I said, and it really was: like something out of a coffee-table magazine. ‘Have you heard from the others?’

‘Jennifer’s crowd are still en route – they went the wrong way on the A9, apparently. And Izzy’s flight from Bangkok – via Paris – gets in tomorrow morning. I’m going to pick her up.’

We had met on the first day of university in Bristol, the four of us neighbours in the same hall of residence, then went on to a shared house until we all graduated at the end of our three years there. For a moment, I wished myself back to our shared house so powerfully that I could almost smell Izzy’s weird and wonderful vegetarian cooking from those days, the perennial post-tennis Deep Heat smell of Jennifer’s room, the heady cocktail of perfume and nail varnish and rosé as we got ready in Rowan’s room for a Friday night out. Back then, it seemed like all four of us were essentially the same – same starting point, same university, same hopes and dreams for the future, just waiting for life to happen to us. We all wanted the same things. Then we had graduated and left our younger selves behind, like snakes shedding their skin.

For more than ten years after finishing university we had made a point of going away for a long weekend every summer, each year somewhere different: Dublin or Prague, Edinburgh or Barcelona.

We'd kept the tradition going despite everything – despite babies and work and other commitments – but then one year, when Rowan was heavily pregnant with Odette in the summer, we didn't get organised, and we just . . . stopped going after that, until we'd missed five years' worth of trips. I didn't really know why.

This holiday was supposed to kick-start the tradition again, doing something together to mark the year we all turned forty. *The big four-oh*. It felt as if we didn't do this all together now, we never would, so for the first time ever we were going to break with tradition by bringing all the children too, plus husbands, for a whole week rather than just a weekend. Spend some proper time together.

And so here we were, half a lifetime after we'd first met.

A little girl appeared at Rowan's side, holding both hands up to her. Her wavy red hair was tied in pigtails, her chubby cheeks lively with freckles.

'Pick me up, Mummy!'

Rowan scooped the little girl up and balanced her on a hip.

'You're getting a bit big to be carried now, Odette.'

'I'm *not* too big.'

'Hello, Odette,' I said to the little girl. 'You *are* getting big. How old are you now?'

She studied me with big hazel eyes, fingers gripping the strap of her mother's sundress. I realised that mother and daughter were wearing virtually identical outfits.

'Five.'

'Daniel's around here somewhere. I'm sure he'd love to play with you.'

‘Don’t like *boys*,’ she said firmly.

As if on cue, Daniel raced into the room and skidded to a stop in front of us, his pale skin flushed.

‘Have you seen the TV?’ he said in an awestruck voice. ‘It’s *massive*.’

Rowan gave him a wide smile.

‘There’s a gym, a games room, a sauna and pool too.’

‘Mum, can I borrow the camcorder later to make a house video?’

‘Yes, but ask your dad first.’

‘Cool. I’m going to find the pool!’ he shouted, haring off again.

‘Be careful,’ I said to his retreating back.

Rowan opened the French windows and led the way out onto a wide stone balcony. There was a long table and twelve chairs, all shaded by sun umbrellas, a view over a large vineyard on a hill sloping gently away from us. Fields and woods and low, rolling hills stretched out beyond.

‘People have lived here since the first century,’ Rowan said. ‘There was a Roman villa on this site originally, then a medieval chateau which fell into disrepair, and now this. It’s west-facing so you get the most amazing sunsets.’

I stood on the balcony, drinking in the French landscape. A rainbow of greens dotted with light-brown terracotta roofs, villas and farmhouses spaced far apart, vineyards and olive groves, wheat fields lined with fruit trees. I felt a little ache inside, a feeling of *how the other half lives*: we could never normally afford to stay in a place like this. Not even close.



‘It’s absolutely breathtaking, Rowan. Thank you so much for arranging it and having us all here – I dread to think how much it would cost for a week.’

She squeezed my arm and followed my gaze across the perfect scene.

‘Probably about twenty thousand in high season,’ she said. ‘But they don’t hire it out to the public – it’s just used for corporate events, jollies, schmoozing. You know the kind of thing.’

I nodded, but in truth I didn’t know: ‘jollies’ and ‘schmoozing’ didn’t really ever come into my working life, and standing there with Rowan, the reality of how far apart our worlds had grown stung a little. I loved my job; I’d been a crime scene investigator with the Metropolitan Police for thirteen years now, but maybe I only noticed everyone else changing because I felt rooted to the same spot – same job, same house, same path – as I had been for years. Maybe it was all about perspective.

Or maybe it was all about Sean.

‘With the vineyard, the gardens and the wall, we’ve got total privacy,’ Rowan continued. ‘All the vineyards inside the wall are part of the property, sloping down towards those trees.’ She put Odette down on the tiled floor and ignored her complaints, pointing instead to a thick line of trees about two hundred yards away. ‘We should all go down there later to have a look: apparently there’s the most spectacular gorge beyond the trees, with a little path cut into the rock face so you can get down to the pools below. Purest water you’ll ever bathe in – comes straight down off the mountains.’

‘Sounds a bit cold for me.’ As soon as the words were out of my mouth I knew they sounded ungrateful, although Rowan didn’t seem to notice. *What was wrong with me?* I needed to be happy here, in this remarkable villa, with all the people I loved together for a week.

‘Below the balcony, on our left here,’ Rowan said, pulling me over to the left and gesturing with a perfectly manicured hand, ‘is the pool area.’

The infinity pool was below us, the water a smooth, perfect blue stretching to the edge of the terrace, surrounded by sun-loungers and umbrellas. It looked incredible.

‘Wow,’ I said, for what felt like the tenth time that day. ‘It looks like something out of a lifestyle magazine.’

‘Over there,’ she said, pointing at a church steeple, ‘is Autignac, ten minutes’ walk away. There’s a bakery, a little supermarché and a lovely little restaurant in the square. On a Wednesday morning they have the most wonderful street market – lots of local produce, food and drink and crafts. You’ll love it.’

She pointed down at a tall, dark-haired man in a white linen shirt and chinos, talking on his mobile, pacing by the side of the pool.

‘Look, Odette, there’s Daddy.’

‘Daddy!’ the little girl shouted, her hands pressed against the stone balustrade of the balcony.

The tall man continued pacing and talking, raising a cigarette to his lips.

‘Daddy!’ Odette shouted again, louder. ‘Daddy! Daddy!’

He still appeared not to have heard, even as the echo of Odette's call rolled away down the hillside.

'DADDY!' she shouted again, her voice so piercing that I had to lean away.

Finally he acknowledged her with a half-smile and a distracted wave of his cigarette before going back to his phone call.

I instinctively reached out to touch Odette's arm, trying to calm her growing anger, but she batted my hand away and started pulling again at her mother's dress.

'Does Russ always have to be contactable for work?' I rested my elbows on the parapet, the smooth stone warm against my skin.

'Pretty much 24/7,' Rowan said. 'Money never sleeps – or whatever Gordon Gekko bullshit his boss comes out with.'

I was only aware of Russ's job in the vaguest terms: something high-powered to do with hedge funds and currencies and city trading. I knew it involved lots of money, but none of the detail.

Rowan's phone beeped with a message and she checked the display.

'Mummy! Pick me up again!' Odette was still pulling at her mother's dress, leaving little sweaty hand marks on the beautiful fabric.

Rowan began typing a rapid reply on the phone's screen with her thumbs.

'Why don't you . . . go and see what Daddy's doing?'

'No!' Odette stamped a pink-sandalled foot on the stone floor, her cherubic little face screwing up. 'Pick me up!'

‘Mummy’s arm is getting tired.’ She continued typing.

‘Mummy!’

‘Just a minute, darling,’ Rowan said, moving back into the house and the vast living area.

Odette shouted one last time and then ran into the house after her mother, her long ginger bunches bouncing with an angry rhythm.

I had to suppress a smile at her display of temper. Odette had thrown the most incredible tantrums from before she could walk, and she didn’t show any sign of stopping. If anything, it seemed her outbursts were getting worse the older she got.

My own daughter wandered out onto the balcony, phone in hand, yawning and stretching.

‘You’re awake!’ I said. ‘Oh, Lucy, come here and look at this amazing view. Isn’t it incredible?’

She came to stand next to me, glancing at the landscape for perhaps a second.

‘Cool,’ she said, turning to me. ‘Have you got the Wi-Fi password?’

### 3

There were ten bedrooms, split between the ground and first floors. Ours was off the first-floor landing, with a creamy marble floor and antique wooden furniture, gauzy mosquito nets tied at each corner of the four-poster bed. Sean heaved our suitcases up onto the bed and we began to unpack.

Daniel appeared in his swimming shorts, all skinny legs and arms and pale English skin. 'I'm ready!' He put his goggles over his eyes and gave us a double thumbs-up. 'Are you ready for the pool, Dad?'

Sean smiled, shaking his head. 'Not quite.'

'I want to be the first in!'

'J'ai presque fini,' Sean said, putting a stack of T-shirts into the chest of drawers.

'Eh?'

'It's French for "I'm nearly ready".'

'Hang on, they speak French here?'

Lucy leaned on the door frame, arms crossed. '*Duh*,' she said. 'That's why it's called France?'

Daniel pulled a face. 'I can't really do French. Can you, Dad?'

'Sure and us Irish have always had a lot in common with our French brothers and sisters.'

‘Like what?’

‘Neither of us can stand the English.’

I threw a towel at him.

‘Just kidding,’ he said, catching it against his chest.

I smiled in spite of myself. ‘Daddy’s just being silly, Daniel,’ I said. ‘We get along very well with the French, that’s why you’re learning it at school.’

‘Can’t really remember anything we’ve learned, apart from *bonjour* and *pommes frites*.’

Sean found his swimming shorts in the suitcase, plucking them out from under a pile of shirts.

‘That’ll actually get you a long way, big lad,’ he said. ‘Hey, do you know why the French only eat one egg for breakfast?’

‘I don’t know, Dad.’

‘Because one egg is *un oeuf*!’

Daniel laughed for a hysterical moment, then stopped. ‘I don’t get it.’

‘Un oeuf? *Enough*? An egg in French is—’

‘Jesus, Dad,’ Lucy rolled her eyes. ‘That’s literally like the worst joke I’ve ever heard.’

Sean retreated into the en suite to get changed.

‘Hey, Daniel,’ he called through the door. ‘Did you hear about the French cheese factory that exploded?’

‘No.’

‘There was nothing left but *de brie*.’

‘Ha!’ Our son shook his head. ‘I don’t get that one either.’

‘De brie,’ Sean said again. ‘*Debris*. Nothing left but *de brie*.’

‘Oh my God,’ Lucy said in disgust. She turned and went back to her own room.

Daniel wrinkled his nose. 'What's brie?'

'What are they teaching you at that school, boy? Brie? The most famous French cheese in the world!'

'Tell me it again.'

Sean repeated the joke as he emerged in his swimming shorts, bare-chested, tossing his jeans, shirt, wallet and keys into a pile on the bed. He had started going to the gym and exercising regularly in the last few months and it was easy to tell – his chest and shoulders were broader and more defined, his waist slimmer. He hadn't been in bad shape before, but he'd definitely been putting the work in recently. I felt a strange pang of insecurity and something else – jealousy? – as if he'd been working out to try to impress someone else. Someone other than me.

Daniel was laughing again as he skipped out of our bedroom and into the hallway.

With our son gone for a moment, the smile on Sean's face faltered and died, and for a moment he looked grim-faced and serious. Deadly serious.

I froze, a pair of shoes in each hand, not sure how to react. His expression was so unexpected, such a change from a moment ago, that it took me completely off guard.

He caught me looking and plastered his smile back on. 'Just going to the pool with Aquaboy, then.'

'Sure. You OK, love?'

'Grand. Never better.'

'I'll finish here. Quick shower then I'll come and join you.'

'Right you are.'

I watched him as he walked out of our bedroom. He started in with the jokes again as they headed down the stairs, his deep Irish brogue echoing down the hallway.

‘Hey, Daniel, do you know why you can’t hear a pterodactyl going to the toilet?’

Daniel’s reply was lost to me.

I turned and went back to unpacking clothes into the wardrobe, a feeling of fear and sickness building so fast inside I had to sit down on the bed. I knew Sean better than I knew anyone else. I knew when he was unhappy, when he was telling jokes to hide nerves, when he was lying. And the look on his face as he’d said he was grand? I couldn’t remember the last time I’d seen him like that. At his father’s funeral, perhaps.

My phone beeped with a muffled sing-song Messenger tone and I stood up, digging it out of my shorts pocket, unlocking it with my thumbprint.

*No new messages.*

I frowned and put it back in my pocket.

The beep came again, still muffled. Across the room.

On the bed? I went to the clothes Sean had left there, a short-sleeved shirt and jeans. Without thinking too much about what I was doing, I picked up the jeans and felt the pockets. A few coins, but no phone. I dropped his jeans back on the bed and listened to the silence of the villa around me. From downstairs, outside, came the faintest sounds from the pool. Splashing, laughing, Daniel’s excited voice.

The muffled Messenger tone sounded for a third time.

Sean’s bedside drawer.



From where I stood, it was close enough to touch. I put my hand out and snatched it back. Sat for a long moment, without moving. Then reached out again and pulled the drawer open slowly.

It was empty apart from his phone, face-down. He'd started going everywhere with it, as if man and phone were connected by an invisible umbilical cord. So much so that I'd started watching him these last few days, only half-deliberately, looking out of the corner of my eye whenever he picked up his phone, trying to see what was absorbing so much of his time and attention. Trying to see the unlock pattern he traced on the screen. Trying to see if I really was going mad, or if this was the start of something unimaginable.

I watched my hand reach in, pick his phone up. Watched my thumb press the power button. Watched the screen light up with a picture of the kids from our last holiday together.

*Just a quick look, I told myself. To put my mind at rest.*

Before I could talk myself out of it I drew his unlock pattern, my heart racing.

I know I shouldn't have looked. I *know*.

But I did.

And that was when everything started to come apart at the seams.

## 4

This is what it feels like: it's as if you're falling.

As if a trapdoor has opened beneath your feet and you're falling through it. One minute everything's fine, you're coasting along just as you have done for years. The next minute you're dropping, plunging, plummeting into the dark. You can't see the ground, can't break your fall. Everything around you is falling, too. Everything you've built.

And this is where it starts: with a little blue numeral indicating three unread items in Messenger.

I clicked on it. At the top of the screen were new messages to and from someone called CoralGirl.

*Message me later when you can x*

*Need to be careful this week like we discussed*

*Remember to delete messages as soon as you've read*

I scrolled down to yesterday's string of back-and-forth messages, reading up from the bottom. The first one was a seven-word message from Sean that stopped my heart.

*Can't stop thinking about what you said x*

*I meant every word*

*Need to talk to you again*

*Does K suspect anything?*

*She has no idea. But I can't go on like this*

*We'll decide when we're in France. Figure out what to do*

*I need to tell her. Soon*

*We talked about this. Better a secret.*

*I know but I feel so bad for lying to K*

I couldn't bear to read the messages but I couldn't stop either, couldn't take my eyes off the little words on the screen, each one another bomb exploding under my marriage.

I scrolled back up and read them again.

*Does K suspect anything?*

*She has no idea. But I can't go on like this*

Something splashed onto the phone's screen and I realised that I was crying.

In that moment, it was as if I didn't know my own history any more, my own story. We'd had one life, our life together, and within a second it felt like fiction. I hadn't even realised I was playing a role. With my hand shaking, I clicked 'View profile' on CoralGirl's account. A generic silhouette instead of a picture, generic email. *Lives in London. Female.* That was it.

I hastily marked the latest messages as unread, then locked his phone and shut it back in the drawer. Sitting on an unfamiliar

bed, in a strange house, in a foreign country, staring blankly at the wall in front of me.

Cold and hot. Angry and tearful and sick with betrayal.

Falling backwards into the dark.

A dozen questions, then a dozen more.

Was it serious?

Why had Sean done this?

How could I have misjudged him so badly?

But the biggest question – *who is she?* – was already half-answered, the clue right there in tiny black letters on a screen.

*We'll decide when we're in France*

France.

One word. But as soon as I saw it, I knew immediately what it meant. Because this week was about the four of us: Rowan, Jennifer, Izzy and me.

Which meant my husband, my soulmate, my *rock*, was having an affair with one of my three oldest and dearest friends.

## 5

He wasn't the type to have an affair, I told myself.

Not my Sean. Not my kind, loving, funny husband who told stupid jokes and gave the kids piggybacks and had sung them to sleep when they were babies.

And yet all the signs had been there these last few weeks: he had been increasingly secretive and preoccupied. Serious, even defensive at times. Constantly on his phone, going to the gym, taking more care over his appearance.

How could I have been so blind when it was happening right in front of me?

Who was she? Which one of my friends had betrayed me?

My heart was thudding in my chest, as if my life was at risk from some unseen danger. *Fight or flight*. I took my phone into the ensuite and locked the door behind me, sat down on the closed toilet seat and called up the picture gallery, selecting an album from the last time we had all been together, a party at Rowan and Russ's house in Chiswick, scrolling until I found what I was looking for.

*There*. A candid picture of all four of us, one of a few that Daniel had taken. Rowan talking and frowning into her iPhone, gesticulating with her free hand. Jennifer, fussing around her

two teenage boys with suntan lotion. Izzy, leaning back against the wall, taking it all in with a wry smile on her face.

And me on the edge of the picture, looking distractedly at the camera.

*We knew each other's secrets*, I thought. Those secret things that bound you together for all time, a common language of memories. We had talked about things with each other that we hadn't shared with boyfriends or husbands. Things we hadn't shared with *anyone* else. I thought I knew them – and it turned out I didn't know one of them at all.

But I knew this: I had wronged all of them in one way or another. That was all I could think about. Over the years of our friendship, I had said and done things that – deliberately or not – had caused anguish and pain and grief to all three of my friends.

Maybe I deserved this.

All of the adult stuff fell away and it felt like I was fifteen again, crippled with anxiety and self-doubt, as if the last twenty-five years had been a dream. Taking off my clothes as if on autopilot, I dropped them in a pile on the floor and stepped into the shower.

I turned the water on and let the tears come, the rushing water stifling the sound of my sobs.

\* \* \*

I knew, of course, what I *should* have done. I should have marched down to the pool and asked him about the messages, what they meant, who they were from. Who she was.

But I didn't.

As the shower water pounded the back of my neck, it started to feel that it wasn't enough, in the scales of our relationship: one flippant question weighed against twenty years together. There wasn't enough weight to it, enough heft, to justify hurling this slender missile at him. It almost didn't seem *fair* to justify wrecking what we had. It would have been . . . irresponsible, somehow. Our marriage wasn't perfect by any means, but who has a perfect marriage? I was happy enough, and I thought he was too. Maybe if I could find out more, I could fix it, rather than destroying it with one reckless question.

And of course I was scared, too. Scared that he would leave me and the kids, discard us for something new. I didn't want it to be real. Didn't want to *make* it real, any more than it already was. I was scared that saying it out loud would make it real.

So I didn't. I couldn't. How do you even start that conversation?

*So, Sean, I memorised the unlock code for your phone and waited for you to leave it unguarded. So who's the other woman? Who is she? What the hell is going on?*

*How could you do this to me? To our family?*

I rehearsed it in my head, practised forming the words in my mouth. Imagined hearing myself saying them. But it all sounded crazy, even to me. So I didn't say any of those things. I stood in the shower and let the water mingle with my tears.

I remembered Googling it a few weeks ago – like a typical twenty-first-century hypochondriac trying to decide between a headache and a brain tumour – and discovered that infidelity happened in about a third of committed relationships.

Which meant that, statistically, one of us on this holiday would fall victim.

Was *already* a victim.

There was another option, of course: to pretend I never saw the messages. Pretend I had never looked. Just let myself float along with the current, as if everything was still the way it was. Why rock the boat? Maybe it would be better to just imagine he was the good husband and I was the good wife who didn't snoop on his phone. Didn't see what could not now be unseen. But I hated the not-knowing, the grey area between the truth and everything else. Black and white suited me best; I didn't deal well with grey. Never had. I wanted to know – for sure – one way or the other, before deciding what to do next.

It would be torture to play happy families for a week in the knowledge that Sean had betrayed me with one of my best friends, when in reality my marriage was a car crash happening in slow motion. But I had to know. Observing him, *seeing* him, I felt sure I would know which one he had picked over me. I spent every working day with evidence, one way or another. Collecting, recording, examining, putting all the pieces together: it was what I did for a living. All I had to do was find the evidence of my husband's infidelity and follow it to the source.

*I'm going to smoke you out, find out which one of you has betrayed me, which one of you is trying to break my family apart.*

If I could find out exactly what was going on, maybe I could stop it before it was too late. I had a week to find out the truth, to find out what was going on with my marriage and whether it could be saved – with a string of messages between us like an



invisible fault line just beneath the surface, waiting to crack wide open and leave me on one side, Sean on the other. Deep within me was a sick, self-destructive urge to know, to know *everything*, every sordid last detail. To see for myself, with my own eyes. Until then, I was going to have to act as if nothing was wrong. Try to act normal – or as close to normal as I could get.

I turned the shower off, feeling more alone than I ever had before, as if I was standing on a ledge, about to step out onto a tightrope into the darkness – a tightrope between my old life, the life I thought I knew, and what came next. What was at the other end? Grief and heartbreak, most likely. But it was a journey I had to take, for my own sanity, for my own self-respect. I would get dressed, paint on a smile and get ready for our week together. And I would find out the truth.

A knock on the bathroom door. Then another.

‘Mummy?’ Daniel’s voice, high and excitable. ‘Are you in there?’

‘Yes. Just getting ready.’

‘Rowan said to tell you that she’s had a text. Jennifer’s nearly here.’