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*THEN SHE WAS GONE*

LISA  
JEWELL

THE  
NIGHT  
SHE  
A NOVEL  
DISAPPEARED



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# THE NIGHT SHE DISAPPEARED

*A Novel*

# LISA JEWELL

**ATRIA BOOKS**

New York   London   Toronto   Sydney   New Delhi

*This book is dedicated to my dad*

## *Arachnophobia*

Arachnophobia. It's one of those words that sounds as bad as that which it describes. The hard *ack* at the end of the second syllable suggestive of the repulsive angles of a spider's legs; the soft sweep of the *f* like the awful wave of nausea that washes through your gut at the suggestion of a sudden movement across a wall or floor; the loud *no* at its center the sound of your brain screaming, in disgust, nononono.

Talulah suffers from arachnophobia.

Talulah is in the dark.

## **PART ONE**

JUNE 2017

The baby is starting to grumble. Kim sits still in her chair and holds her breath. It's taken her all night to get him to sleep. It's Friday, a sultry midsummer night, and normally she'd be out with friends at this time. Eleven o'clock: she'd be at the bar

getting in the last round for the road. But tonight she's in joggers and a T-shirt, her dark hair tied up in a bun, contacts out, glasses on, and a glass of lukewarm wine on

the coffee table that she poured herself earlier and hasn't had a chance to drink.

She clicks the volume down on the TV using the remote and listens again.

There it is, the very early outposts of crying, a kind of dry, ominous chirruping.

Kim has never really liked babies. She liked her own well enough, but did find the

early years testing and ill-suited to her sensibilities. From the first night that both her children slept through the night, Kim has placed a very—possibly disproportionately

—high value on an unbroken night. She had her kids young and easily had time enough and room in her heart for another one or two. But she could not face the

prospect of sleepless nights again. For years she has protected her sleep vigilantly with the help of eye masks and earplugs and pillow sprays and huge tubs of melatonin that

her friend brings back for her from the States.

And then, just over twelve months ago, her teenage daughter, Tal ulah, had a baby. And now Kim is a grandmother at the age of thirty-nine and there is a crying

baby in her house again, soon, it feels, *so soon*, after her own babies stopped crying.

For the most part, despite it happening ten years before she was ready for it, having a grandson has been blessing after blessing. His name is Noah and he has dark

hair like Kim, like both of Kim's children (Kim only real y likes babies with dark hair; blond-haired babies freak her out). Noah has eyes that oscil ate between brown and

amber depending on the light and he has solid legs and solid arms with circlets of fat at the wrists. He's quick to smile and laugh and he's happy to entertain himself,



sometimes for as long as half an hour at a time. Kim looks after him when Tal ulah

goes to col ege and she occasional y gets a kick of panic in her gut at the realization that she has not heard him make a noise for a few minutes. She rushes to his high

chair or to the swing seat or to the corner of the sofa to check that he is stil alive and finds him deep in thought whilst turning the pages of a fabric book.

Noah is a dreamy baby. But he does not like to sleep and Kim finds this darkly

stressful.

At the moment Tal ulah and Noah live here with Kim, alongside Zach, Noah's

father. Noah sleeps between them in Tal ulah's double bed and Kim puts in her earplugs and plays some white noise on her smartphone and is generally saved from

the nighttime cacophony of Noah's sleeplessness.

But tonight Zach has taken Tal ulah out on what they're calling a "date night,"

which sounds strangely middle-aged for a pair of nineteen-year-olds. They've gone to

the very pub that Kim would normally be sitting in tonight. She slipped Zach a twenty-pound note as they were leaving and told them to have fun. It's the first time

they've been out as a couple since before Noah was born. They split up while Tal ulah was pregnant and got back together again about six months ago with Zach

pledging to be the best dad in the world. And, so far, he's been true to his word.

Noah's crying has kicked in properly now and Kim sighs and gets to her feet.

As she does so her phone buzzes with a text message. She clicks it and reads.

*Mum, there's some ppl here from college, they asked us back to theirs. Just for an hour or so. Is that OK?*

Then, as she's typing a reply, another message follows immediately.

*Is Noah OK?*

*Noah is fine, she types. Good as gold. Go and have fun. Stay as long as you like. Love you.*

Kim goes upstairs to Noah's cot, her heart heavy with the prospect of another hour of rocking and soothing and sighing and whispering in the dark while the moon

hangs out there in the balmy midsummer sky, which still holds pale smudges of daylight, and the house creaks empty and other people sit in pubs. But as she approaches him, the moonlight catches the curve of his cheek and she sees his eyes

light up at the sight of her, hears his breath catch with relief that someone has come, and sees his arms reach up to her.

She collects him up and places him against her chest and says, "What's all the fuss now, baby boy, what's all the fuss?" and her heart suddenly expands and contracts

with the knowledge that this boy is a part of her and that he loves her, that he is not seeking out his mother, he is content for *her* to come to him in the dark of night to comfort him.

She takes Noah into the living room and sits him on her lap. She gives him the

remote control to play with; he loves to press the buttons, but Kim can tell he's too

tired to press buttons—he wants to sleep. As he grows heavy on top of her, she knows

she should put him back into his cot, good sleep hygiene, good habits, all of that, but now Kim is tired too and her eyes grow heavy and she pulls the throw from the sofa

across her lap and adjusts the cushion behind her head and she and Noah fall silently

into a peaceful slumber.

Kim awakes suddenly several hours later. The brief midsummer night is almost over

and the sky through the living room window is shimmering with the first blades of

hot morning sun. She straightens her neck and feels all the muscles shout at her.

Noah is still heavy with sleep and she gently adjusts him so that she can reach her

phone. It's 4:20 in the morning.

She feels a small blast of annoyance. She knows she told Talulah to stay out as late

as she likes, but this is madness. She brings up Talulah's number and calls it. It goes straight to voicemail so she brings up Zach's number and calls it. Again it goes to voicemail.

Maybe, she thinks, maybe they came in in the night and saw Noah asleep on top

of her and decided that it would be nice to have the bed to themselves. She pictures

them peering at her around the door of the living room and taking off their shoes,

tiptoeing up the stairs, and jumping into the empty bed in a tangle of arms and legs

and playful, drunken kisses.

Slowly, carefully, she tucks Noah into herself and gets off the sofa. She climbs the



stairs and goes to the door of Tal ulah's room. It's wide-open, just as she left it at eleven o'clock the night before when she came to collect Noah. She lowers him gently

into his cot and, miraculously, he does not stir. Then she sits on the side of Tal ulah's bed and calls her phone again.

Once more it goes straight to voicemail. She calls Zach. It goes to voicemail. She continues this ping-pong game for another hour. The sun is fully risen now; it is morning, but too early to call anyone else. So Kim makes herself a coffee and cuts

herself a slice of bread off the farmhouse loaf she always buys Tal ulah for the weekend and eats it with butter, and honey bought from the beekeeper down the road who sells it from his front door, and she waits and waits for the day to begin.

## 2

AUGUST 2018

"Mr. Gray! Welcome!"

Sophie sees a silver-haired man striding toward them down the wood-paneled

corridor. His hand is already extended although he has another ten feet to cover.

He gets to Shaun and grasps his hand warmly, wrapping it inside both of his as if

Shaun is a small child with cold hands that need warming up.

Then he turns to Sophie and says, "Mrs. Gray! So lovely to meet you at last!"

"Miss Beck, actually, sorry," says Sophie.

“Ah yes, of course. Stupid of me. I did know that. Miss Beck. Peter Doody. Executive Head.”

Peter Doody beams at her. His teeth are unnaturally white for a man in his early

sixties. “And I hear you are a novelist?”

Sophie nods.

“What sort of books do you write?”

“Detective novels,” she replies.

“Detective novels! Well, well, well! I’m sure you’ll find lots to inspire you here at

Maypole House. There’s never a dull day. Just make sure you change the names!” He

laughs loudly at his own joke. “Where have you parked?” he asks Shaun, indicating

the driveway beyond the huge doorway.

“Oh,” says Shaun, “just there, next to you. I hope that’s OK?”

“Perfect, just perfect.” He peers over Shaun’s shoulder. “And the little ones?”

“With their mother. In London.”

“Ah yes, of course.”

Sophie and Shaun follow Peter Doody, wheeling their suitcases down one of the

three long corridors that branch off the main hallway. They push through double doors and into a glass tunnel that connects the old house to the modern block, and

continue wheeling the cases out of a door at the back of the modern block and down a curved path toward a small Victorian cottage that backs directly onto woodland and

is surrounded by a ring of rosebushes just coming into late-summer bloom.

Peter takes a bunch of keys from his pocket and removes a pair on a brass ring.

Sophie has seen the cottage once before, but only as the home of the previous head

teacher, filled with their furnishings and ephemera, their dogs, their photographs.

Peter unlocks the door and they follow him into the flagstone back hallway. The Wellington boots have gone, the waxed jackets and dog leads hanging from the hooks. There is a petrolic, smoky smell in here, and a cold draft coming up from between the floorboards, which makes the cottage feel strangely wintry on this dog

day of a long, hot summer.

Maypole House is in the picturesque village of Upfield Common in the Surrey

Hills. It was once the manor house of the village until twenty years ago, when it was

bought up by a company called Magenta that owns schools and colleges all over the

world and turned into a private boarding school for sixteen-to-nineteen-year-olds who'd flunked their GCSEs and A levels first time around. So,

yes, a school for failures, in essence. And Sophie's boyfriend, Shaun, is now the new head teacher.

"Here." Peter tips the keys into Shaun's hand. "All yours. When is the rest of your

stuff arriving?"

"Three o'clock," replies Shaun.

Peter checks the time on his Apple Watch and says, "Well, then, looks like you've

got plenty of time for a pub lunch. My treat!"

"Oh." Shaun looks at Sophie. "Erm, we brought lunch with us, actually." He indicates a canvas bag on the floor by his feet. "But thank you, anyway."

Peter seems unperturbed. "Well, just for future reference, the local pub is superb.

The Swan and Ducks. Other side of the common. Does a kind of Mediterranean, meze, tapas type of menu. The calamari stew is incredible. And an excellent wine cellar. Manager there will give you a discount when you tell him who you are."

He looks at his watch again and says, "Well, anyway. I'll let you both settle in. All

the codes are here. You'll need this one to let the van in when it arrives and this one is for the front door. Your card will operate all the interior doors." He hands them a

lanyard each. "And I will be back tomorrow morning for our first day's work. FYI,

you may see some strangely dressed folks around; there's been an external residential

course running here all week, some kind of *Glee*-type thing. It's the last day today, they'll be leaving tomorrow, and Kerryanne Muligan, the matron—you met her last

week, I believe?"

Shaun nods.

"She's looking after the group so you don't need to worry yourself about them.

And that, I think, is that. Except, oh..." He strides toward the fridge and opens the

door. "A little something, from Magenta to you." A single bottle of cheap champagne

sits in the empty fridge. He closes the door, puts his hands into the pockets of his blue chinos, and then takes them out again to shake both their hands.

And then he is gone and Shaun and Sophie are alone in their new home for the

very first time. They look at each other and then around and then at each other again.

Sophie bends down to the canvas bag and pulls out the two wineglasses she'd packed

this morning as they'd prepared to leave Shaun's house in Lewisham. She unwraps

them from the tissue paper, rests them on the counter, pulls open the fridge, and grabs the champagne.

Then she takes Shaun's outstretched hand and follows him to the garden. It's west-facing and cast in shade at this time of the day, but it's still just warm enough to sit with bare arms.

While Shaun uncorks the champagne and pours them each a glass, Sophie lets her

gaze roam across the view: a wooden gate between the rosebushes that form the boundary of the back garden leads to a velvety green woodland interspersed with patches of lawn onto which the midday sun falls through the treetops into pools of

gold. She can hear the sound of birds shimmying in the branches. She can hear the

champagne bubbles fizzing in the wineglasses. She can hear her own breath in her lungs, the blood passing through the veins on her temples.

She notices Shaun looking at her.

“Thank you,” he says. “Thank you so much.”

“What for!”

“You know what for.” He takes her hands in his. “How much you’re sacrificing to

be here with me. I don’t deserve you. I really don’t.”

“You do deserve me. I’m ‘sloppy seconds,’ remember?”

They smile wryly at each other. This is one of the many unpleasant things that

Shaun’s ex-wife, Pippa, had found to say about Sophie when she’d first found out

about her. Also, “She looks much older than thirty-four,” and, “She has a strangely flat backside.”

“Well, whatever you are, you’re the best. And I love you.” He kisses her knuckles

hard and then lets her hands go so that she can pick up her glass.

“Pretty, isn’t it?” Sophie says dreamily, staring through the back gate and into the

woods. “Where do they go?”

“I have no idea,” he replies. “Maybe you should go for a wander after lunch?”

“Yes,” says Sophie. “Maybe I will.”

Shaun and Sophie have only been together for six months. They met when Sophie

came to Shaun’s school to give a talk about publishing and writing to a group of his

A-level English students. He took her for lunch as a “thank you” and at first she felt nervous, as if she’d done something wrong; the association between being alone with

an older male teacher and having done something wrong was buried so deep into her

psyche she couldn’t override it. But then she’d noticed that he had very, very dark

brown eyes, almost black, and that his shoulders were broad and that he had a wonderful warm, hearty laugh and a soft mouth and no wedding band and then she

realized that he was flirting with her and then there was an email from him in her

inbox a day later, sent from his private email address, thanking her for coming in and wondering if she might like to try the new Korean place they’d chatted about at lunch

the previous day, maybe on Friday night, and she'd thought, I have never been on a

date with a man in his forties, I have never been on a date with a man who wears a tie to work, and I have not, in fact, been on a date for five full years, and I really would like to try the new Korean place, so why not?

It was during their first date that Shaun told her he was leaving the big secondary

school in Lewisham where he was head of sixth form at the end of the term to be a

head teacher at a private boarding sixth-form college in the Surrey Hills. Not because he wanted to be in the private sector, working in a mahogany-lined office, but because his ex-wife, Pippa, was moving their twins from the perfectly nice state primary they'd both been at for three years to an expensive private school and expected him to contribute half of their school fees.

At first the implications of this development hadn't really hit Sophie. March tumbled into April tumbled into May tumbled into June and she and Shaun became closer and closer and their lives became more and more intertwined and then Sophie

met Shaun's twins, who let her put them to bed and read them stories and comb their

hair, and then it was the summer holidays and she and Shaun started to spend even

more time together, and then one night, drinking cocktails on a roof terrace overlooking the Thames, Shaun said, "Come with me. Come with me to Maypole

House."



Sophie's gut reaction had been no. No no no no no. She was a Londoner. She was

independent. She had a career of her own. A social life. Her family lived in London.

But as July turned to August and Shaun's departure drew ever closer and the fabric of

her life started to feel as though it were stretching out of shape, she turned her thinking around. Maybe, she thought, it would be nice to live in the countryside.

Maybe she could focus more on work, without all the distractions of city living.

Maybe she'd enjoy the status of being the head teacher's partner, the cachet of being

the first lady of such an exclusive place. She went with Shaun to visit the school and she walked around the cottage and felt the warm solidity of the terra-cotta tiles beneath her feet, smelled the sensuous fragrance of wild roses, of freshly mowed grass, of sun-warmed jasmine through the back door. She saw a space below a window in

the hallway that was just the right size for her writing desk, with a view across the

school grounds. She thought, I am thirty-four. Soon I will be thirty-five. I have been alone for a long, long time. Maybe I should do this ridiculous thing.

And so she said yes.

She and Shaun made the most of every minute of their last few weeks in London.

They sat on every pavement terrace in South London, ate every kind of obscure ethnic cuisine, watched films in multistory car parks, wandered

around pop-up food

fairs, picnicked in the park to the background sounds of grime music and sirens and

diesel engines. They spent ten days in Majorca in a cool Airbnb in downtown Palma

with a balcony overlooking the marina. They spent weekends with Shaun's children

and took them to the South Bank to run through the fountains, for al fresco lunches

at Giraffe and Wahaca, to the Tate Modern, to the playgrounds in Kensington Gardens.

And then she'd leased her one-bedroom flat in New Cross to a friend, canceled her

gym membership, signed out of her Tuesday-night writers' group, packed some

boxes, and joined Shaun here, in the middle of nowhere.

And now, as the sun shines down through the tops of the towering trees, splashing

dapples onto the dark fabric of her dress and the ground beneath her feet, Sophie starts to feel the beginning of happiness, a sense that this decision borne of pragmatism might in fact have been some kind of magical act of destiny unfurling,

that they were meant to be here, that this will be good for her, good for both of them.

Shaun takes their lunch things through to the kitchen. She hears the tap go on and

the clatter of dishes being laid down in the butler's sink.

"I'm going for a wander," she calls to Shaun through the open window.

She turns to put the latch on the gate as she leaves the back garden and as she does

so her eye is caught by something nailed to the wooden fence.

A piece of cardboard, a flap torn from a box by the look of it.

Scrawled on it in marker and with an arrow pointing down to the earth are the

words "Dig Here."

She stares at it curiously for a moment. Maybe, she thinks, it's left over from a

treasure trail, a party game, or a team-building exercise from the *Glee* course that is finishing today. Maybe, she thinks, it's a time capsule.

But then something else flashes through her mind. A jolting déjà vu. A certainty

that she has seen this exact thing before: a cardboard sign nailed to a fence. The words

"Dig Here" in black marker pen. A downward-pointing arrow. She has seen this before.

But she cannot for the life of her remember where.

### 3

JUNE 2017

Zach's mum is older than Kim. Zach is her youngest child; she has another four, al

girls, all much older than him. Her name is Megs. She answers the door to Kim in

cargo shorts and a voluminous green linen top, sunglasses on her head, a patch of sunburn on the bridge of her nose.

“Kim,” she says. Then she turns immediately to Noah and beams at him. “Hello,

my beautiful bubba,” she says. She chucks him under the chin, and then glances back

at Kim. “Everything OK?”

“Have you seen the kids?” Kim says, hitching Noah onto her other hip. She walked here without the pram; it’s hot and Noah is heavy.

“Talulah, you mean? And Zach?”

“Yeah.” She shifts Noah again.

“No. I mean, they’re at yours, aren’t they?”

“No, they went to the pub last night, no sign of them now, and they’re not answering their phones. I thought maybe they might have come back to yours to crash.”

“No, love, no. Just me and Simon here. Do you want to come in? We’re just out in

the garden. We can try calling them again?”

In Megs’s back garden, Kim lowers Noah down on the grass next to a push-along

plastic toy that he attempts to pull himself up onto. Megs takes out her phone and

presses in her son's number. Megs's husband, Simon, nods at Kim curtly and then

turns back to his newspaper. Kim's always had a horrible feeling that Simon finds her

attractive and that his offhand manner is his way of dealing with how uncomfortable

this makes him feel.

Megs scowls and ends the call. "Straight through to voicemail," she says. "Let me

call Nick."

Kim throws her a questioning look.

"You know, the barman from the Ducks? Hold on." She prods the screen of her

phone with blue acrylic nails. "Nick, love, it's Megs. How are you? How's your mum? Good. Good. Listen, were you working last night? You didn't happen to see

Zach in there, did you?"

Kim watches Megs nod a lot, listens to her making receptive noises. She pulls a

lump of earth from Noah's hand just as he's about to press it into his mouth and

waits patiently.

Finally Megs ends the call. "Apparently," she says, "Zach and Talulah went off

after the pub to someone's house, someone Talulah knows from college."

“Yeah, I know that. But any idea who?”

“Scarlett someone. And a couple of others. Nick seemed to think they were heading out of the village. They went in a car.”

“Scarlett?”

“Yes. Nick said she’s one of the posh kids from the Maypole.”

Kim nods. She’s never heard of a Scarlett. But then, Talulah doesn’t really talk

much to her about college. Once she’s home, Noah is pretty much the only topic of

conversation in the house.

“Anything else?” she asks, pulling Noah onto her lap.

“That’s all he had, I’m afraid.” Megs smiles at Noah and stretches her arms out

toward him, but he curls himself closer to Kim and Kim sees Megs’s smile falter.

“Should we be worried? Do you think?”

Kim shrugs. “I honestly don’t know.”

“Have you tried calling Talulah’s friends?”

“I don’t have any numbers for them. They’re all on her phone.”

Megs sighs and leans back into her chair. “It’s strange,” she says. “If it weren’t for the baby, I’d just assume they were sleeping somewhere off somewhere, you know,

they're so young, and God knows the things I got up to at their age. But they're both

so devoted, aren't they, to Noah. It just seems a bit..."

"I know." Kim nods. "It does."

Kim wishes that she and Megs were closer, but Megs never seemed to believe in

Zach and Talulah as a couple, and then after Noah was born she backed off completely for a while, barely visiting Noah and acting like a distracted aunt when she

did. And now she's missed her moment with Noah, who recognizes her but doesn't know that she's important.

"Anyway," Kim says. "I'll go and do some research into this Scarlett girl. See what

I can dig up. But hopefully, I won't need to. Hopefully, they'll be home by the time I get back, looking sheepish."

Megs smiles. "You know what," she says, brightly, in a tone of voice that suggests

that really she just wants to get back to relaxing in the garden in the sun, that she

really isn't in the mood for worry, "I bet you anything they are."

In Talulah's room, Kim rifles through the contents of her schoolbag. Talulah is studying social care; she wants to be a social worker. Most of her coursework is done

at home and she has to go into college only three times a week. Kim watches her at the bus stop from the front window sometimes, her fresh-faced baby in her casual college

gear, her hair tied back, clutching a folder to her chest. Nobody would ever guess that she has a child of her own at home, she looks so young.

Kim finds a planner in the bag and flicks through it. It's full of Tallulah's dense,

somewhat inelegant handwriting—she'd started off left-handed and forced herself to

learn to write with her right hand to fit in when she was at primary school. There's no point looking for phone numbers—no one writes down phone numbers anymore—

but maybe Scarlett's name will appear on a class list or some such.

And there it is, glued down and folded up on the back inside cover of the planner:

“Student Contacts.” Kim scans it quickly, her finger coming to rest on the name

“Scarlett Jacques: Student Event Planning Committee.”

And there's her email address.

Kim immediately starts to type a message:

Scarlett. This is Tallulah Murray's mum, Kim. Tallulah hasn't come home since going out last night and isn't answering her phone and I wondered if you had any idea where she

might be? A friend said she was with someone called Scarlett. Please call me on this number as soon as possible. Many thanks.

She presses send and then exhales and rests the phone on her lap.

Downstairs the front door clicks shut. It's 2:00 p.m. and it'll be her son, Ryan, home from work. He works at the grocer's in the village every Saturday, saving up for



his big summer holiday to Rhodes in August, his first without his mum, just with

friends.

“Are they back?” he calls up the stairs to her.

“Nope,” she calls back down.

She hears him dropping his keys on a surface, throwing his trainers into the pile of

shoes by the front door, then bounding up the stairs.

“Seriously?” he says. “Have they called?”

“No. Not a word.”

She tells him about Megs calling Nick at the pub and the girl called Scarlett, and as

she talks, her phone rings with an unknown number.

“Hello?”

“Oh, hi, is this Lula’s mum?”

“Yes, hi, this is Kim.”

“Hi. It’s Scarlett here. I just got your email.”

Kim’s heart begins to race painfully, then skitter.

“Oh,” she says, “Scarlett. Thank you. I just wondered—”

Scarlett cuts in. “They were at my house,” she says. “They left at about three a.m.

That’s all I can tell you.”

Kim blinks; her head rocks back slightly. “And were they... did they... say where

they were going?”

“They said they were going to get a cab home.”

Kim doesn’t like the tone of Scarlett’s voice. She has one of those clipped, chilly

voices that tell of four-poster beds and bohemian private schools and gravel on the

driveway. But she also sounds disinterested, as though talking to Kim is beneath her

somehow.

“And did they seem OK? I mean, had they had a lot to drink?”

“I guess, yeah. Lula was sick. That’s why they left.”

“She threw up?”

“Yeah.”

Kim pictures her slight, kind girl, bent double over a flower bed, and her heart

lurches.

“And did you see them? Get into a taxi?”

“No. They just left. And that was that.”

“And—sorry—but where do you live, Scarlett? Just so that I can ask around the

local cab companies?”

“Dark Place,” she replies, “near Upley Fold.”

“Street number?”

“No street number. Just that. Dark Place. Near Upley Fold.”

“Oh,” says Kim, drawing two rings around the words on the paper where she’s

written them down. “OK. Thank you. And please, if you hear anything from either

of them, will you give me a ring? I mean, I don’t know how well you know Talulah...”

“Not that well,” Scarlett interjects.

“Yes, well, she’s not the type just to disappear, not to come home. And she has a

baby, you know.”

There’s a brief pause at the other end of the line. Then, “No. I didn’t know that.”

Kim gives her head a small shake, tries to imagine how Zach and Talulah could

have spent a whole night with this girl without once mentioning Noah. “Well, yes.

She and Zach are parents. They have a son, he’s twelve months old. So not coming

home is kind of a big deal.”

There’s another silence at the end of the line and then Scarlett says, “Right, well,

yeah.”

Kim says, “Cal me, please, if you hear anything.”

“Yeah,” says Scarlett. “Sure. Bye.”

And then she ends the cal .

Kim stares at her phone for a moment. Then she looks up at Ryan, who has been

watching the phone cal curiously.

“Weird,” says Kim. She relays the detail of the cal to her son.

“Shal we drive over there?” he suggests. “To her house?”

“Scarlett’s?”

“Yeah,” says Ryan. “Let’s go to Dark Place.”

**4**

AUGUST 2018

Shaun heads into work early the fol owing morning. Sophie stands at the door of the

cottage and watches as he disappears up the glass passageway, toward the main school

building. He turns at the double doors and waves at her and then he is gone.

The grounds of the school are ful of people wheeling smal cases behind them,

heading toward the car park at the front of the school. The residential *Glee* course is over, summer is coming to an end, from tomorrow the boarding-school students wil

start returning. Cleaners wait in the shadows to enter their vacated rooms and prepare them for the new term.

She heads back into the cottage now. It's a pleasant house, functional. The air inside is clammy and cool with small windows grown over with ivy and wisteria branches that don't let in much light. It still smells of other people and there's that odd, damp bonfire smell in the hallway, which seems to emanate from between the

floorboards. She's covered the floorboards over with a runner and placed a reed diffuser on the sideboard, but it still lingers. It's going to take a while to make the cottage feel like home, but it will, she knows it will. Shaun's children are coming the weekend after next: that will bring it to life.

Sophie turns to a box that she is halfway through unpacking when there is a knock

at the door.

"Hello?"

"Oh, hi! It's Kerryanne! The matron!"

Sophie opens the door and sees a woman with thick golden hair held back with

sunglasses, bright blue eyes, and sun-burnished cleavage. She's wearing a maxi dress

and bejeweled flip-flops. She does not look like a matron.

"Hi!" says Sophie, reaching out to shake her hand. "Lovely to meet you!"

"You too. You must be Sophie?"

"Correct!"

Kerryanne has a huge set of keys hanging from her hand. "How are you settling

in?” she says, passing the keys from one hand to the other. “Got everything you need?”

“Yes!” says Sophie. “Yes. Everything’s just fine. Shaun’s first day. He headed into

work about ten minutes ago.”

“Yes, I just saw him. We exchanged pleasantries! Anyway, I wanted you to take my

number, in case you need anything. Obviously, my primary function is student welfare, but I’ll be keeping my eye out for you as well. I know how weird and new

everything must be feeling, so please consider me to be your matron too. And if you’re missing home and need a shoulder to cry on...”

Sophie blinks, not sure if she’s being serious or not, but Kerryanne beams at her

and says, “Just joking. But honestly, anything you need—advice about the village, about the staff, the kids, *whatever*. Please just text me. And I’m on the second floor of Alpha block, just”—she crouches slightly to peer beneath an overhanging tree on the

periphery of Shaun and Sophie’s garden—“that window there. With the balcony.

Room number 205.” She passes Sophie a piece of paper with her details written on it

in neat, schoolteachery script.

“Is it just you?”

“Most of the time, yeah. My daughter comes to stay sometimes, Lexie, she’s a travel blogger so she comes and goes. But mostly it’s just me. And I hear there’ll be

some little ones here from time to time?”

“Yes. Jack and Lily. Twins. They’re seven.”

“Aw. Nice age. Right, well, any questions, anything at all, just ask. I’ve worked

here for twenty years. I’ve lived in the village for nearly sixty. There’s nothing I don’t know about Upfield Common. In fact, you and Shaun should come over for a drink

tonight, I can chew your ears off over a glass of wine.”

“Oh,” says Sophie. “That would be lovely. Thank you.” She is about to thank her

again and head back indoors, when her eye is caught by a pair of magpies taking flight from the treetops in the woodland beyond her garden. “Those woods?” She gestures

at them. “Where do they lead?”

“Oh, you don’t want to go too far into those woods.”

Sophie throws Kerryanne a questioning look.

“They go on for miles. You’ll get lost.”

“Yes, but where do they come out at?”

“Depends which direction you go in. There’s a hamlet about a mile and a half that

way.” She points to the left. “Upley Fold. Church, village hall, a few houses. It’s quite pretty. And if you head straight for a mile or so”—she points ahead—“there’s the back end of a big house. ‘Dark Place,’ it’s called. Empty now. It belongs to a hedge-fund manager from the Channel Islands and his very glamorous wife.” She rolls her

eyes slightly. “Their daughter was a student here for a while, actual y. Scarlett.

Amazingly talented girl. But I real y wouldn’t recommend trying to get there.

Students head over there sometimes because there’s an old swimming pool and a tennis court, but then they can’t find their way back and there’s no signal in the woods. We even had to get the bloody police involved once.” She rol s her eyes again.

Sophie nods. She’s feeling a bristle of excitement. In London when she needs writing inspiration, she’ll walk up to Dulwich or Blackheath and look at the grand

old houses there and imagine the stories that lie within. Now she thinks of her walking stick and her compass and her water bottle and the opportunity to get some

proper steps on her fitness app. The sun is hazy, it’s about seventy-two degrees, perfect walking weather. The words “old pool” and “tennis court” swim through her

imagination. She thinks of the dryness of the air of a house abandoned throughout a

long, hot summer, the bleached lawns, the dusty, cracked flagstones, the birds nesting in grimy window casements.

She smiles at Kerryanne. “I’ll try to resist the urge,” she says.

## 5

SEPTEMBER 2016

Scarlett Jacques is standing next to Tal ulah in the queue at the canteen. She is five foot ten, thin as a stick; her bleached hair is dyed pale blue and gathered on top of her head in a bundle and someone has drawn a tiny rainbow on her cheekbone. She’s wearing a man’s hoodie, with sleeves that



come to her knuckles, and a pair of oversize jersey shorts, with high-top trainers. Her fingers are covered with heavyweight rings

and her fingernails are painted green. She hovers over the miniature cereal boxes, her fingers dancing across their spines until they land, decisively, on Rice Krispies. She grabs it and adds it to her tray, next to a carton of chocolate soya milk and an apple.

Tal ulah watches her head to the til . Her people are already gravitating toward her, fol owing in her wake, ensuring that they wil find space next to her once she has decided where she wil sit. Tal ulah picks up a ham sandwich and an orange juice and

pays for them. She sits at a table close to Scarlett's.

Scarlett sits with her long legs stretched out, her huge high-top trainers resting on

the chair opposite her, her shins stil boasting a silky summer tan. She opens the chocolate soya milk and pours it onto her Rice Krispies, then lowers her face to the

bowl and shovels them into her mouth with a spoon. At one point she spil s chocolate milk down her chin and wipes it away with the cuff of her hoodie. She's

with the kids she always hangs around with. Tal ulah doesn't know their names.

Scarlett and her clique al used to go to the posh school in Tal ulah's vil age, Maypole House, which has a reputation for being for thick rich kids or rich kids with behavioral issues or rich kids with ADHD or rich kids with drug-abuse problems.

They screech around the vil age in their convertible Mini Clubmans, stalk into the

local pubs with their fake IDs and their loud voices and their rich-kid hair. In the co-op you could hear them before you saw them, calling to each other across the aisles

about how there was no fresh mozzarella, then talking across the heads of the village teenagers manning the tills as if they didn't even exist.

Now a small group of them has, for some unknown reason, ended up at the local

further education college in Manton, the nearest town. Most of them are in their first year of a fine art diploma. A couple of them are studying fashion. They clearly all

come from families that had expected them to end up in good universities and instead

had ended up at Manton College of Further Education and consequently there is a

defensiveness about them.

Talulah puts a hand to her belly. The flesh there is still so loose and blubbery. It's been nearly three months since she gave birth, but it feels like half her insides are still made of baby. She just stopped breastfeeding a week ago and her breasts still leak sometimes and she keeps pads inside her bra. She switches on her phone and looks at

the photo of Noah on her home screen. Her stomach flips, a mixture of unbearable

love and fear. For three months she and Noah have been inseparable; her first day at

college last week was the first time she'd left him for longer than a few minutes. Now he is half an hour away from her, a bus ride, six and a half miles away, and her arms

feel weightless, her breasts feel heavy. She texts her mum. *All OK?*

Her mum replies immediately. *Just got back from looking at the ducks. All good.*

At the next table, Scarlett has zoned out from talking to her clique and is staring at her phone in a way that suggests she's not really looking at anything. She rolls the

apple on the tray around and around with the fingers of her spare hand. Her face, in

profile, is interesting; there is a bump in her nose, a slight curve to her chin. Her mouth is a thin line. But still she is somehow pretty, prettier than any other girl at the college, even the ones with perfect noses and pillow lips. She turns and catches Talulah staring at her. She narrows her eyes, then turns away from her, drops her feet back to the floor, picks up the apple, tucks it in the pocket of her hoodie, and leaves her group of friends without saying goodbye to any of them. As she passes Talulah

she narrows her eyes again, and Talulah imagines for a split second that she sees a

smile pass across her face.

**6**

JUNE 2017

Kim buckles Noah into his car seat and gives him one of his fabric books to flick through. Ryan sits in the back with him, while Kim gets into the driver's seat and

switches on her phone to put the address into Google.

"Dark Place," she says as she types. "It's only a mile away, I wonder why I've never

heard of it before."

She slots her phone into its holder, presses start, and pulls out of the quiet cul-de-

sac where she has lived since she was twenty-one years old. She hums distractedly under her breath. She doesn't want Noah to pick up on her anxiety, doesn't want

Ryan to have to deal with her mounting feelings of dread and fear.

They drive through the sun-dappled lanes that connect Upfield Common with

Manton, the nearest big town. Just before the large roundabout that marks the end of

the village, Google tells them to turn right, up a tight dogleg. The signpost is overgrown with buddleia, but Kim can just make out the words UPLEY FOLD ½.

It's a single-lane road and she drives cautiously in case she meets a vehicle coming

the other way. It's nearly 4:00 p.m. and the sun is still high in the sky. She peers into the rearview mirror and says to Ryan, "Can you put the screen down on Noah's side?"

He's in full sun."

Ryan leans across and pulls it down. Noah points at something in his fabric book

and attempts to tell Ryan what it is, but he hasn't learned how to talk yet so Ryan just looks at the page and says, "Yes, piggy, that's right. Piggy!"

Google tells her to take the next turning on the right. She cannot believe that there

is actually a turning on the right, but there it is, a track with a line of meadow grass running down its center, the hedgerows lower here so Kim

can see blinding fields of

rape, some cows silhouetted in the distance, a cluster of cottages. And then, after another few minutes, a pair of metal gates, a gravel driveway pointing due south, the

name DARK PLACE fashioned out of wrought iron, the suggestion of a turreted house in the distance. Kim turns off the engine and puts her phone into her handbag.

“What are you going to do?” asks Ryan.

Her eyes scan the gate for a doorbell or entry system, but there’s nothing. A footpath runs alongside the gravel drive. She gets Noah’s pushchair out of the boot

and assembles it, batting midges out of her face. “Come on,” she says to Ryan, unclipping the fastenings on Noah’s seat. “We’re going to walk.”

Ryan uses his phone to google Dark Place and he gives her a running commentary

from its Wiki page as they walk. Kim enjoys the distraction from her thoughts.

“It was built in 1643,” he says. “Wow, 1643,” he repeats. “But most of it got burned down a few years after it was built. It lay empty for seventy years and that’s

how it got the name ‘Dark Place,’ because of the charred wood that surrounded it.

The Georgian wing was added in 1721 and the Victorian wing in the late 1800s by a

coffee plantation owner called Frederick de Thames. Who... God...” He pauses and

scrolled back. “Who fathered at least thirty-eight children in Colombia, seven in the

UK, and died of the Spanish flu when he was only forty-one. The house was left to

his last wife, Carolina de Thames, who was only twenty when he died, and who passed it on in turn to her son, Lawrence. In 1931 three of Frederick’s older children plotted to have Lawrence assassinated, but the man they hired to kill him got caught

in a fox trap in the grounds of Dark Place and wasn’t found until five days later when he’d been partially eaten by foxes and had his eyes pecked out by crows. He had the

assassination orders on a signed form in the pocket of his coat. The three brothers

who’d plotted Lawrence’s death were sent to prison and Lawrence lived in the house

until he died in 1998. Whereupon, with no living heirs, the house went back on the

market and was purchased by an unknown buyer for nearly two million pounds in

2002.”

As they walk Kim casts her eyes across the ground, across the horizon, all around

her, looking for signs of her daughter. She’d called all three local taxi companies before leaving the house and none of them had collected anyone from Dark Place last

night.

They walk for nearly ten minutes until finally she sees the house. It looks just as

Kim had expected it to look from Ryan's description. A hodgepodge of disparate architectural styles, blended almost seamlessly together across three wings, set around a central courtyard. The sun sparkles off the diamonds of leaded windows on the left

wing and larger Victorian casement and sash windows on the right. It should be a

mess, but it is not; it is exquisitely beautiful.

In the driveway are four cars and a golf buggy. Even from here, Kim can hear the

sound of people splashing in a swimming pool. Ryan helps her pull Noah's buggy up

the steps to the front door and she rings the bell.

A young man answers. A huge Saint Bernard dog follows behind and collapses,

panting, at his feet. The man is bare-chested and holding a six-pack of beers in one

hand and a tea towel in the other.

He looks from Kim to Noah to Ryan and back to Kim. "Hi!"

"Oh, hi. My name is Kim. I wondered if Scarlett was around? Or her parents?"

"Er, yeah. Yeah, sure. Hold on a sec." He turns and yells out, "Mum! Someone for

you at the door!"

Behind him, Kim sees a pale stone staircase, with a striped runner up the middle.

She sees modern art and designer light fittings and then a woman in a loose white

sundress and white flip-flops appears. The dog stands heavily to greet the woman, who peers at Kim curiously through the door.

The boy smiles at Kim and then disappears.

“Yes?” says the woman.

“Sorry to disturb you like this, on a Saturday.”

The woman looks across her shoulder at the gravel sweep and says, “How did you

get here?”

“Oh,” says Kim, “we parked at the gate, and walked.”

“But that’s half a mile! You should have rung the bell.”

“Well, we looked, but we couldn’t see one.”

“Urgh, yes, sorry, it’s a movement sensor. You need to stand over it. Lots of people

miss it. You should have called.”

“Well, I didn’t have a number. Or at least, I had a number but I didn’t realize how

far the house was going to be from the gate, but anyway, it’s fine. It’s just... I’m looking for my daughter.”

“Oh,” she says, “are you Mimi’s mum? I think she left this morning...”



“No,” says Kim. “No. Sorry. I’m not Mimi’s mum. I’m Tal ulah’s mum. She was here last night?”

“Tal ulah?” The woman rubs the dog’s head absentmindedly with a hand bearing

just one wide band on her wedding finger. “Gosh, no, I don’t think I know a Tal ulah.”

“Lula?” she suggests. She hates the name Lula, but her daughter’s friends have always tended to shorten her full name; it’s something she’s learned to accept.

“No.” The woman shakes her head. “No. I’ve never heard of Lula either. Are you

sure she was here?”

Kim is hot and anxious. There’s no shade where she’s standing and the sun is beating down on the back of her neck. She can feel a hot dampness breaking out all

over her body and feels a flash of anger at this woman in her crisp white sundress and freshly brushed hair, her cool, dry complexion and the suggestion in her clipped English accent that Kim is somehow mistaken and in the wrong place.

She nods and tries to keep her voice pleasant. “Yes. I spoke to your daughter a couple of hours ago. She said Tal ulah was here last night with her boyfriend, Zach,

and they left in a minicab at three a.m. But I’ve called all the minicab numbers and

none of them has a record of a pickup from this address or anywhere in the vicinity of this address. And it’s nearly four p.m. and my daughter is still not home. And this”—

she points behind her at Noah in his buggy—"is Tal ulah's son and she would never

deliberately leave him. Just never."

Her voice begins to crack dangerously and she breathes in hard to stop herself from crying.

The woman looks unperturbed by this display of emotion. "Sorry," she says after a

pause. "What was your name again?"

"Kim. And this is Ryan. My son. And Noah. My grandson."

"Gosh," says the woman. "A grandmother! You look far too young to be a grandmother. Anyway. I'm Joss." She puts out a hand for Kim to shake and then says, "Come on, then. Let's go and see what Scarlett has to say about al of this.

Fol ow me."

She leads them across the courtyard and through a tal wrought-iron gate set in an

ancient brick wal grown over with ivy. The huge dog pads heavily behind them. The

courtyard is smattered with tiny white stone figures set on Perspex plinths. They

fol ow her down a flagstone path lined with sculptural plants in cobalt-glazed pots and then turn a corner.

In front of them is the pool.

It's set in a cream marble terrace with a curtained pagoda at one end housing a

huge cream-cushioned daybed. At angles along its length are teak sunbeds with matching cream cushions. Floating at the pool's center, inside a bright pink inflatable flamingo, is a tall, thin girl with lime-green hair and a black bandeau bikini top. She peers at Kim and her entourage curiously. Then she says, "Oh," as the penny drops.

"Talulah?" says Joss, shielding her eyes from the sun shining off the pool's surface

with her hand. "Apparently, she was here last night. Any idea where she got to?"

Scarlett pushes herself to the pool's edge by paddling her hands through the water;

then she dismounts the flamingo and ascends the stone steps. She pulls a black towel

around herself and sits down at a teak circular table covered with white candles in

glass jars.

Kim sits opposite her. "I know," she begins, "you said that you don't know where

they went. I know you said that Talulah was sick and they got in a minicab. But the

cab firms are all saying that they didn't pick anyone up from here. I just wondered if there was anything else that happened last night that might explain where they are."

Scarlett picks at the wax on the top of one of the candles and makes no eye contact

with Kim. "Genuinely," she says, "honestly. That's all I know."

"And did you see them getting into a car?"

“No. I was out here, with Mimi. And Zach came and said Lula had been sick and

he was going to take her home, that there was a taxi coming.”

“He said that? That the taxi was coming? Or did he say he was going to call one?”

Scarlett shrugs. Kim watches crystal beads of pool water coalesce and collapse on

her angular shoulders and run down her arms in rivulets. “I’m pretty sure he said one

was coming.”

Kim can see Ryan hovering in her peripheral view. She pulls out a chair for him

and he sits down, bringing Noah’s pushchair close to him. “So, is there a chance, do

you think, that Zach tried to call a taxi and no one could send one so they ended up

walking?”

“Yeah?” says Scarlett. “I guess?”

Kim turns to Scarlett’s brother, who is perched on the end of a sunbed across the pool, with a bottle of beer hanging between his knees. “Were you here last night, at

the party?” she calls over to him.

He puts out a hand defensively and says, “No. Not me. I just got home this morning.”

Kim sighs. “And if they had walked, where might they have ended up?”

Scarlett shrugs again. "It depends, I suppose. On which way they went. If they went up the driveway they could have ended up on the main road, or Upley Fold if

they turned the wrong way. If they went the back path, they would have ended up

back in Upfield Common."

"The back path?"

"Yes," she replies, waving her hand in a vague arc behind her. "There."

Kim gazes over her shoulder. All she can see are lawns and flower beds and hedges

and gravel pathways and pockmarked stone steps and sundials and arbors.

"Where?"

"Beyond," says Scarlett. "Behind. There's a path there that goes through the woods and into the back end of Upfield Common. Near the Maypole. I used to walk

that way to go to school sometimes when I was there."

"How far?"

Joss interjects. "A mile, just over. But I wouldn't recommend it. Especially not with a baby. You really need to know where you're going, otherwise you'll get lost."

"Did Talulah know about the back path?"

Scarlett shrugs. "I don't think so," she said. "She'd never been here before so there's no reason she should have known about it."

"And who else," Kim continues. "Who else was here last night?"

“Just us three,” says Scarlett, “and Mimi. Lexie Mul igan was here before they left.

She lives at Maypole House. Her mum’s the matron there. You know, Kerryanne Mul igan?”

Kim nods. She knows Kerryanne wel . Everyone in Upfield Common knows

Kerryanne. She’s larger-than-life.

“Yeah. Her daughter. She’s, like, in her twenties. But she left early. She was driving. And she took my friend Liam with her.”

“So, after that, it was just you, Tal ulah, Zach, and... Mimi?”

“Yup.”

“And your mum and dad?”

“Mum was here. She was asleep. Dad’s away on business.”

Kim turns to Joss, who is sitting on the steps behind her, listening into the conversation. “You don’t happen to have security cameras, do you? Anywhere in the

grounds?”

Joss nods and says, “Yes, tons of them. But I’m afraid I haven’t got the vaguest idea

how to use them.” She glances across at her son. “Rex? Any idea how to look at the

camera footage?”

Rex grimaces. “Not real y. I know there’s like some kind of centralized panel in

Dad's study, but I've never actually used it."

Kim says, "Do you think we might try?" And as she says it she feels the mood change immediately. Until now she's been a minor distraction, entertained on their

own terms. Now she's asking people to go indoors, to open doors, work out how to

use equipment. She sees the three of them exchange looks. Then Joss gets to her feet

and approaches Kim and says, "Tell you what. Save us all traipsing about in Martin's

office, why don't I just get Rex to have a look in a bit. I'll get him to give Martin a ring to talk him through it. Scarlett's got your number. We'll call you if we find anything."

Kim still has so many things she wants to ask, so many questions she needs answers

to. She's not ready to go. "You said Talulah hadn't been here before?" she asks, a hint of desperation in her voice. "And on the phone earlier you said you didn't really know her. I mean, you didn't even know she had a child. So what... I mean, why was

she even here?"

Scarlett pulls her towel over her shoulders like a cloak and rubs at her ears with its corners. "We chat sometimes," she says, "at college. Then I saw her in the pub last

night and we had a few drinks and one thing led to another."

Kim's eyes take her in again, this lanky, angular girl with whom her daughter chatted sometimes. She takes in the detail of her; the piercings that catch the light, the tattoo on her shoulder blade, the perfectly painted toenails. And her gaze alights on a black mark on Scarlett's foot, a small

tattoo, a pair of letters that she can't at first quite make out. Then she sees that it is the trademark symbol. Scarlett's hand reaches

down and covers the tattoo, hard and fast, like swatting a fly. Their eyes meet briefly and Kim sees something defensive and raw pass across Scarlett's face.

She hitches her bag onto her shoulder. "Would it be possible," she says, "to speak

to your friend Mimi, do you think? Do you have a number for her?"

"She won't know anything more than I do."

"Please?"

"I'll get her to call you," says Scarlett.

Within a minute they are pushing Noah's buggy back through the wrought-iron

gate and onto the front courtyard and Joss is standing under a bower of

passionflowers with her gigantic dog, waving them off, and as they walk toward the

driveway, Kim hears the splash of bodies hitting the cool, blue surface of the swimming pool, a small squeal of laughter.

7

AUGUST 2018

Sophie comes from an outdoorsy family. They go on walking holidays and sailing holidays and skiing holidays. Her father runs marathons, her mother plays golf and

tennis, both her brothers work in the sports industry. Sophie was once a swimmer.



She has medals and cups and certificates in a big box in her parents' loft and still has a swimmer's physique although she barely swims at all these days. When they were all

small and getting on her mother's nerves, she would zip them into their coats and

lock them in the back garden. They would moan for a while and then find something

to do. Usually involving climbing very tall trees and swinging off things that weren't designed to be swung off. So Sophie is very comfortable being outdoors and confident in her ability to find her way about and deal with obstacles alone without

assistance. And so she sets off into the woods, sensibly dressed and equipped with

water, energy bars, a mobile charger for her phone, her compass, some plasters, sun

cream, a hat, and a packet of bright red plastic space-marker cones that she can drop

on the forest floor at intervals if she needs to find her way back.

Inside the woods, the tree cover is immense and very little of the pale gold August

sun gets through. Within a few feet she feels the temperature begin to drop. She holds her compass in her right hand and follows the path alongside the arrow telling her

where to go.

After twenty minutes the denseness of the middle of the woods starts to thin out

again and there are established footpaths meandering through the trees, signs of humanity, pieces of litter, dog poo in a green plastic bag hanging from a branch. She

checks her map again now that she has briefly regained her phone signal and finds

that she is about to emerge onto a bridleway. She moves the map across her screen

with her fingers and sees the linear representation of a large building to her right.

After a moment she sees a turret and a weathervane. Then she sees the curve of an ancient brick wall and a curtain of bright red Virginia creeper. She squeezes through a parade of trees that abuts the wall and finds herself in front of a rusty metal gate, a broken padlock hanging from its bars, and then she is through the gate and into a

clump of woodland; the shimmer of blue sky is visible ahead of her and then she is on

a ragged sun-bleached lawn that rolls downward via wide stone steps overgrown with

thistles toward a house that looks like something from a Tim Burton movie.

Sophie catches her breath and puts a hand to her throat.

As she runs down the tiered lawns toward the house, she sees the pool appear; it's

dark green, a ripped cover half pulled across it, mulchy dead leaves from the previous winter stacked around it. A pagoda at one end of the pool has been covered in boldly

colored graffiti.