


Rachel Burton

The  
Things  
We Need  
to Say



An emotional story of loss, family  
and ultimately hope

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**The Things We Need to Say: An  
emotional, uplifting story of hope  
from bestselling author Rachel Burton**

«HarperCollins»

## **Burton R.**

The Things We Need to Say: An emotional, uplifting story of hope from bestselling author Rachel Burton / R. Burton — «HarperCollins»,

‘A true novel of the heart, Rachel's *The Things We Need to Say* is at once beautifully written and achingly honest. This is a story that carries you away, taking you on an incredibly poignant journey, and which stays with you long after you finish. Read it!’ Jenny Ashcroft, author of *Beneath a Burning Sky* ‘Devastatingly beautiful, inspiring and extremely thought provoking; Rachel Burton has written from the heart as she unintentionally becomes the voice of everything we need to say.’ *The Writing Garnet* Sometimes the things we never say are the most important. Fran loves Will with all her heart. They had a whirlwind romance, a perfect marriage and a wonderful life. Until everything changed. Now Fran needs to find her way again and teaching a yoga retreat in Spain offers her just that. Leaving behind a broken marriage she has some very important decisions to make. Will needs his wife, he needs her to open up to him if they're to ever return to the way things once were. But he may have damaged any possibility he had of mending their relationship and now Fran is in Spain and Will is alone. As both Fran and Will begin to let go of a life that could have been, fate may just find a way of bringing them back together. From the best-selling author of *The Many Colours of Us* comes an emotional story perfect for fans of Katie Marsh, Amanda Prowse and Sheila O'Flanagan Praise for *The Things We Need to Say* ‘Utterly spectacular. For me, *The Things we Need to Say* is a real-life love story and one that will stay with me for a long time.’ Laurie Ellingham, author of *One Endless Summer* ‘*The Things We Need to Say* is a wonderfully well-written novel which covers the issues of infertility, infidelity and temptation in a heart-wrenchingly honest way.’ Victoria Cooke, author of *The Holiday Cruise* ‘If you love novels that have warmth, charm and heart I strongly recommend that you read this poignant and uplifting book.’ Kerry Postle, author of *The Artist's Muse*

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Fran loves Will with all her heart. They had a whirlwind romance, a perfect marriage and a wonderful life. Until everything changed. Now Fran needs to find her way again and teaching a yoga retreat in Spain offers her just that. Leaving behind a broken marriage she has some very important decisions to make.

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As both Fran and Will begin to let go of a life that could have been, fate may just find a way of bringing them back together.

**Perfect for fans of Katie Marsh, Amanda Prowse and Sheila O'Flanagan.**

**Also by Rachel Burton**

*The Many Colours of Us*

Coming 2019

*The Pieces of You and Me*

**The Things We Need to Say**

Rachel Burton



ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES

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An imprint of HarperCollins *Publishers* Ltd.

1 London Bridge Street

London SE1 9GF

First published in Great Britain by HQ in 2018

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

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E-book Edition © May 2018 ISBN: 9780008285654

Version: 2018-04-20

**RACHEL BURTON** has been making up stories since she first learned to talk. After many false starts she finally made one up that was worth writing down.

After graduating with a degree in Classics and another in English, she didn't really know what to do when she grew up. She has worked as a waitress, a paralegal and a yoga teacher.

She has spent most of her life between Cambridge and London but now lives in Leeds with her boyfriend and three cats. The main loves of her life are The Beatles and very tall romantic heroes.

Find her on Twitter & Instagram as [@bookish\\_yogi](#) or search Facebook for Rachel Burton Author. She is always happy to talk books, writing, music, cats and how the weather in Yorkshire is rubbish. She is mostly dreaming of her next holiday...

To every yoga student I've ever taught and to every yoga teacher who has ever taught me.

The light within me acknowledges the light within you.

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[DECEMBER 2004](#)

It started at the party. His hands on my hips, my forehead against his shoulder. He asked me to dance but he didn't know how. We stood together at the edge of the dance floor shaking with laughter at his two left feet. I don't know how long we stood there. I don't know if anybody noticed.

He'd waited for me, sitting with my friends, not sure if I'd turn up or not. I wasn't in the habit of going to work Christmas parties; I only went in the end because he said he would be there, because he said he would wait for me. I arrived just as the main course was being served. I slipped into the seat next to him. His hand brushed against my thigh as I sat down. He held my gaze for longer than he should have done.

I fell in love with him that night as we stood on the dance floor laughing, my hands on his waist, feeling the muscles of his back, the warmth of his body, through his dress shirt, the press of him against my hip.

That was where it began. I sometimes wonder if that should have been where it ended.

But later that evening, as I got out of his car, and I said those words I should have kept to myself, we both knew there was no going back.

[JULY 2016](#)  
[Fran](#)

She wakes up in the same position in which she fell asleep, her husband's arms around her, their hands entwined on her stomach. Neither of them have slept that deeply for months. Fran remembers something: a hotel room on a Greek island, a feeling of hope, of new beginnings. She doesn't allow the memory to linger. This is what they have now. They can be happy again if they allow themselves to be.

The hot, humid weather has broken in the night and she listens to the sound of summer rain on the roof. Will moves gently against her, pulling her closer. She feels his breath against her neck and the sensation of hot liquid in her stomach, a combination of desire and need. This is their second chance – she can't let it pass her by.

'I love you,' Will says sleepily.

'I love you too,' she replies. It feels good to be saying it to each other again. She's never stopped loving him; she just forgot how to tell him for a while.

'Do you want me to go and make coffee?' Will asks, nuzzling her neck.

'Not just yet,' she replies, turning around to look at him. His brown eyes are dark, impenetrable pools. His hair is pushed back off his face. Sometimes she forgets how much all of this has affected him too. Sometimes she forgets everything except her own pain. She feels his warmth against her, his strength. She feels as though the gulf that had been threatening to open up between them for the last year is slowly closing. She realises they have so much life ahead of them. So much time to learn to be happy again.

'I thought I'd lost you,' Will says quietly, reaching up to stroke her face. 'I thought you'd gone, but recently I feel as though you've come back to me.'

She smiles softly. 'I thought I'd lost you too,' she says. 'This last year has been ...' She doesn't finish. She can't finish.

She watches as a shadow of anguish crosses his face, as his brow furrows, as his jaw tightens. She recognises that look, recognises the pain he is trying to hide. She hears the shudder of his breath. His eyes flick away for a moment; he pauses for a fraction too long.

'No,' he says. 'You never lost me. I'll always be here.'

She kisses him gently then, and feels his hand drift down the bones of her spine.

Later, showered and dressed, they finally appear in the kitchen; Will's younger brother, Jamie, is already sitting at the table drinking coffee. Will and Fran are hardly able to stop touching each other.

Jamie smiles at them, raising an eyebrow. 'You're up late,' he says. Fran feels herself blushing, her stomach flipping over, and turns away towards the toaster.

'Thanks for last night,' Jamie goes on. 'I needed that.' Recently separated from his wife, living apart from his children, Jamie is lonely. Last night wasn't the first Saturday night he'd spent with them. Fran knows Will has been throwing himself into cheering his brother up. She doesn't mind. Jamie makes Will smile and it's good to see him smile again.

As Will and Jamie start talking about the cricket, she feels her husband's hand on her thigh, the warm, solid sensation of him right there next to her. They have been given a second chance, and they have grabbed it with both hands. She isn't naive enough to think everything is going to go back to the way it used to be, but she knows that they can move on; they can talk and heal together. They can take another chance on living, find a new kind of normal.

Will stretches, draining his coffee cup. 'This weather isn't going to let up is it?' he says looking out of the window where the rain is rattling against the frames like beads in a jar. 'I'm going to have to cancel the cricket.' As captain of the village team it is up to him to reschedule this afternoon's match. Fran is quietly delighted that the weather means she doesn't have to spend her last afternoon with her husband before she goes away watching him play cricket. Will gets up and walks into his study, shutting the door behind him.

'How are you feeling about tomorrow?' Jamie asks.

'Nervous,' Fran replies. 'It's the first time I've been on a plane on my own, which is pathetic at my age, I know.'

‘It’s OK to be nervous.’

‘It’s the first time Will and I have been apart since ...’ She trails off. Jamie knows what she’s talking about. ‘I’m worried about him too.’

Jamie smiles. ‘I’ll look after him,’ he says.

After a moment Jamie gets up and follows Will into his study. He doesn’t knock; he just opens the door and walks in. As Fran starts to clear the breakfast dishes she hears raised voices but can’t quite make out what they are saying. She rolls her eyes to herself. As an only child she has long since given up on understanding Will and Jamie’s relationship: best friends one minute, bickering the next. She just hopes Jamie doesn’t stay too long – she wants her husband to herself for the day.

Will

It rains all day, the sky grey and waterlogged and heavy with cloud. After Jamie leaves, Will pulls Fran towards him, his hands at the back of her head where her skull meets her neck, where her hair is cut so short.

‘No cricket,’ he says. ‘I’m all yours.’

She smiles, standing on tiptoe to kiss him.

‘Can we just watch a film or something?’ she says. ‘I’m tired and I have to pack for Spain later.’ His stomach drops at the thought of her going away. He wishes he’d never encouraged her to do it.

‘I’d forgotten about Spain,’ he says.

‘No you hadn’t. It’s the only thing we’ve talked about for ages.’

Will had watched Fran spend the last few weeks flipping back and forth between excitement and terror at the thought of going to Spain on her own. He knew she was strong enough to do it; he knew she was stronger than anyone realised. But he also knew that she wondered if she was ready. When she first mentioned Spain to him he had seen it as a perfect opportunity to help her begin to put herself back together again after what had been the worst year of both their lives. He tried to believe that everything life threw at him was an opportunity.

Fran had been teaching at a studio in central Cambridge for six years and had been asked to teach for a week on a retreat in Spain. Will had always supported her teaching, always tried to put her career on a level par with his own and had done everything he could to help her find the strength to go back to work in January. None of it had felt as though it was enough. None of it would make up for the last year, the things he had said, the things he had done. Suddenly he is terrified about being on his own. Neither of them have been alone for months.

‘What do you want to watch?’ he asks, squatting down in front of the TV.

‘Can we watch *Some Like it Hot*?’ Fran replies.

Will rolls his eyes. He must have seen it a hundred times, but puts it in the DVD player anyway and goes to settle himself on the sofa. ‘Come here,’ he says, and she sits with him, leaning back against his chest.

‘Are you OK about Spain?’ he asks quietly.

‘I think so,’ she says. ‘I’m nervous, but I’m excited as well.’

‘Elizabeth will be there with you, won’t she?’

‘Yes, and Constance. In fact, I already know most of the other people who are going. I’ll be fine.’ She pauses. ‘Are you going to be OK?’ she asks quietly.

‘I’m going to miss you,’ he says, lying back on the sofa, wrapping his arms around her. He doesn’t know how to answer the question. He wants to tell her everything but knows that now is not the right time.

‘I’m going to miss you too,’ she replies.

He kisses the top of her head as she presses ‘play’ on the remote control. He watches her as she watches her favourite film, her lips moving along with the characters – she still knows every word by heart. They used to spend rainy Sundays like this when they were younger, when life seemed easier.

Halfway through the film he realises that Fran is crying – fat, salty tears running down her cheeks.

‘Fran?’ he asks quietly, pressing pause on the remote.

Fran doesn’t reply, she just turns around and he takes her in his arms. He feels her body against his. She clings to him as though her life depends on it and he holds her close as she cries and cries. He can’t remember the last time he saw her cry like this. They had both done their grieving in private over the last year but to Will it feels as though Fran has been holding all this in for months, shutting herself down. He’s relieved that she finally seems ready to let go.

‘I want my old life back,’ she sobs. ‘I want to be happy again.’

‘So do I,’ Will whispers. ‘And we will, in time. I promise.’

‘I wish we’d never bought this house – we had so much hope.’

‘Shhh ...’ Will says softly, stroking her hair as she weeps against him.

OCTOBER 2004

He always claimed it was love at first sight. I would laugh, telling him I didn’t believe in love at first sight. He said he didn’t either until I came along. He said he’d known on his first day at the firm when he was introduced to me, his secretary. All I know is that when he shook my hand he held on for a little bit longer than he needed to and I noticed that he wasn’t wearing a wedding ring.

I’d been working at the firm for two years when Will started. He was ten years’ qualified by the time I met him, the eldest of two boys, privately educated, married and divorced by the time he was thirty. I already knew the firm had poached him from rival lawyers and made him partner to head up the Family Law department. He had a penchant for divorce law apparently, which I suppose must have come in handy.

I showed him the ropes, helped him understand the office politics, who to trust, who not to. We grew close, Will and I, over those first few weeks. Closer than we should have done. I’d gently rib him about his big posh family. He’d tease me for always having my nose in a book or for being back late from my lunchtime yoga class, for not concentrating on my job, not taking it seriously. Occasionally, as often as he thought he could get away with it, he’d take me out to lunch – we got to know each other in those stolen moments.

It was in the pub one lunchtime, over soup and sandwiches, that I told him about my parents.

I hardly ever talked about my parents. Other people’s sympathy was the one thing that always made it worse. I was the only child of older parents, their little miracle. My dad died when I was a teenager and two years later I’d left home to go to university in London with no intention of ever coming back.

But I’d returned to Cambridge three years after I graduated, when my mum was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I’d helped to care for her, but it took her quickly. I hadn’t been prepared for how quickly. She died within a few weeks of my coming back. She left me with enough money to buy my own house and a hole in my heart so big I couldn’t bear to go back to the life I’d left behind in London.

Will didn’t say anything when I told him. It was almost as though he could read my mind and he knew that I couldn’t cope with his sympathy. He looked at me for a moment, nodded once, and changed the subject, gently steering the conversation back to its usual mix of gentle ribbing and mild flirtation. Because I was still kidding myself then, I think, that this was just a mild flirtation. That it would pass. That I wasn’t falling for him.

But then the Christmas party rolled around and everything changed. I got into his car afterwards. I let him drive me home. We sat outside together for too long, until the windows started to steam up from our breath. I was still laughing at his attempts at dancing. He was telling me to treat my boss with a bit more respect.

‘I’d better go,’ I said. I didn’t want to go. I wanted to stay there with him all night. I wanted him to tell me everything, to let me into his world, but I still thought that was impossible. Maybe it always was.

As I got out of the car I turned back to him one last time. I don't know what made me say it. Maybe it was three glasses of wine on an empty stomach. Maybe both our lives would have been different if I'd kept quiet.

'Just so you know, if you weren't my boss I'd be asking you inside now.'

JULY 2016

Fran

She cries herself out on Will's shoulder that afternoon as the rain continues to fall in the garden outside. Slowly her breath returns to normal and she pulls away from her husband, the rise and fall of her chest steadying. Outside, the sun breaks through the clouds for a moment.

'I'm sorry,' she says.

Will runs his left thumb over her cheekbone, wiping away a tear.

'You have nothing to be sorry for,' he replies.

The shaft of sunlight that breaks into the living room that grey afternoon makes Fran think of new beginnings, makes her think again about the second chance she has been offered.

'I want to try again,' she says. 'When I get back from Spain, I want to try again.'

She watches Will's brow furrow.

'I don't know if I can ...' he begins and she suddenly realises what she has said.

'No,' she interrupts. 'No, I mean I want to try again with us. I want our marriage to work.'

'You and I can be happy again, I promise.' He kisses her then, gently, and they sit quietly together holding each other. They feel like a team again, like equals. They've come a long way since last summer.

She pulls away from him a little to look at him. He looks so vulnerable. He isn't as strong as he likes people to believe.

'The weather's clearing up,' he says, quietly. 'I might go for a run. Do you mind?'

She shakes her head. 'No,' she says. 'I need to pack and I might have a bath.'

He goes upstairs to change. 'I'll cook tonight,' he says as he leaves.

Looking back, Fran will remember everything about that moment with the surreal clarity of a dream – the sunlight in the room, the logo on Will's shirt, the way he smiled, the feeling she had that maybe he was right and that they could be happy again.

It was the last time she saw him before everything changed.

\*

She lies back in the bath feeling it cocoon her. The bathroom is her favourite room in the house and she probably spends far too much time in here submerged in water that is just a little bit too hot, watching her skin turn pink and the pads of her fingers wrinkle.

This was the first room Will renovated when they bought the house. He and Jamie ripped out the old bathroom suite, stripped down the floorboards and created the bathroom Fran had always wanted: with a double shower and a double sink and, resplendent in the middle of the room, the claw-footed bath she'd dreamed of since she was a little girl. Unless they had visitors, nobody but her ever used this bathroom – Will preferred the en-suite – but Fran knew it had been a labour of love and being here made her feel close to her husband, even when things had seemed as though they could never be fixed.

Will renovated the bathroom first because he wanted to make her dreams come true – he always said he wanted to make her dreams come true. But Fran couldn't help thinking that all the work he'd put into this house was just a mask, a cover – papering over the cracks that were getting deeper and deeper as it started to become apparent that she could never make his dreams come true.

After last summer she would spend hours in here, locking the door so Will couldn't come in. Back then she used to wonder what it would be like to disappear into the water and never re-emerge, but she doesn't think like that any more. She doesn't lock the door any more either, but she does keep it closed – not like before, when she'd keep it wide open so she could still see Will if he walked past.

Some evenings he would even come in, sit on the edge of the bath, and talk to her. She didn't think he'd been in here for months; it had become her private sanctuary, as his study had for him.

After it had happened it had taken her months to let him touch her, let him kiss her. She couldn't bear him to be near her; she couldn't bear anyone to be near her. Other people's sympathy, other people's emotions, made everything worse. She couldn't cope with her own feelings; she didn't have the space to think about Will's.

Things had gradually got back into a semblance of normality after New Year, once Fran had felt ready to go back to the yoga studio. Once she finally did, it had helped more than she thought it would – being with her friends again, doing something that mattered to her, something that made her happy. Sometimes the only time she felt alive was when she was teaching.

She thinks about the previous night, about falling asleep in Will's arms, and it dawns on her that it was the first night they'd slept the whole night through together in months. It had taken them so long to get there after those first fumbled attempts at normality.

On their wedding anniversary in March, Will had come home from work with a takeaway from their favourite Thai restaurant in the next village. He'd laid the table, lit candles, opened a bottle of Prosecco, and encouraged her to join him, to share a meal with him.

'I know it doesn't feel like we have much to celebrate,' he'd said. 'But we still have each other.' She'd tried to let herself relax, to just enjoy his company for a few hours, to try to eat something.

Afterwards, they'd watched a film together just like they had this afternoon. She'd lain back against him and tried to concentrate on the future, tried to concentrate on the film. She'd let Will choose and it was full of action and loud noises and bright colours with an unnecessarily complicated plot that she hadn't been able to follow. It had made Will happy though, and she had let herself sink back into his contentment, even if it was only fleeting.

Later, when the film was over, she had become aware of the sensation of his arms around her, the warmth of his breath on her neck. She had turned around to face him, felt his lips on hers. It had been six months since she'd last kissed her husband properly. She had wanted to feel something, anything. She hadn't been sure she would be able to and, as it turned out, it was months before she truly started to feel anything again, but she wanted to try before the gulf that had opened between them became too wide to traverse.

He had carried her upstairs that night. It was the first time they had gone to bed at the same time since the previous summer, and while she wasn't able to feel the things she used to be able to feel, at least her husband had been there with her.

But later, even later, when he thought she had fallen asleep, she had felt his arm slip out from underneath her, felt the mattress lift as he got out of bed. She had heard him slip back into his clothes and pad across the bedroom and down the stairs. She had heard the door of his study open and close and she knew she had lost him again, to his thoughts and to his sadness.

She had wondered if anything would ever be the same. They had kept trying, from that night onwards, to find a new sort of normal, but he had nearly always come to bed after her, always woken long before her, neither of them able to sleep more than a couple of hours at a time.

Until now. Now she understood that, deep down, under all the pressure and the pain, they were still just Will and Fran. They could still find happiness again. Now she began to understand how much he had been through as well.

The bathwater is starting to cool and she needs to finish her packing before Will gets back so they can spend the evening together. She pulls herself out of the water, wraps herself in one of the big, soft white towels, and walks across the landing to the bedroom.

It is then that she notices Will's phone on his nightstand. It isn't like him to leave his phone behind. She notices the light flashing, signalling a message, and for a moment she feels something shift – as though the atmospheric pressure has changed slightly.

If somebody had asked her, afterwards, why she did it she wouldn't have been able to tell them. All she remembers is walking over to the nightstand, still wrapped in the soft white towel, and picking up Will's phone, drawn to it like a moth to a flame. She'd never looked at his phone before, never checked his messages or emails, never answered a call. But that afternoon she is pulled towards the flashing light on the phone and she will never be able to explain why.

Later, looking back at this moment, she would wonder if she'd made the right choice. But sometimes life isn't about choices. Some things are just meant to be.

Will has never been secretive about his phone or his laptop. He leaves his emails open in the kitchen all the time and everyone knows his PIN to everything is his birthday. He is just arrogant enough to believe that nobody will ever try to hack him.

Fran walks over to the nightstand and picks up the phone, tapping in 310170. She will remember the touch of her fingers on the phone screen for a long time afterwards. Almost immediately she wishes she had never looked.

I miss you so much, Will. I wish we could be together again like we used to be – just one last time. You know where I am. Kx

The number isn't saved to his phone, and there are no other texts or calls to or from it. It is almost as if Will had gone out of his way to make sure they were all deleted. Fran knows exactly who 'K' is anyway.

She turns the text message back to unread, locks the phone, and returns it to the nightstand. It isn't until then that she feels it: the sensation of the world tilting on its axis. Nothing will ever be the same again.

She thinks about Karen Barden, a woman who works in the village pub. Someone she barely knows. Fran had seen her flirt with Will sometimes; she'd seen Will flirt back. She hadn't thought much about it. She'd had bigger things on her mind. She'd barely thought about Karen Barden at all until now.

She unwraps the towel from around herself, hanging it over the back of the door to dry, and slowly dresses. Then, carefully and methodically, she begins to work her way through her list, packing everything she needs for Spain.

One of the things that she has always loved about yoga is the way it has helped her to be aware of the present moment, to focus her mind on the task at hand. The reason she'd taken it up all those years ago, long before she'd even considered teaching, was to help her stress levels at university. Now, in her bedroom, the bedroom she shares with her husband who she suddenly feels she doesn't know any more, she takes some deep breaths and focuses.

Inhale. Exhale.

Will has already brought her suitcase down from the attic for her, leaving it open on the bed. She feels the shudder of tears in her throat. The little thoughtful gestures, the things he does without having to be asked. She always thought he was perfect, even though she knows there's no such thing as perfect.

Inhale. Exhale.

She slowly folds and rolls her clothes, feeling the texture of the fabric beneath her fingers. Yoga clothes, sundresses, bikinis, sarongs, shorts, vests.

Inhale. Exhale.

She notices the familiar smell of the fabric conditioner that she's used for years, the one her mother used. She squeezes socks and underwear and sandals into stray corners of the suitcase.

Inhale. Exhale.

She remembers all the conversations she and Will have had about this retreat over the last few months – about whether or not she should do it. He constantly encouraged her, ignited that flame of excitement and adventure inside her that has helped her to feel alive again, told her how strong she is. Now she wonders if he wanted her out of the way.

Now she needs that strength more than ever.

Inhale. Exhale.

She picks up the small plush Piglet that sits by the side of her bed. She presses it to her face, the toy that will always remind her of everything she and Will have been through. Almost as an afterthought she puts it in her suitcase too. It feels as though she is leaving for longer than a week.

She pushes the suitcase lid down with the weight of her upper body and slides the zip around. Then she sits at the bottom of the bed and waits for her husband to come home.

### FEBRUARY 2005

For months after Mum died, I missed her so much. We'd spoken on the phone three or four times a week after I moved to London and to not have those conversations any more left me empty. I didn't really know anyone in Cambridge then and, after Mum, I found myself living a quiet, isolated life. I went to work, I went to yoga, I watched TV, I read, I went to bed. And then the next day I would do it all over again. The days seemed endless, pointless, always seeming to require too much effort – as though I was walking through jam.

Until Will came along.

The first time Will stepped inside my house was a Sunday morning in February. It was one of those days when the sky is the colour of slate and the air completely still. One of those days when it's bone-achingly cold. A typical East Anglian winter. Will turned up on my doorstep with champagne and eggs to cook me brunch. I hadn't invited him.

He looked out of place in my tiny house – too big for the rooms – but he brought life and happiness and laughter to walls that hadn't known anything but my sadness since I'd moved in.

Will had been slowly bringing me out of my shell. I don't think he knew it at the time, but he was helping me rediscover who I was. I'd always thought of myself as somebody who wanted a big life, who wanted to travel, to drink champagne, to fall in love. Until I met Will I'd never even left the country. He brought me out of my chrysalis, let me spread my wings. He transformed me.

After we'd eaten the eggs and drunk the champagne he cleared the dishes. I sat on the kitchen counter and watched him as he slowly dried his hands, not taking his eyes off me. He was looking at me in that way that made me feel as though I was the only person in the world. And then he walked over to me and kissed me.

It wasn't our first kiss. That had been in his car the previous Wednesday. Since the Christmas party we'd taken to going out for dinner on Wednesdays. I don't know why it was always Wednesdays; I don't know why he never asked to see me at the weekend. When he kissed me the first time I pulled away before it turned into anything. I didn't want to be that person. I didn't want to be the secretary who sleeps with her boss and then afterwards, when everything gets awkward, has to leave.

I saw the fleeting look of disappointment cross his face as I pulled away, before he composed his features again. He had no idea how much willpower it had taken for me to do that. Neither of us had known where to look since it happened, our eyes sliding quickly over each other at work, not sure whether to say anything, not sure what to do.

But that Sunday morning in my kitchen when Will's lips found mine, my willpower deserted me. I knew I couldn't pull away again. I let him kiss me; I let him slide his hands down my back, finding the gap between my jeans and my top. I ran my fingers through his hair, wrapped my legs around his waist, pulled him closer.

'I want you so much,' he whispered in my ear. 'Can I take you to bed?'

Afterwards we lay together, our foreheads against each other, limbs entwined, breathing each other in. I didn't know what this was; I didn't know where this was going. He was my boss. He was eight years older than me. This had disaster written all over it.

I moved away from him a little so I could see him properly. He lay with his eyes closed, those impossibly long eyelashes brushing his cheeks. Those eyelashes were wasted on a man.

‘Will,’ I said quietly. He blinked his eyes open and I watched his lips curve into a smile. His hand traced the bones of my spine.

‘I can’t do this,’ I said.

‘I think you already have,’ he replied. He was still smiling.

‘I can’t be the secretary who sleeps with her boss. I can’t afford to lose my job. I’m so sorry, Will – I should have stopped this before now. We need to stop this.’

He propped himself up on his elbow. ‘I can’t stop,’ he said. ‘I’m falling in love with you.’

I hadn’t been expecting that. I stared at him. I’d been trying to stop myself falling in love with him since the Christmas party.

‘I thought this was just—’ I began.

‘This isn’t just anything,’ he interrupted. ‘Well, not for me it isn’t. I didn’t think I’d ever be able to feel like this again. I didn’t think I’d ever be able to trust anyone else after my wife left me.’

‘But—’ I hadn’t known his wife had left him. I’d always assumed he left her. I was surprised to realise that during all those lunches, all those dinners, he’d never talked about his wife.

‘I know you’re my secretary,’ he interrupted. ‘I know that makes this a bit ... complicated, but I wondered if you’d be my girlfriend?’ He smiled, pulled me a little closer. ‘Sorry that sounded really corny. But will you?’

‘I thought you just wanted ...’

‘Just wanted what? To shag my secretary?’ He shook his head. ‘No, not my style.’

‘So why was it always Wednesdays? Why did you never ask to see me at the weekends before now?’

He laughed then, gently. ‘Because I thought you’d have better things to do at the weekends than be with me. Until last week I didn’t think I had a chance with you in a million years.’

‘Even after what I said at Christmas?’

‘I thought that was just the wine talking,’ he said quietly. ‘I didn’t want to take advantage.’

I stared at him, running my fingers over his jaw, over the stubble where he hadn’t shaved that morning. I couldn’t find my voice; I just leaned my head against his chest.

‘Trust me,’ he said, stroking my hair. ‘I promise I won’t let you down.’

[JULY 2016](#)

[Will](#)

It had turned into a longer run than he’d intended. He’d only meant to be gone about thirty minutes or so, but as he looks at his watch he realises he’s been out for more than an hour. He needed some space to think, away from the house, away from Fran. Time to think about the things he’d said to his brother that morning, the things his brother had said to him.

He’d looked up when Jamie had followed him into his study. He’d made the calls he’d needed to make and was sitting watching the rain against the windows, wondering what the future would look like, thinking about everything he and Fran had lost.

There are only eighteen months between the two brothers. They had always known what the other was thinking. And Will had realised – as soon as he saw the look on his brother’s face – that he knew the secret Will had been carrying for the last nine months, the secret he hoped nobody would ever find out. Just before Jamie confronted him, Will had realised that there was a sense of relief in being found out.

‘What the fuck were you thinking, Will?’ Jamie had spat at him, his hands on the desk as he leaned towards his brother. Will hadn’t moved; he had just carried on sitting there, staring out of the window.

‘Keep your voice down,’ he’d replied softly.

In the quiet moment that followed he heard the scrape of a chair being pulled up, the gentle sound of Jamie sitting down, a long exhalation.

‘Talk to me, Will,’ Jamie had said after a while and Will told him everything, their heads together like they used to be when they shared secrets as boys. The words fell out of him, jumbled together in their eagerness to be released. Will had been glad to finally share the burden of the secret, even though he had known that this was only the beginning and that sharing it would change everything for ever.

When he’d finished speaking he’d looked at his brother. ‘I’ve been a complete fucking idiot,’ he said. ‘But I thought I’d lost everything. Fran wouldn’t talk to me, as though it was all my fault.’ He paused, blinking back tears. ‘As though it wasn’t tearing me apart too.’

‘So you thought you’d fuck a single mum from the village instead?’ Jamie asked, his face white. He’d always had a soft spot for Fran.

Will had leaned his elbows on the desk, covering his eyes with his hands. *If I don’t open my eyes, he thinks, maybe all of this will go away.*

‘Is it over?’ Jamie asked.

Will nods, dropping his hands onto the desk in front of him. ‘It’s been over since Christmas Eve.’

Jamie had sighed. ‘Fran must never find out,’ he’d said. ‘After everything she’s been through, this would destroy her.’

Will had run his fingers through his hair.

‘Do you think I don’t know that?’ he’d said.

‘Not enough to make sure it didn’t happen,’ Jamie had replied.

He hadn’t banked on Jamie working out that he had cheated on Fran, but Jamie knew him too well. On Saturday night, while Fran had been getting the dinner ready, he and Jamie had gone to the pub. He’d bumped into Karen there – it had been months since he had last seen her, since he’d broken off their brief affair. As far as he was concerned it was over, in the past. But Karen had flirted with him and there must have been something about his reaction that had made Jamie suspicious. When he’d come out of the toilet half an hour later to see Jamie and Karen chatting, it hadn’t occurred to him what it might have been about.

But now Jamie knows, Will doesn’t feel as though it is something he can keep to himself any more. He isn’t sure if he can keep lying to her. He isn’t sure if he can keep lying to himself. And, now he’s had time to think about it, he’s sure that Jamie is wrong; finding out isn’t going to destroy Fran. Fran is stronger than most people realise and he owes her the truth.

He starts to slow his pace down as he circles back into the village, rubbing his temples where one of the tension headaches that have plagued him since law school is throbbing behind his eyes. Some days he can run them off, but today isn’t one of those days.

He thinks about what Fran had said before he left the house, about wanting to start again. He has wanted their marriage to work all along – even when he was sleeping with someone else it had never been with the intention of leaving Fran. He thought he’d lost everything. He never thought he’d hear Fran say she wanted to try again.

Initially he’d thought she was talking about something else, and he said he wasn’t ready. He wasn’t, and he was certain Fran wasn’t either. But it doesn’t mean they can’t talk about it. They’re not too old to try again. Not quite. Not yet.

But if they are going to try again, they have to build it on honesty and it has to start with him. He has to tell her the truth as soon as she gets back from Spain. He has to let her have Spain first; he has to let her see how strong he already knows she is. He knows that leading this retreat is going to help her so much and the strength she gains from it will help her make whatever decision she needs to make.

Because, whether he likes it or not, that decision has to come from her.

Will slows to a walking pace as he passes the row of cottages at the station end of the village. The station itself has been closed for years but the trains between Cambridge and Newmarket rattle past the back gardens of the cottages once an hour, making these houses less sought after, cheaper,

mostly let to tenants who come and go. He comes to a stop outside the house at the end of the terrace. There is something he has to do.

\*

He stands outside the door of Karen's cottage remembering the first time he came here on that cold, wet October evening, soaked to the bone and distraught. He remembers how the candles in the jack-o'-lanterns had all gone out in the rain, how there were only a few straggling teenagers still out trick or treating. He remembers how nobody came to their house that night for treats, knowing better of it, knowing that Fran still needed to be left alone.

He remembers how he'd walked out on Fran, shouting at her when she was at her most vulnerable, slamming the door so hard as he left that he thought the glass panels would shatter.

If he could live through that night again, would he do things differently? Do we ever have a choice?

He knocks on the door remembering the last time he was here on Christmas Eve. He remembers how cold it was and how he thought his heart was never going to mend. After Karen had let him in he sat on the bottom of her stairs and wept like a child. And when he'd cried every last tear out of his body, he had told her it was over, that he had to try to make his marriage work, that the thought of being without Fran was more than he could bear. Karen had nodded and he'd walked up to her, stroking her cheek with the pad of his thumb.

'I never meant to hurt you,' he'd said. As though anybody could ever have come out of any of this without being hurt.

And here he is again, knocking on Karen's door one last time.

'Will,' she says, surprise in her eyes, and something else. Hope, maybe?

'Karen,' he replies. He tries to remain as distant as he can.

'I'm sorry about last night,' she says, the hope in her eyes flickering for a moment before disappearing. 'Sometimes I just get so lonely, especially when the kids aren't here.'

Will sighs. He knows all about loneliness and the crazy things it can make you do. 'I know,' he says. 'But you know I'm not the person who can help you. I should never have let you believe I was. I'm—'

'You're sorry,' she interrupts. 'I know. We're all sorry.' She looks away from him. 'I sent a text,' she goes on. 'I know I shouldn't have. It's the last one – I promise.'

'I'm going to tell Fran,' he says.

'About us?'

Will nods. 'She's away next week, teaching in Spain. But as soon as she's back I'm going to tell her.'

'I thought you never wanted her to know.'

'She deserves to know. And you deserve to know that I'm going to tell her.'

'Is that really the reason?' Karen asks. 'Or is this some sort of big act of contrition. Do you think telling her is going to appease your guilt or something?'

'I don't think anything will ever appease this guilt,' he replies quietly. 'But I have to do it for our marriage.' He pauses for a moment. 'For everything we've been through.'

Karen looks at him then, a flash of understanding crossing her face.

'I can't imagine how it feels,' she says. 'What it must be like to go through that.'

'I hope you never have to.'

'What if she leaves?'

'I don't know what will happen,' Will says. 'But I do know that I have to be honest with her. She's my wife.'

He feels as though Karen wants to say more, as though she wants to reach out and touch him one last time, but he is already backing away down the path. He raises a hand as he shuts the gate behind him and starts running back up the hill towards his house, his wife, his life.

He wonders how much longer this will be his life.

Fran

She is still sitting at the bottom of the bed as he comes into the bedroom.

‘There you are,’ he says, his running shoes in one hand, wiping the sweat from his brow with the other. ‘What are you doing up here?’

‘Just finishing packing,’ Fran replies, trying to smile. She doesn’t know how she is going to do this.

‘Are you OK?’ he asks. She sees the tension in his jaw and knows instinctively that he has a headache and is pretending he doesn’t.

She nods. ‘Just a bit nervous about tomorrow.’ Why is she doing this? Why doesn’t she just come out and ask him?

He walks over to her, bends down, kisses her forehead.

‘You’re going to be just fine,’ he says. ‘I promise.’

*Am I, Will? Am I?* she thinks.

‘I’m just going to grab a quick shower and then I’ll start dinner – OK?’

She nods again, watching as he lifts her suitcase off the bed and puts it in the corner of the room. She watches as he picks his phone up off the nightstand, unlocks it, and frowns as he checks his messages. He strips off his sweaty clothes and leaves them in a pile on the floor, disappearing into the en-suite. Usually she’d pick them up, put them in the laundry basket. Today she leaves them where they are.

She waits, listening to the water running, the sound of her husband singing softly to himself. She feels a wave of nausea wash through her. She tries to stand up, but she feels as though she is going to faint.

She waits.

Eventually Will comes out of the shower, still humming to himself, his hair damp, the towel wrapped loosely around his waist. He looks so beautiful: her incredible, handsome husband. The man who saved her from her own loneliness all those years ago and taught her how to live again.

But suddenly he isn’t hers any more. Someone else has touched his skin, run their fingers through his hair, felt him against them, inside them. Fran has to blink back tears to stop him seeing how upset she is. He sees her looking at him and comes over to her, sitting on the bed next to her.

‘I love you,’ he says. The smell of his aftershave sends another wave of sadness through her. She doesn’t reply. She doesn’t know what to say.

‘It’s OK to start getting on with our lives, you know,’ he says gently. ‘You don’t have to feel guilty because you’re trying to move on.’

When she doesn’t reply he stands up again and walks over to his closet to get dressed. She watches as he drops his towel, leaving it in a puddle on the floor next to his running things, and slides on his clothes. She wonders what he’s thinking.

‘Are you having an affair with Karen Barden?’ She hears the words as though somebody else has spoken them.

He turns around and she sees a shadow cross his face, and for a second she thinks he’s going to deny it. Then she watches him crumple, leaning back against the wall.

‘How did you find out?’

‘So you are having an affair?’ She realises she’d been hoping he would deny it, or that it had been a misunderstanding – a crush or obsession on Karen’s part. She realises that she wasn’t prepared for it to be true. Her world, the one that had already tipped on its axis, flips over completely.

‘Was,’ Will replies. ‘Past tense.’ As though that makes a difference. He makes it sound so matter-of-fact. She searches his face for some indication of what he’s feeling but he isn’t giving her anything.

‘She sent you a text this afternoon though. I don’t know why I read it, I just ...’ Fran stops, biting her lip. Will has the decency not to question why she was going through his phone. She couldn’t have answered him even if he had asked.

He moves towards her then, wiping his hand down his face. She hears the sound of the palm of his hand against the stubble on his jaw.

‘God, Fran, I’m so sorry. It’s been over for months, since before Christmas. I promise you that.’

‘When did it start?’

He sighs. ‘Halloween,’ he says. ‘The night I walked out.’

‘The night you ...’ She doesn’t finish the sentence, can’t bring herself to remember what he did before he walked out on her. She turns away from him, remembering the argument they’d had that night, how Will had told her he couldn’t take it any more, remembering the sound of the door slamming behind him as he left.

‘I didn’t plan to go there,’ he says. ‘I just ended up there.’

‘I didn’t even know you knew her.’

‘I didn’t really. We bumped into each other a few times when you were still really ill. She was just someone to talk to ...’ He trails off, realising the hole he’s digging himself into. Realising there is no way out of this.

‘Jesus, Will,’ she says quietly.

‘It only lasted a few weeks,’ he says, as though that makes a difference. ‘I didn’t know what I was doing ...’

‘So why is she texting you now?’ Fran interrupts.

He shakes his head. ‘I don’t know. I saw her in the pub last night. I hadn’t seen her for months.’

‘I don’t think you’re in a position to get defensive,’ Fran replies. It seems almost impossible to think how she and Will had been together only that morning, the tenderness, the love.

Her husband had cheated on her. After everything they’d been through. She feels numb, as though her body is shutting down on her again just as it did after her mother died, just as it did last summer.

She lies down on the bed, rolling onto her side, her back towards him.

He walks around the bed and kneels down next to her. He takes her hand in his and says her name softly, gently. She doesn’t resist him; she has never known how to resist him.

Seeing Will kneeling by the bed like that reminds her of when she was pregnant. He would squat down next to her as she settled down to sleep each night and he would talk to her bump. He’d recite nursery rhymes, sing songs, tell her stories about his family, teach her the rules of cricket. He was so delighted that he was finally going to be a father, so delighted that it was a boy. He pretended that it would have been the same if it had been a girl, but Fran had never really believed that.

Those moments were some of the happiest of Fran’s life. When Will was there with her, when it was just the three of them shut up together in the bedroom each evening, she could forget about the pain in her back, the strange sensation of her stomach stretching taut across her like a drum skin, the weight of her breasts. She could forget about how being pregnant didn’t seem to suit her, how she felt as though her organs were being pushed up and out of her throat, how she didn’t feel big enough, substantial enough, to be carrying Will’s son. When Will pressed his lips to her stomach she could forget about how scared she was to be pregnant.

She looks at Will kneeling there in that same spot now, after this bombshell. He seems to be expecting some sort of response from her.

‘Why did you do it?’ she asks. ‘Was it because I let you down? Because I couldn’t be the wife you wanted?’

‘God, Fran, no. You’ve never let me down.’

‘I’ve never been able to give you what you want.’

‘That’s not true. You’re all I want – you know that.’

She laughs then, a dry humourless sound. ‘If that’s true, how did you let this happen? How could you do this to me, Will? How could you do this to us after everything?’

Will doesn’t say anything. Fran closes her eyes and listens to his breathing, which is almost perfectly in time with hers, just as it always has been.

‘I don’t know,’ he says eventually. ‘I wanted you to talk to me ...’

‘There was nothing to say,’ she interrupts, her eyes blinking open. She looks away from him. She knows she should have tried to talk to him more, but she had never been able to find the words.

‘I thought I’d lost you, Fran,’ he says. His face might not have been giving much away earlier but now the pain is clear. But it is too late. She doesn’t think she can care about his pain any more. ‘I know I should have tried harder. I know I should never have walked away from you that night. I needed you, but you weren’t there ...’ He stops, hesitating, dropping his gaze from hers. ‘Christ, none of this is an excuse. There is no excuse for what I’ve done and it didn’t help if that’s any consolation.’

‘None.’

She closes her eyes again, unable to look at him. He is still holding her hand, his fingers wrapped around hers. She finds herself transported back to the hospital, nearly a year ago, when she thought if she held on to his hand and never let go, everything would be all right. She wiggles her fingers free from him. It doesn’t feel as though anything will ever be all right again.

‘Talk to me, Fran,’ he says.

‘Why didn’t you tell me?’ she asks. ‘If I hadn’t found out today would you ever have said anything?’

‘I was going to tell you when you got back from Spain,’ he said. ‘Although that doesn’t sound very believable now.’

Fran doesn’t respond, doesn’t open her eyes.

‘I thought if we were going to try again then we had to do it honestly. I—’

‘I think you’d better sleep in the spare room tonight,’ she interrupts. ‘I’m going to go to bed now. I’ve got an early start in the morning.’

‘You’re still going?’ he asks. ‘You’re not going to cancel?’

When Fran was training to teach yoga, one of her teachers had explained to the group the importance of always being there for their students. Whatever may be happening in their own lives needed to be put to one side as they remembered why their students came to class. ‘Why did you first start going to yoga?’ the teacher had asked. They’d all had different reasons, but they’d all agreed that they had gone to feel supported by their practice, and by their teacher.

‘Those people need me,’ she replies quietly.

‘I need you, Fran. We need to talk; we need to work out where we go from here.’

She shakes her head against the pillow. The noise the pillowcase makes against her hair seems louder than it should be. ‘No, Will. I can’t talk to you now. I can barely look at you.’ The tears that she has been desperately trying to hold back are filling her eyes and Will sits on the bed next to her, trying to reach out for her. She moves away.

‘Don’t,’ she says. ‘Please don’t. I need you to leave me alone. I need you to give me some space.’

He stands up then, pushing his hands into his pockets. ‘Tomorrow,’ he says. ‘I’ll drive you to the airport.’

‘No, Will, please,’ she says almost desperately, sitting up, looking directly at him. ‘I’m going to book a taxi. The least you can do is give me the space I’m asking for.’

He stands looking at her for a moment, as though he is wondering what to say. Eventually he nods and walks away, closing the door behind him.

Fran watches him leave, his shoulders hunched, his head down. She hadn’t thought it was possible for her heart to break any more than it already had.

MARCH 2005

I don't know how we got through that week at work, that week after we first slept together. Our eyes lingering on each other for longer than they should, our hands itching for the want of touching each other, fevered text messages at night that turned my insides to liquid. His fingers innocently brushing against mine as he passed me a file would send shivers through my body. Nobody had ever made me feel like that before. I began to wonder if I was imagining it.

We didn't get any time alone together until he took me for dinner that Wednesday.

'A proper date,' he said as we walked to the restaurant, just before he pulled me into All Saints Passage and pressed me up against the wall, kissing me until I was breathless.

'I've been wanting to do that for days,' he said.

I felt my shoulders relax then, the tension melting off me like candlewax. Part of me hadn't been able to trust him. Part of me didn't think he'd meant it.

Later, when he drove me home and we sat outside my house in his car – a place we'd been so many times before – I asked him if he wanted to come inside. His fingers were at the base of my skull; I felt his breath on my neck. I heard him groan quietly, kissing the soft place behind my ear before pulling away, straightening himself.

'I do,' he said. 'But I'm not going to. I don't want our first morning together to be spoiled by the rush of going to work, by me having to leave early to find a clean shirt.'

I tried to hide the disappointment I knew was showing in my face.

'Let me take you away this weekend,' he said.

We went to a hotel in the Cotswolds, away from everyone who knew us so we could get to know each other. We made love, slept late, ate breakfast in bed and took long walks in the beautiful countryside, all the while talking about our lives before. That's how it always felt to me – my life before Will and my life after.

He told me about his brother, his huge family, his parents' reaction when he refused to go to Oxford and did his law degree at Durham instead. He admitted to his obsession with cricket; how, before he got married, he used to play at county level.

And he finally told me about his first wife. He tried to explain how he felt after she left him for his best friend from law school, the guy who'd been best man at their wedding.

'All I ever really wanted was to get married and have kids,' he said, his eyes flicking away from me.

I told him about how much I'd loved living in London, how I hadn't wanted to come back to Cambridge, but how, after Mum died, I hadn't wanted to return to London either. I told him about Jake, the man I'd left behind in London. Jake, who I'd promised to go back to but never had.

'Why?' Will asked.

To answer that I had to finally admit how much Mum's death had affected me, how I'd shut myself away from everything because I hadn't been able to handle the fact that I couldn't make her well again.

'You saved me, you know,' I said as I lay in his arms on our last morning.

'No I didn't,' he replied. 'I just helped you realise how strong you are.'

'I was so lonely after Mum died. I didn't know what to do with myself. And then you came along.' I turned to face him.

'You don't ever have to be lonely again,' he said, running the side of his hand down my cheek.

'I do probably need to get another job though.'

'You don't have to,' he said. 'I like seeing you every day.'

'We both know I do have to.'

He looked at me then, quietly for a moment.

'I love you,' he said after a while. It was the first time he said it.

[JULY 2016](#)

[Fran](#)

Standing at the bottom of the gravel driveway, waiting for her taxi, Fran takes a deep breath. It's just after five in the morning and the sun is beginning to appear over the horizon. The rain of the previous day has subsided and the sky is a thousand shades of orange and pink. Another day is dawning, the birds singing, life is continuing. The cycles of nature don't care that Fran's world will never be the same again.

One of the things she has always loved about living in Suffolk is the size of the skies. They always feel as if they go on for ever and, on a good day, the sunsets are as beautiful as anything she's seen in more exotic locations. The size of the sky at her in-laws' estate had taken her breath away the first time she'd seen it. She'd still been living in Cambridge then, where the sky always seems so close, almost oppressive in comparison. There's a freedom in the Suffolk skies that makes Fran feel beautifully insignificant.

She hears Will's footsteps on the gravel drive behind her. She knew he would never be able to just let her leave. She doesn't turn to look at him.

'Don't do this, Fran,' he says quietly. The whole village is still asleep. It feels as though they are the only two people in the world.

'I have to,' she replies.

'You could go tomorrow,' he says. 'You can get a flight direct to Reus tomorrow. We need to talk.'

Still she doesn't look at him. She wishes the taxi would come.

'Please, Fran.'

There is something about his tone of voice, something about the way he sounds that almost breaks her. She turns to look at him. He stands in front of her still in his pyjamas, his hair tousled, his brow furrowed in that way she knows means he still has a headache. The shadows under his eyes indicate how little sleep he's had. She wants to reach out and touch him – she almost does – but the taxi arrives suddenly with a screech of brakes.

'I have to go today,' she says. 'You know I do.'

Fran had decided weeks ago, when she first agreed to do the retreat that she wanted to arrive the day before her retreaters. She needed a little time to settle in, to get the lay of the land. But flights to Reus only went from Stansted on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so she had organised a flight to Barcelona and booked a taxi to take her down the coast to Salou from there. She had sorted out this week in a way that worked best for her. She wasn't going to change her plans for Will now, not after what he had done.

'I'll put this in the back then shall I, love?' the taxi driver asks. His voice seems unusually loud in the quiet summer dawn, his accent the kind of Estuary English that would make Will's mother turn her nose up.

Fran nods and as the driver puts her suitcase in the boot, Will steps a little closer.

'Fran ...' he begins, reaching for her.

'Don't,' she replies, stepping away.

'Remember when we last flew to Barcelona?' he asks quietly.

She's been trying not to think about that weekend seven years ago. Another bullet point in a long list of failures, another time she'd let Will down.

'I need you to let me have some space, Will,' she says again. 'Please?'

'Phone me when you get there at least. Let me know you're safe.'

She nods once and turns away to get into the taxi, but he grabs her arm, stopping her.

'Fran,' he says, so quietly she can barely hear him over the noise of the car engine. 'Are you leaving me?'

She looks up at him then, catching the darkness in his eyes. Despite what he's done her heart is breaking for both of them. Nobody should have had to go through what they've been through these last few years. She needs to get away: away from this village, away from Will, away from the memories.

She doesn't answer him because she doesn't have an answer; she just keeps staring into those brown eyes that she has always loved so much.

'Is everything all right, love?' the taxi driver asks walking around the car and looking at the two of them curiously. Will loosens his grip on Fran's arm and she gets into the car, shutting the door. The driver shrugs and gets back into the driver's seat.

'Stansted then?' he asks.

'Yes, please,' Fran replies quietly. As the cab moves away she turns to look out of the rear window. Will stands on the pavement, his hands in the pockets of his pyjama trousers, watching her drive away.

### Will

He sits in the bathroom, Fran's bathroom, on the edge of the bath. He hasn't been in here for months. He hasn't been in here since she was pregnant – he hasn't been able to cope with the memories. Sometimes back then he would take his clothes off and slip in with her, sitting behind her, holding her against him as they marvelled at her growing bump. The last time he sat on the edge of this bath Fran had looked so beautiful. They'd been so happy.

He doesn't know what has drawn him into the bathroom, but as Fran's taxi had driven out of sight, he'd come back into the house and found himself here. This was her haven, her sanctuary. He supposes he is trying to feel close to her.

He remembers renovating this bathroom for her. He and Jamie had taken a week off work to get it done in time to surprise her on the day they moved in. He'd been amazed that they'd managed it without bursting a water main. He'd just wanted to make her happy. Over the years he'd failed again and again to make her happy, and now he has let her down in the worst possible way.

The house already feels so quiet without her. The clock ticking in the hallway seems louder than usual. She hadn't answered his question about whether she was going to leave him. He can't bear the thought of this empty, silent house being his future.

From the moment he first met Fran he was lost. He had never believed in love at first sight until then – he thought it was just something written about in the kind of novels his ex-wife read. But when Fran first walked into his office and the woman from HR introduced her as his secretary, he knew he was in trouble. When Jamie texted him that evening to ask how the first day in the new job had gone those were the very words Will texted back: *Bro, I'm in trouble.*

He could still remember exactly what she was wearing the first day he met her, the way her hair looked even redder under the office light. The way she stood in front of him looking at him, her green eyes challenging him, appraising every inch of him before sticking out her hand and grinning. She had a firm handshake and her fingers had lingered in his for longer than they needed to. Will knew from that moment he was undone.

He would find himself watching her from his office, listening to the jangle of the silver bracelets on her wrists as she typed. He'd never met anyone like her; she took his breath away.

The first time he met Karen at the end of last summer, by contrast, he had barely noticed her. He was still consumed by grief. Fran was still so unwell, barely holding it together, and spent a lot of time in bed. He was trying to look after her, trying to make her eat, trying and failing to find something, anything, interesting or nourishing in the village shop.

Susan was working behind the counter that day and introduced him to Karen.

'William and his wife live in the Old Vicarage,' she said.

'Wow!' Karen replied, holding out her hand for Will to shake. To this day he can't remember if he took it or not. 'That house is gorgeous, and so huge! Do you have a big family?'

Will froze, staring at her. Why didn't she know? Why had nobody told her? This bloody village couldn't shut up about your private business most of the time.

‘Karen has only just moved to the village,’ Susan butted in, clearly flustered. ‘She lives up by the station with her two children. She’s recently divorced.’ Will couldn’t imagine why Susan thought he cared.

‘William’s a divorce lawyer,’ Susan babbled on. Karen gave him a funny look that he couldn’t read.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said, finding his voice. ‘My wife’s not well. I have to get back to her.’ Clutching the two tins of soup he was holding, he fled.

It was days later when Susan gently reminded him that he’d never paid for them.

### Fran

She has never been on a plane on her own before. Until she met Will, she’d never been on a plane at all. Meeting him had opened up a whole new world to her: a family she’d never had, countries she’d never visited, things she’d never dreamed of doing. Every year they would go *en masse* to the south of France, or skiing in the Alps – Fran was a hopeless skier, which utterly frustrated Will, who was, of course, brilliant and only ever skied black runs. It was a life Fran had never imagined.

On Sunday morning when she had been talking to Jamie about it, when Karen Barden was just a woman who worked in the village pub who occasionally flirted with her husband, she had felt foolish. Foolish about how nervous flying alone at the age of thirty-eight made her feel. But she barely notices anything as she drifts through passport control, through security and through the boarding gate. Bigger things have taken over from her fear of flying and now she is high in the air, her ears popping and the man in the seat behind her digging his knees into her back.

She can still feel Will’s hand on her arm trying to prevent her getting into the taxi. It would have been so easy to go with him, to send the cab away and take his hand. To walk back into the house with him, forgive him, start again.

That’s what she wanted after all wasn’t it? To start again. To try again.

But even if Will hadn’t done what he’d done, even if she hadn’t found out about it, she did have to come to Spain. The reasons for leading this yoga retreat were still there. Over the last few years Fran has felt as though she has been losing her way, her essence. She wants this retreat to help her find out who she is again, to help her rebuild herself. She had been excited at the thought of an adventure on her own, despite her nerves. She had been looking forward to some time away. Now she doesn’t know what to feel.

Will had always supported her in everything she had wanted to do. They’d always supported each other. They were Will and Fran; they were a team – together they could weather the highs and the lows. They hadn’t expected so many lows, but she never expected the possibility of facing life as only one half of that team either.

She remembers when she first mentioned teaching yoga. She used to go to a lunchtime yoga class twice a week at the gym near her office. It was the class that Will complained she was always late back from, in the days when she was just his secretary. It was perfect – it stretched her body and relaxed her mind halfway through a stressful day. Her sanity, and the sanity of the rest of her colleagues, depended on it.

One week the regular yoga teacher was away. Fran often found herself disappointed when this happened. It always left her with a strange sense of loss, an echo of how she felt after her mother died. She sees it now, sometimes, in the eyes of her own students when she tells them she won’t be there the next week and another teacher will take the class. She knew she shouldn’t be attached to one teacher and one style of teaching, but she always found it hard to let go.

She’d hated the yoga class that Thursday lunchtime. She’d never hated a yoga class in her life before. She’d found herself, halfway through, uncharacteristically and unapologetically angry. She had done something unthinkably rude, something she’d never done before.

She’d walked out of the class before it had finished.

Fran was the sort of person who stayed in the cinema until the bitter end even when the film was long and boring and she couldn't stand it. She always finished books, even when she lost interest in the characters on page twenty, and when it came to yoga classes she considered herself the mistress of etiquette. She always turned off her phone, never chatted, always arrived early and never, ever left before the end.

She'd tried to explain to Will what it was she'd hated so much about it, tried to make him understand something that she didn't really understand herself.

'I could do better,' she'd said.

Will smiled. 'I know you could,' he'd replied. 'So why don't you?'

There were so many reasons why Fran didn't think she could. She considered herself uncoordinated and ungraceful. She didn't think she looked like a yoga teacher should look. She swore too much and drank too much red wine and was married to a divorce lawyer.

But Will had never been a fan of excuses. He didn't put up with them. He liked challenges and pushing yourself harder and always reaching your goal. He liked to be the best, to win.

And most of all Fran knew that he wanted her to be happy and healthy and less stressed. They wanted to start a family and by then they were both beginning to realise it wasn't going to be as easy as they'd hoped. Fran had gone down to working part time at the law firm she'd moved to after she stopped working for Will, but she knew he wanted her to take some time out. In his mind this was the perfect answer – a less stressful life for Fran while she still got to do something she loved, something she was interested in.

Fran had signed up for yoga teacher training. She was terrified. But she was forced to look inside herself and face that fear. To learn to stand up in front of a class of people and share with them the thing she loved most in the world. Will always knew she could do it and eventually she believed she could as well.

Together they could do anything. Or so she used to think.

As the plane flies over the Pyrenees towards Barcelona – somewhere so full of memories and that cycle of hope that came to nothing – she didn't know how she was meant to feel. She didn't know what to do with her sadness; she didn't know where to put it. There was the sadness for what Will had done, but also the sadness for what had happened before, the dreams they had shared that had been torn apart.

She looked out of the little plane window at the mountains below her and blinked back her tears. Crying always made her feel stupid.

Will

He stands up and walks over to the medicine cabinet looking for the painkillers he'd hidden in there last summer, vowing to stop taking them by the handful. He'd meant to start seeing the osteopath again, to start looking after himself, but he'd just never got around to it. Looking after himself had stopped seeming important.

But he can't cope another second with this headache pounding behind his eyes. He'd lain awake all night in the spare room, his jaw clenched, feeling the headache suck the life out of him. And now Fran has gone and he's damned if he's going to put up with this pain. In half an hour the sweet release of codeine will take him.

He finds the pill bottle at the back of the bathroom cabinet and swallows two dry. As an afterthought he takes a third and puts the bottle back, closing the cabinet door and looking at himself in the mirror. He sees his father looking back and closes his eyes. He can't stand the way he is looking more like his father as he gets older. He can't stand the way he's started acting like his father, despite every effort he's made to be a better man, a kinder man, a better husband.

A better father if he'd been given the chance.

He opens his eyes and looks at himself again. The years of headaches, the years of medication, the years of heartache are taking their toll now. No matter how far he runs, how well he keeps himself in shape, how much cricket he plays, he can't stop time.

Perhaps it is too late to try again. Perhaps it always has been.

He hadn't seen Karen again for several weeks after that first time in the shop. The next time he'd bumped into her he'd apologised for being so rude the first time they'd met. They had chatted for a while and Will was glad of the company, glad of the distraction. Karen had made him smile and it had been nice to smile again.

It took him longer than it should have done to realise that she was flirting with him. She was nearly twenty years younger than he was and it massaged his ego to think someone so young could find him attractive.

But the flirting had turned from harmless fun to what seemed, to Will, to be a full-on seduction – and to his shame he'd found himself reciprocating. Sometimes she would ask him to help her out in the house, things her husband would have done for her if he hadn't left. He would always remind her that he was married, that his wife wasn't well. Flirting was one thing, consciously going over to the house of the woman who was flirting with him was quite another.

But by October he'd felt as though Fran should be feeling better, that by then things should be changing. He had given up all hope of the life he had planned and the only way he could move on was to let go of the past. He had wanted his wife back and he couldn't understand why she hadn't wanted the same thing. He should never have shouted at her, never have tried to force her to do something she wasn't ready to do.

He had told Fran the truth when he said he hadn't planned to go to Karen's when he'd walked out on her that night. He hadn't known where he was going. He wondered sometimes, if he could do everything all over again would he do things differently?

He had been shaking when he arrived on that night last October, and soaked through from the rain. He hadn't even stopped to put on a coat. Karen had fetched a towel and poured him a glass of wine and he'd told her about what he'd done, the argument he'd had with Fran, how he'd walked away. They stood in Karen's kitchen facing each other, leaning against opposite countertops. He'd talked; she'd listened. He'd told her about everything that had happened that summer, everything that had happened over the last seven years, about how he felt his heart would never heal, about how he felt as though his marriage was over.

When he'd finished they both stood in silence. He had stared at her as though he couldn't believe he'd said so much. But it had felt good to talk; Fran never wanted to talk. It was months later that Will realised, too late as it turned out, that Fran just hadn't been ready and he hadn't had the patience to wait for her. He'd betrayed Fran in so many ways that night.

He never thought he'd cheat on his wife, but when Karen walked over to him that evening Will had thought she was going to kiss him and he didn't think he was going to stop her. Instead she had dropped to her knees in front of him. He was hard before she'd unbuttoned his jeans.

Just before he came he'd caught sight of his reflection in Karen's kitchen window and remembered the fragment from the Shakespeare play he'd studied for A Level flashing through his head.

Foolish fond old man.

Afterwards, as he'd done up his jeans and swallowed the rest of his wine in one gulp, he hadn't been able to look at her. She'd turned her back on him to make it easier. She'd finished her own wine as though to take away the taste of him.

'I have to go,' he'd said. 'I shouldn't be here. I don't know what I was thinking. I have to get back to my wife.'

As he'd walked home in the rain he told himself that he would end it there. He hadn't, and he would never forgive himself for that.

He still doesn't know why he did it, why he went that first night or why he went back. He was desperate for someone to hold him, to tell him that everything would be all right. But he hadn't realised until it was too late that the only person who could do that was Fran. All Will had ever wanted was Fran. A life he hadn't planned on was infinitely better than a life without Fran. He should have told her that every day.

Standing now in Fran's bathroom, in front of the mirror, he slowly starts to pick up the bottles and jars of creams and gels and liquids that Fran keeps on the shelf above the sink. He feels the weight of the blue glass in his hands and is suddenly overcome with the sense of the irreparable nature of the damage he has caused. Anger and frustration rise up in him like fire and without knowing what he is doing he throws the blue glass jar at the mirror, listening with satisfaction to the sound of glass shattering glass. He throws another and another listening to the sound that splinters the claustrophobic silence of the house. He used to be one of the best spin bowlers in Suffolk; every jar hits home.

When he's done he stands, breathless, listening to the vestiges of the shattering noises echo around the house. When he looks up he catches sight of himself in the broken mirror once more.

Foolish fond old man.

#### Fran

As she sees her suitcase travel towards her on the luggage carousel, Fran steps forward to retrieve it. She barely has the energy to drag it towards her and pull it through customs. Will wasn't the only one who hadn't slept the night before. She had lain awake for most of the night, turning everything over in her mind. Part of her wishes she hadn't found out, wishes that Will had played cricket the day before, that it hadn't rained, that he hadn't forgotten to take his phone out with him when he went for a run. But part of her knows it was inevitable that she found out, that she never had a choice.

She is tired and hot and feeling a little nauseous, but she knows she needs to pull herself together. She knows she needs to be at her strongest over the next few days, both for herself and for the people coming on the yoga retreat. She thinks about them as she wheels her suitcase out into the main concourse of Barcelona airport – of Elizabeth and Constance and Katrin and David, regulars at her yoga classes in Cambridge, and of the friends they will be bringing. She already feels a sense of support at the thought of seeing their familiar faces the next day.

She stops to buy a bottle of water using the euros that Will had brought home for her on Friday night. Friday night seems like a lifetime ago, when Will was still the man she could trust with anything, when they still had each other. She thinks again about how they had planned this trip together, covering every eventuality. It was the first thing they had done together since the previous summer. She remembers sitting at Will's desk as they booked her tickets and sorted out her travel insurance, and thinking how together they could find a new kind of normal, how they could be happy again if they wanted to be. But now she doesn't know what's going to happen any more.

She realises she is standing in the middle of the arrivals hall of a busy airport getting in everyone's way as she drifts off into memories. She has these moments a lot these days, as though she is watching her life from the outside, as though she has become slightly disconnected from the world.

When her mother died she'd felt as though everything had changed. Their bond had been special and when it disappeared Fran felt as though her safety net had been taken away. As though her lifeline back to the mothership had been severed and she had been left drifting in space. But since last summer she feels more like the mothership, sitting motionless and calm while life carries on around her, just outside of her reach.

Fran feels closest to the person she used to be when she is teaching yoga – and that's why she's here. To try to find out what it is to feel alive again, try to remember who she is.

She had been feeling more alive in other areas of her life recently though, hadn't she? On Saturday night when Jamie came round for dinner, she laughed in a way she hadn't done in a year and on Sunday morning when she woke up in Will's arms, she had felt as though they could start again.

It was that longing to start again, that need to get her old life back, that had brought Fran so close to walking away from the taxi this morning, from almost allowing Will's touch to guide her home.

She felt as though she had woken from a deep sleep, like the fairy-tale princesses of her childhood imaginings, and now instead of the numbness she had grown used to over the last twelve months, she could feel everything.

Yoga had always taught her how to sit with her feelings, to help her remember that everything passes in the end and that sometimes a sensation is no more than a sensation. Right now she can't imagine these feelings ever passing, but she knows, deep down, that over time the feelings would become less raw, less intense.

Up until yesterday she had been feeling so hopeful again, as though she and Will could find their way out of this. But now, with the future so uncertain, everything feels raw again.

If she really wants to remember who she is, she needs to do it alone, because she might only have herself to rely on now. She knows she's strong enough to do it. She knows she's done it before.

But finding out about Will's affair has reminded Fran of all the cracks that were developing in their marriage, cracks that had started as tiny threads years ago after her first miscarriage when she began to feel afraid. Afraid that she couldn't give Will the one thing he wanted, afraid that she had waited too long, afraid that one day – if she couldn't do it – he might leave her for someone younger, someone more fertile. Someone like Karen.

She wonders if it had started to become too much for him. She always thought they were equals, that they held one another up, that she looked after him as much as he looked after her.

Getting the partnership, the role Will had taken that led to his meeting Fran in the first place, was everything that was expected of him by his family, but Will had found it stressful, sometimes unbearably so. The early, heady, honeymoon days of their relationship had been marred by the stresses of Will's job. He worked long hours and was plagued by tension headaches. Fran would look after him, cook his favourite meals, massage his temples, let him lie down in the dark with his head on her lap quietly, doing nothing, just being there for him.

She'd asked, once, if he ever regretted taking the job. If he ever felt it was too much.

'The job's hard,' he had said. 'But I don't regret taking it. If I hadn't I wouldn't have met you and meeting you was the best thing that ever happened to me.'

Fran wonders if Will still thought that. She tries to remember the last time she had been able to find the strength to be there for him. Their marriage had shifted gear after her first miscarriage. She wonders if it became a place where Will did all the looking after and if perhaps he'd got tired of that.

As she walks through Barcelona airport she remembers the last time she was here, over six years ago. She and Will, on their way back to England, wrapped around each other and holding a secret, trying again. Their whole marriage seems to have revolved around an endless cycle of trying again and holding secrets. Some of those secrets turned out to be ones that they didn't share.

Fran thinks about her own secret, the one she holds so tightly that she barely shares it with herself.

She doesn't know what will happen to either of them now. But she does know that she has to focus on herself, on being strong, on the retreat. She takes a deep breath and rolls the cold bottle of water over her hot brow, letting the water droplets fall down her temples. She swallows down another wave of nausea and heads towards the taxi that waits for her.

#### JULY 2005

We'd been together just over four months when Will took me to Paris, his favourite place on Earth. He booked first-class seats on the Eurostar and I wound myself up into a ball of anxiety about travelling on a train in a tunnel under the sea. By the time we got to Dover we'd drunk half a bottle of champagne and as the train entered the tunnel he kissed me, distracting me from my fears. By the time we arrived in Calais, all I was interested in was getting to our hotel room.

He had found a boutique hotel in Montmartre. Our room was tiny but beautiful and from the window you could see the marshmallow outline of Sacré Coeur against the horizon. When we arrived we fell into bed before the door had barely closed behind us.

I loved Paris because he did. I loved watching him show me his favourite places, telling me stories of the times he'd been here before. He never mentioned the fact that most of those memories would have been made with his first wife. I tried not to think about it.

Most of all I loved watching him speak French. I'd had no idea how fluent he was and for some reason it made me love him even more. When I mentioned it he shrugged.

'I did languages at A Level,' he said.

'But not at university?'

'My parents thought law would be more useful.' There was an edge of resignation to his voice. I was beginning to understand that what his parents thought was often hard to argue with. I'd never asked what they thought of me.

He asked me to marry him as we sat on a bench by the Seine. I was talking about something else – I can't even remember what now – and he seemed distracted, as though he wasn't really listening. He cut me off mid-sentence, grabbing my hand and putting something in it.

'Stop talking for a minute, will you?' He smiled nervously. 'Sorry, I just ...' He took a breath, looked away from me. 'Open the box,' he said.

The little black leather box he'd given me contained a ring, a solitaire diamond on a white-gold band. I looked from the ring to him.

'Will you marry me?' he asked.

'I didn't think you'd want to get married again,' I said, still holding the ring box, still staring at it.

'Of course I want to get married again, Fran. I want to marry you, I want to have babies with you, I want to grow old with you. I've never felt like this before.' He put his hands on my shoulders, turning me towards him, looking into my eyes. 'Please say yes.'

I wrapped my arms around him then, as the breeze fluttered in off the river, cooling the humid July evening. I felt the solidity of him, the way he made me feel so sure. This was everything I had ever wanted, the rescue from my loneliness that I'd never dared hope would arrive.

'Of course yes,' I said quietly. 'I want all those things too.' Even when I said the words I wasn't sure if they were completely true, but I was sure I wanted him.

We sat there together for a while, arms around each other. Jazz was floating in the air towards us from one of the nearby cafés.

'I'd ask you to dance,' he said into my hair. 'But we know how badly that turns out.'

The next day I lay in bed, staring at the ring on my finger, the early morning sun glinting off the diamond. I couldn't believe how lucky I was. I couldn't believe this was happening to me.

'Where do you want to get married?' Will asked. I'd thought he was still asleep. I turned my head to look at him.

'I don't know. I've never really thought about it!'

'Really?' He seemed surprised. 'I thought all women thought about that sort of thing.'

'Not all women, Will,' I said, rolling onto my stomach so I could look at him. I felt his hand trace the bones of my spine.

'Well do you want a big church wedding, a marquee in my parents' garden?' he asked.

'Is that what you had last time?' I didn't want it to be like last time. I didn't even really want him to think about last time, but I had to know.

He nodded, his eyes flicking away from me, just for a second.

'Well then, no. I don't want this to be anything like last time,' I said.

*He grinned then, that boyish lopsided grin that I loved so much. 'Will you elope with me?' he asked.*

[JULY 2016](#)

### Fran

The taxi drops Fran off outside her hotel and the driver helps her in with her bags. He seems to know most of the staff and there is much back slapping and shouting that Fran doesn't understand, and then suddenly the driver is gone with an '*adéu, bella*' and a wave. Fran remembers, too late, that everybody here speaks Catalan. No wonder her sorry attempts at schoolroom Spanish were met with mild amusement.

The hotel is stunning – the pictures on the website don't do it justice. The owner of the studio where Fran works told her how fantastic it was, but nothing had prepared her for this beautiful marble atrium, so close to the beach that you can hear the waves in the background if you stand still and listen. Fran intends to do a lot of standing still and listening. She feels the warmth of the sun on her back and already, despite everything, her shoulders begin to soften, her shoulder blades melting down her back. She exhales.

She thinks about Will, about how stressed he's been, about how much the sun here would relax him. He had wanted to go away a few months ago but she had refused; it had felt too soon. It felt as though he was trying to run away from what had happened. But now she is here in the sunshine, now she is away from the village and the constant reminders, she realises what Will had wanted. He'd just wanted some perspective, somewhere to start to heal. It had taken her months to realise how much he was hurting too, as if anyone could run away from that kind of pain.

But now it's time for her to get some perspective on her own.

'Can I help you *senyoreta*?' says a voice close by. It takes her a moment to realise that the voice is speaking to her. It's been a long time since anyone called her *senyoreta*. It's been a long time since she's been anywhere without Will. The thought gives her a fizz of excitement in her belly as though the coming week could hold untold adventure.

'Um yes, sorry,' she says. The man is dressed smartly in a three-piece suit. Fran wonders how he isn't boiling to death. His name badge says Amado. 'I'm Fran Browne. I'm here to teach a yoga retreat.'

'Ah.' Amado bursts into a huge grin. 'Pardon me, pardon me, *Senyora* Browne.' Fran preferred it when he called her *senyoreta*.

'Please, just call me Fran.'

'Come with me,' he says, beckoning Fran to follow him. He clicks his fingers at a young man in a waistcoat who is passing by and says something to him in Catalan that Fran doesn't understand. The boy takes her suitcase from her, smiling and nodding.

'Carlos will take your things to your room,' Amado assures her. 'Meanwhile, Pierre will show you around. *Pierre* ...' he shouts at another young man, this one wearing an orange T-shirt, and then he turns back to Fran.

'You have sun tan cream on yes?' he says frowning, placing his nut-brown hand on Fran's milky pale arm. 'The sun here is very strong and you are very pale.'

Fran smiles at this. 'Yes, yes,' she assures him. 'I never go anywhere without Factor 30 at least!'

Amado nods and turns to Pierre and the two men speak in rapid Catalan. Fran just about gets the gist of it from hand gestures and facial expressions. Pierre is to show her the yoga room, the dining room, the private lounge and swimming pools, and then he is to show her where her room is. At least she thinks that's what's happening.

'We will see you for dinner?' Amado asks. Fran still doesn't feel hungry, but she assures him that they will. She has to try to eat something after all.

The yoga room is beautiful with sprung wooden floors and a sea view. There are shelves full of rainbow-coloured yoga mats, blocks, cushions and blankets, along with candles, incense and a huge and beautifully carved golden Buddha. Fran almost weeps with relief at it. This is exactly what she needs.

‘You can take your yoga mats onto the beach too if you like,’ Pierre says. ‘But it gets pretty busy after about eight a.m.’ His English is perfect, without a hint of an accent, and Fran wonders what brought him to a small tourist town like Salou to run a health spa.

‘I’m a sports physiotherapist,’ he says with a smile as if reading her mind. ‘You’re wondering what I’m doing running a health spa and massaging pampered old women, aren’t you?’

‘How did you know that’s what I was thinking?’ Fran asks.

He shrugs. ‘Everyone thinks it,’ he says. ‘Some people even ask. There’s not much work in Catalonia right now – you take what you can get.’

Fran bows her head to hide her blush. She forgets sometimes how hard life is for some people. With the privilege she has, she has no right to feel so miserable.

‘Come on, let me show you the pool,’ Pierre goes on, leading Fran back outside.

\*

Later Fran sits in her room, the balcony doors open so she can hear the sound of the sea, the occasional burst of laughter, or families having fun. Mostly everything is quiet as it’s siesta time. Nothing much will happen now until this evening. She sits on the bed and looks at the room around her. Amado insisted that she have one of the mini-suites, even though she said she didn’t need it. He said he wanted *Senyora* Browne to be happy, but really this room just makes her sad – the king-sized bed, the double shower, the bottle of Cava in the fridge – all remind her of Will.

She lies back on the bed holding the little plush Piglet she brought with her against her face. Somewhere outside a baby is crying and Fran wonders, as she always does, what it would have been like to hear the sound of her own baby crying, to get up in the night to feed the baby she and Will had planned. It feels like all their plans have turned to dust.

But part of her knows that they were Will’s plans not hers, that she had only ever done it to please Will, to keep him happy, to try to give him what he wanted. She thinks again about the secret she can barely bring herself to admit, let alone admit to her husband.

While she had been enjoying a life she had only ever imagined after meeting Will – the holidays, the dinners out, the theatre – she had never been sure she wanted things to change. Deep down, she had never been sure she’d wanted two to become three.

She knows she should phone Will now, just to let him know she’s arrived safely. She knows texting is cowardly and that he’ll just phone her straight back anyway, but she can’t bear to talk to him. Not right now.

Looking around the room again, she realises how lonely she feels. She knows it’ll be better tomorrow when everybody else is here to distract her, but right now she needs to hear a friendly voice. She reaches for her phone, finds Janine’s number in her contact list and waits for the international dial tone.

Janine and Fran have been friends since before Will. They worked together and, after Fran left, Janine became Will’s secretary.

‘Fran, hi, aren’t you supposed to be in Spain?’ It’s so lovely to hear Janine’s voice that Fran forgets to speak for a moment. She wonders why she didn’t phone her friend the previous evening.

‘Fran? Are you there?’ Janine asks. Fran realises she still hasn’t said anything.

‘I’m here,’ she says. ‘I’m in Spain.’

‘Are you OK? Will didn’t come in to work today and nobody’s heard from him. Is everything all right?’

‘He cheated on me.’ Fran hears the words, but they still don’t feel real. She still can’t believe Will did this after everything they’ve been through. And yet at the same time she can.

‘Fran, hold on, I’m still at work. Let me go somewhere more private.’

Fran waits, hearing rustling and muffled voices. After a moment Janine comes back.

‘Fran, are you sure?’ she says.

Fran tells her everything. The words pour out of her like a waterfall and when she finishes she feels completely empty. As if on cue her stomach growls, reminding her again that she hasn't eaten since the previous day. She finally feels hungry.

'Jesus Christ, I'll kill him,' Janine says quietly.

'Please, Janine,' Fran says. 'Please don't be angry with him on my behalf. He's still your boss, still your friend.'

'You're my friend and he's hurt you.'

'He's still a good man.' As Fran says the words she knows they are true. She knows she should be angrier, that some women would be out for his blood, but she doesn't feel like that. She doesn't know if she will ever forgive him, ever be able to look at him in the same way, ever be able to trust him, but she isn't angry. Janine thinks she should be, but Janine hadn't seen Will's face this morning, or last night. She hadn't heard him crying in his study night after night when he thought Fran was asleep. How Fran wishes now that she had found the energy to go to him then, how that could have changed everything.

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