

Extract 3

It takes every ounce of my self-control to keep my head down as I hurry to my car. The urge to look over my shoulder to see if any cars are parked on our quiet road is almost impossible to resist.

Don't look round, don't look round.

I mutter the words under my breath as I dash to the far side of the car and press the key to unlock it. I wince as the lights flash their confirmation. Will they come for me? Do they know where I'm going? Will they try to stop me?

I fumble with the door handle, my trembling fingers struggling to grasp the cold shiny metal, but finally I'm in the car, the engine starts, and all I have to do is reverse out of the gates. It's a tricky driveway with a bend halfway down and decorative stones along each edge. I feel like a learner. The last thing I need is a puncture. I give a little moan of panic but force myself to take it slowly.

The rain has been relentless for the last few days, and the roads are wet and shiny with huge puddles in places where the drains have been unable to cope. The headlamps of passing cars strike the sheets of water falling from the sky, creating zigzags of bright light, and I lift a hand to my brow so they don't dazzle me. I stare too long into the rear-view mirror, wondering if the headlights behind me are from the same car that has tracked me since I left the house. Police or kidnappers? I have no way of knowing.

I have the route planned in my head, but at each junction I question myself. Am I going the right way? Should it be taking this long? Shouldn't I be there by now? I choke back the sobs. If I cry, I won't be able to see, and getting there safely is critical.

I take the exit from the final roundabout, and the hotel I've been told to come to is in front of me. The car park is busy close to reception, so I have to park at the far end. I turn up the collar of my red raincoat, wrap the bright turquoise scarf tightly around my neck and make a run for it.

The reception area is huge and brightly lit, with sofas and comfortable chairs arranged around low tables. I spin round, peering in all directions, but I don't know who I'm looking for, and I must look slightly deranged, my eyes wild, frightened.

'Jo?'

I turn to see a mixed-race man with a shaved head, dressed in jeans and a dark jacket. He's about Sami's age, and he gives me a solicitous smile.

I realise I haven't answered, but he takes one look at my face and touches my arm.

'My name's Rob. Come with me.'

We walk quickly side by side, not speaking, towards the back of the hotel. Rob nods at a girl in a dark skirt suit, who punches some numbers into a keypad and pushes open the door. We are in the back of the hotel – the staff-only part. People in uniforms – waiters, chefs, cleaners – are milling around, and we get some curious looks as we push through to the goods-received area, a covered tunnel with empty metal cages on wheels lining each wall – no doubt waiting for tomorrow's deliveries.

In the space that I guess is normally reserved for lorries sits a dark blue car. Rob ushers me towards it, opening the passenger door for me.

As he climbs in, he turns to me. 'Are you okay?'

'No.'

He seems to have half-expected this answer and he gives a brief nod as he starts the engine. 'Won't be long. We'll be there in about fifteen minutes.'

Now that I have nothing to do but think, I feel my hands start to shake. I clasp them tightly together.

It seems like a long fifteen minutes, but finally we pull up in front of some high wrought-iron gates and my driver leaps out to talk into the intercom. He jumps back into the car as the gates open and we head towards a big red-brick building. He steers the car round the side to a small door and turns to me.

'I'll take you in.'

For a moment I don't want to get out of the car. It means I'm going to have to face what's happened – what's happening – but Rob has run round to my side and is opening the door, apparently oblivious to the rain.

I follow him into the building, struggling to keep up with his fast stride, along a brightly lit passage with closed doors on either side, our footsteps echoing on the dark linoleum floor. We reach the final door and he knocks once and pushes it open.

Inside are two people – a pretty young woman with dark shoulder-length auburn hair and a tall broad-shouldered man in jeans and a black leather jacket. The woman steps forward.

'Hi, Jo. I'm Detective Inspector Becky Robinson. We spoke on the phone. This is my boss, Detective Chief Inspector Tom Douglas.'

Do you want to find out what happens next to Jo, Tom and Becky?

Check out the book on Amazon – [here](#).